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SELF-ESTEEM

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The investigation of self-esteem has experienced tremendous growth in the social sciences over the past 100 years (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007). There are hundreds of scholarly articles and books that appear each year to add to the tremendous number of magazine articles, internet posts, and self-help books concerning self-esteem (Zeigler-Hill, 2013). There are researchers who argue that the importance of self-esteem is exaggerated or that the utility of the construct may be inflated (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003), but our position in this chapter is that self-esteem is an important element of the human psyche. As we highlight in our subsequent review, self-esteem has significant motivational, affective, and information-processing implications for humans (see Zeigler-Hill, 2013, for a review) and it appears to play a key role in how people regulate themselves at work (Schaubroeck, Kim, & Peng, 2012).

Despite our personal enthusiasm for research concerning self-esteem, we recognize that many industrial/organizational psychologists may throw up their hands in utter confusion upon first confronting this vast literature. There are several reasons for this response. First, it may be unclear how self-esteem fits into the broader context of the “self.” In this regard, a collection of seemingly semantically indistinguishable and highly related constructs has been proffered. Second, there has been a variety of approaches used to understand self-esteem which has created a conceptual maze that is often daunting to newcomers. For example, self-esteem has been viewed as: possessing both dispositional and state-like qualities (Kernis, 2003); differing in specificity (Brown & Marshall, 2006); operating both implicitly and explicitly (Zeigler-Hill & Jordan, 2010); a root construct for more recent approaches, such as Core Self-Evaluations (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2002) and narcissism (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001); an epiphenomenon (Baumeister et al., 2003); and an internal regulatory guide

(Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995; Mahadevan, Gregg, Sedikides, & de Waal-Andrews, 2016). Given the diversity of approaches, it may be unclear to some new readers what self-esteem is or why it even matters. In addition, industrial/organizational psychologists themselves have been promiscuous in their usage of the construct by leveraging its predictive power across such divergent workplace literatures as: feedback seeking (Anseel, Beatty, Shen, Lievens, & Sackett, 2015), organizational justice (Schroth & Shah, 2000), work–family conflict (Aryee, Chu, Kim, & Ryu, 2013), leadership (Vogel & Mitchell, in press), deviance (Duffy, Shaw, Scott, & Tepper, 2006), motivation (Pilegge & Holtz, 1997), job attitudes (Dipboye, Zultowski, Dewhirst, & Arvey, 1978), and job search (Turban & Keon, 1993; Wanberg, 1997). Although this research has generated a rich nomological network, the underlying fundamental principles, theories, or assumptions that underscore these applications may be somewhat difficult for a researcher to discern who is new to this area.

Given the above, our guiding philosophy in this chapter is that industrial/organizational psychologists may benefit not only through a better understanding of the richness of self-esteem, but also through a better appreciation of how their own research fits within the broader self-esteem literature. To these ends, our chapter attempts to accomplish some elementary goals for readers. In the first portion of our chapter, we hope to clarify the meaning of the construct itself. To accomplish this goal, we provide a brief historical sketch of self-esteem as well as a general definition. From here, we highlight the different approaches to understanding the construct. In the second portion of the chapter, we move beyond simple definition and consider the dominant schools of thought regarding why or how self-esteem regulates human activity. Throughout these two sections, we discuss relevant literature from social psychology as well as the work of industrial/organizational psychologists. Finally, we end the chapter by highlighting the function of self-esteem. Our hope is that by the end of this chapter readers will appreciate not only what self-esteem is but why self-esteem matters and how it may be useful to industrial/organizational psychologists. Throughout our presentation, we will attempt to direct the attention of readers to how industrial/organizational psychologists have informed basic debates in social psychology as well as highlight considerations from social psychology that have not yet infiltrated the industrial/organizational literature.

What Is Self-Esteem?

A Brief Historical Sketch

As with many of the most influential ideas in psychology, interest in self-esteem can be traced to William James (1890), who noted that a central element of the self is the sense of self-esteem that arises from consistently meeting or exceeding important life goals. Consistent with this orientation, many early luminaries of

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psychology – such as Margaret Mead, Sigmund Freud, Lev Vygotsky, and Kurt Lewin – maintained an active conceptual interest in comprehending the inner workings of the self. Despite such prominent advocates, scientific interest in the self – and self-esteem in particular – failed to gain traction during the first half of the 20th century (Swann et al., 2007). During this time, behaviorists, such as John Watson, Ivan Pavlov, and B. F. Skinner, dominated the field and argued that internal ethereal mental states, such as self-esteem, had no place in a scientific discipline which, in their view, should focus exclusively on concrete, observable, and measurable behavior (Bosson & Swann, 2009). A direct consequence of behaviorist domination over psychology was that the early conceptual work of James and his contemporaries languished, and topics such as self-esteem remained on the fringes of the discipline.

Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s humanistic psychologists expressed disenchantment with the behaviorist view of human nature, which not only ignored central elements of humanity, such as free-will, but also inappropriately presumed that human behavior was shaped passively by the external environment. In contrast to the behavioristic approach, these scholars convincingly argued that in order to understand human behavior it was necessary for psychologists to orient themselves toward the inner subjective experiences of the individual. Notably, self-esteem was prominently featured in these discussions. For instance, Maslow (1954) proposed that human behavior is motivated by the satisfaction of internal basic needs such as self-esteem, whereas Rogers (1959, 1961) proposed a client-centered approach to therapy that emphasized a need for positive self-regard. Although focus on the inner life of the individual continued, the dominant paradigm within the field shifted toward human cognition and information processing.

Coinciding with these broader paradigm shifts, the scientific legitimacy of self-esteem was solidified by several rigorous research programs. Notably, social psychologists (e.g., Bem, 1972; Festinger, 1954) initiated influential work that was pertinent to understanding the development of self-knowledge (see Bosson & Swann, 2009, for a review) and several influential books were published on the topic (Coopersmith, 1967; Rosenberg, 1965). Although these events were certainly significant, the watershed moment for self-esteem research was most likely the publication of several measurement instruments that transformed a fuzzy hypothetical construct into something that could be quickly and easily assessed. Particularly noteworthy was Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item trait measure of self-esteem that has gone on to be utilized in more than one quarter of all published self-esteem research (Tafarodi & Swann, 1995). In addition to the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, a wide variety of other instruments have been developed to measure self-esteem including the Coopersmith (1967) Self-Esteem Inventory, the Self-Attributes Questionnaire (Pelham & Swann, 1989), the Self-Liking and Self-Competence Scale (Tafarodi & Swann, 2001), and the Single-Item Self-Esteem Scale (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001; see

Bosson, 2006, for a review). There are important differences between these instruments with regard to issues such as the structure of self-esteem (e.g., global vs. domain-specific), but one common feature shared by all of them is that they directly ask respondents to report how they feel about themselves. With the development of these self-report instruments, self-esteem research accumulated rapidly and clearly demonstrated its significance (see Zeigler-Hill & Jordan, 2010, for an extended discussion of the measurement of self-esteem). Industrial/organizational psychologists very quickly recognized the importance of self-esteem and took advantage of these measurement tools in order to understand the practical implications of self-esteem for organizations and workers (Korman, 1966, 1967; Tharenou, 1979; Tharenou & Harker, 1982).

Self-Esteem Defined

One source of confusion that immediately confronts those who begin to explore the self-esteem literature is the multiplicity of definitions that have been proffered. At various points social psychologists have proposed that self-esteem is: a favorable global evaluation of the self (Baumeister, 1998), the extent to which an individual respects himself/herself and considers himself/herself to be worthy (Rosenberg, 1965), the way people generally feel about themselves (Brown & Marshall, 2006), and the association of the self with a valence attribute (Greenwald, Banaji, Rudman, Farnham, Nosek, & Mellott, 2002). Although each definition is subtly distinct, we argue that it is reasonable to conceive of self-esteem, at least in broad terms, as an intrapersonal, subjective evaluation that reflects an assessment of one's worth and value (Baumeister, 1998). In effect, self-esteem is the extent to which an individual likes him/herself and views him/herself as competent (Brown, 1998; Tafarodi & Swann, 1995; Wojciszke & Abele, 2008).

Despite its utility, this definition takes us only part of the way toward comprehending self-esteem. Indeed, to fully appreciate self-esteem one must acknowledge that the term has not been utilized uniformly by scholars (Brown & Marshall, 2006). Rather, alternative perspectives concerning the self have inspired different conceptualizations of self-esteem. Pertinent to this chapter, in subsequent sections we consider the two dominant approaches, one that emphasizes a monolithic and stable self (i.e., trait approach) and a second that emphasizes a differentiated, dynamic, and state-based view of the self (i.e., social-cognitive view). We do not contend that one approach is superior, but simply that each approach stimulates different questions and research directions for investigating self-esteem.

The Global Trait-Based View

Global self-esteem or *dispositional* self-esteem are interchangeable terms that have been utilized by scholars to reference overall, affectively laden, evaluations

of the self (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). Paralleling our evaluations of other animate or inanimate entities, it has been argued that each individual possesses a valenced feeling of general affection toward the self as a whole (Rosenberg, 1965). Although changes in global self-esteem across the lifespan have been documented that correspond with salient maturational and social transitions (Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter, 2002), literature reviews suggest that global self-evaluations exhibit a high degree of stability (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2003). Moreover, although the stability of global self-esteem is reduced with longer time intervals between measurements, one's relative standing remains remarkably consistent across the lifespan (Orth & Robins, 2014). Furthermore, longitudinal investigations that have partitioned the variance in self-esteem using latent trait-state models have concluded that upwards of 85 percent of the variance in global self-esteem is accounted for by a stable trait-like factor (Donnellan, Kenny, Trzesniewski, Lucas, & Conger, 2012).

Whether global self-esteem is caused by nature or nurture has been the subject of continuous interest with supportive data available for both positions. Thus, for instance, although several studies have shown that between 30 percent and 50 percent of the observed variance in global self-esteem is heritable, other studies have emphasized the importance of key socialization agents (Hart, Atkins, & Tursi, 2006; Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2013). Regardless of one's position, it seems reasonable to conclude that individuals form an overarching trait-like feeling of self-liking relatively early in life that persists and colors domain-specific self-evaluations as well as momentary feelings of self-worth.

Global Self-Esteem and the Internal World

To better comprehend the core meaning of global self-esteem, personality and social psychologists have conducted hundreds of correlational studies that have assessed the associations it has with a broad spectrum of personality, emotion, and cognition variables (for reviews, see: MacDonald & Leary, 2012; O'Brien, Bartoletti, Leitzel, & O'Brien, 2006; Suls, 2006). In terms of personality, global self-esteem is weakly related to agreeableness, openness to experience, and conscientiousness, but is modestly positively associated with extraversion and strongly negatively associated with neuroticism (e.g., Judge, Erez, & Bono, 1998; Watson, Suls, & Haig, 2002). Perhaps not surprising given these findings, global self-esteem is positively related to positive affectivity and negatively related to negative affectivity (Watson et al., 2002). In fact, global self-esteem is negatively related to such emotions as anxiety, sadness, hostility, loneliness, guilt, and shame (MacDonald & Leary, 2012). Of particular importance, global self-esteem has substantial overlap with depression and depressive episodes (Suls, 2006). In line with these findings, research in industrial/organizational psychology has shown that the global self-esteem of employees relates to employee reports of negative emotional experiences and physical symptoms (Kivimäki &

Kalimo, 1996; Spector & Jex, 1998). In effect, the intrapsychic experience of low self-esteem corresponds to an affectively aversive and unpleasant existence whereas that of high self-esteem is the polar opposite.

Why the affective experiences of high and low self-esteem individuals diverge so dramatically has been the subject of intense interest in both social and industrial/organizational psychology with critical differences in emotional regulation and information processing being frequently cited as two likely culprits. For instance, individuals with low self-esteem are less motivated to engage in mood repair (Heimpel, Wood, Marshall, & Brown, 2002), exhibit a tendency to dampen positive affect when it is experienced (Wood, Heimpel, & Michela, 2003), and experience greater negative reactions to hostile social stimuli (Richter & Ridout, 2011) relative to those with high self-esteem. Although not directly focused on understanding basic emotion regulation processes, results from industrial/organization psychology nicely dovetails with this body of findings. For example, Levy (1993) found that individuals with low self-esteem experience their work performance as being more affectively negative, whereas Brockner (1988) noted a tendency for low self-esteem individuals to recall more negative information about themselves. Further, in a sample of working adults, Cohen-Charash and Mueller (2007, Study 2) provided evidence that individuals with high self-esteem effectively regulate envy toward a co-worker by striking out, harming, or undermining the source of this aversive feeling. Work in both disciplines also points toward the critical role of information processing, particularly with regard to attributions. Here, studies have shown a relationship between self-esteem and the tendency to overgeneralize failures (Brown & Dutton, 1995), whereas early work in industrial/organizational psychology has highlighted a positive relationship between self-esteem and internal attributions for positive job conditions (Adler, 1980).

Although not mutually exclusive from affective and information-processing mechanisms, an alternative perspective that has been proffered is that self-esteem reflects a psychological resource which protects or buffers individuals from the slings and arrows of life (see Zeigler-Hill, 2011, for a review). In essence, researchers have argued that self-esteem corresponds with a reservoir of self-worth that can be drawn upon when difficult circumstances arise. More precisely, self-esteem has been argued to impact one's perceived capacity to cope with stressful situational conditions or alter the extent to which individuals interpret environmental circumstances as threatening or challenging. This conceptualization of self-esteem has received ample support in laboratory experiments. For instance, when exposed to threatening negative evaluations, individuals with high self-esteem are more resilient and less prone to experience distress compared to those with low self-esteem (Brown, 2010). Paralleling this work, industrial/organizational psychologists have documented that global self-esteem moderates one's reactivity to common workplace stressors. For instance, Mossholder, Bedeian, and Armenakis (1981) found that nurses who were low

in self-esteem exhibited poorer job performance following the experience of role conflict relative to those who were high in self-esteem. Ganster and Schaubroeck (1991) reported that low self-esteem firefighters reported higher levels of somatic symptoms following role conflict relative to those who were high in self-esteem. Further, global self-esteem permits individuals to effectively cope with the stress of unemployment through job-search activity (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; Wanberg, Glomb, Song, & Sorenson, 2005).

Global Self-Esteem and the External World

As well as impacting evaluations and internal affective experiences, self-esteem also appears to have a profound influence on how an individual orients him/herself to the external world. Here, research suggests that individuals with high levels of self-esteem are characterized as being self-confident, sociable, secure, assertive, and motivated by approach goals, whereas those with low levels of self-esteem lack self-confidence, are insecure or uncertain about their personal characteristics, and are guided by avoidance goals (Baumeister, 1998; McGregor, Gailliot, Vasquez, & Nash, 2007). Consistent with this characterization, industrial/organizational psychologists have found that self-esteem is positively related to seeking out workplaces that maximize one's ability to exert influence (Turban & Keon, 1993) or voice one's opinions (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998). Furthermore, self-esteem relates to a tendency to engage in proactive career exploration (Cai et al., 2015). Global self-evaluations have also been shown to impact workplace behavior through the adoption of approach and avoidance goals (Ferris, Rosen, Johnson, Brown, Risavy, & Heller, 2011). Brockner's (1988) behavioral plasticity model, which nicely bridges social and industrial/organizational psychology, has been particularly informative in terms of understanding the importance of self-confidence and security as defining features of self-esteem. According to this model, individuals with low self-esteem are more behaviorally malleable and susceptible to their surrounding environmental conditions relative to their high self-esteem counterparts, because they are uncertain and insecure. As such, low self-esteem individuals pay closer attention to and are more profoundly impacted by the environment and social cues. Based upon our review of the literature, it would appear that this conceptual framework is not only among the most popular approaches to justify a moderating effect of self-esteem, but also strongly supported by evidence (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991; Mossholder et al., 1981, 1982; Pierce, Gardner, Dunham, & Cummings, 1993; Turban & Keon, 1993).

Another influential theoretical approach, particularly in instances in which a direct relationship between self-esteem and an outcome is posited, are frameworks grounded in self-consistency or self-verification processes. Self-verification theory (Swann & Buhrmester, 2012) emerged from the tradition of self-consistency and balance theories (Aronson, 1969; Festinger, 1957). The central idea here is that

individuals want to preserve their firmly held self-conceptions which they manage by soliciting feedback from the social environment that is consistent with their own self-views. That is, individuals will attempt to verify their positive self-views by engaging in positive behaviors and seeking positive feedback or verify their negative self-views by engaging in negative behaviors and seeking negative feedback. Multiple reasons for this self-verification process to unfold have been suggested, but the desire for a predictable and controllable world has been argued to be an integral part of the process (Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989). Notably, industrial/organizational researchers, such as Korman (1966, 1967), provided some of the earliest evidence regarding the efficacy of self-verification and self-consistency processes and, not surprisingly, this theoretical orientation remains a core conceptual principle in the field of industrial/organizational psychology to this day (Ferris, Lian, Brown, & Morrison, 2015; Van Dyne, Vandewalle, Kostova, Latham, & Cummings, 2000).

Among the most noteworthy issues is the longstanding theoretical debate between self-verification and self-enhancement, which predicts a universal preference for positive evaluations. For individuals who possess largely positive self-views, the processes of self-verification and self-enhancement produce similar outcomes, such that individuals will prefer positive evaluations. However, self-verification and self-enhancement processes diverge for individuals with negative self-views such that self-verification predicts that these individuals will prefer negative evaluations, whereas self-enhancement predicts that they will demonstrate a preference for positive evaluations. Which motive, self-verification versus self-enhancement, is correct, represents a longstanding debate within the social psychological literature (Sedikides, 1993; Sedikides & Strubbe, 1997).

As has been the case in social psychology, within industrial/organizational psychology the evidence appears mixed regarding these two motives. Beyond the studies reported earlier in this chapter, some recent investigations have reported direct support for self-verification theory. For instance, Wiesenfeld, Swann, Brockner, and Bartel (2007) found that individuals high in self-esteem reacted more positively to fair (vs. unfair) treatment relative to low self-esteem individuals (see also Lapointe, Vandenberghe, & Panaccio, 2011). Relatedly, Cable and Kay (2012) found strong support for the role of a self-verification motive amongst new organizational entrants and Whelpley and McDaniel (2016) concluded that the evidence with respect to the relation between self-esteem and deviance supports self-verification models. In contrast to this data, however, several other findings appear contradictory. For instance, in a study of feedback reactions, Anseel and Lievens (2006) concluded that their data were in line with self-enhancement theory predictions and not self-verification theory. Similarly, Woo and his colleagues (Woo, Sims, Rupp, & Gibbons, 2008) found little support for self-verification theory, relative to self-enhancement theory, amongst participants of a developmental assessment center. Given the state of the literature, we would suggest that industrial/organizational psychologists

remain mindful of the possibility that the nature of the outcome may matter (Kwang & Swann, 2010) and that moderators may potentiate each motive (see Ferris et al., 2015 for an example). In addition, industrial/organizational psychologists should remain cognizant that challenges to these predominant views do exist and the possibility of supplanting one or both remains a possibility (Gregg, 2008).

The Benefits of Self-Esteem: Controversies and Debates

As implied above, high global self-esteem is widely regarded as beneficial, whereas low global self-esteem is deemed to be problematic. In fact, the findings from numerous studies serve to bolster this common perception. Within social psychology, investigators have noted that global self-esteem is a risk factor in the development of psychopathology (Zeigler-Hill, 2011), poor physical health (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, Moffitt, Robins, Poulton, & Caspi, 2006), relationship behaviors (Murray, 2006), academic outcomes (Wylie, 1979), and deviant behavior (Trzesniewski et al., 2006). Similarly, organizational psychologists have noted the differential predictive power of global self-evaluations and workplace outcomes such as job distress (Cropanzano & Grandey, 1998), self-rated interview performance (King & Manaster, 1977), career exploration (Cai et al., 2015), job performance (Ferris et al., 2011), job satisfaction (Judge & Bono, 2001), and workplace deviance (Vogel & Mitchell, in press). Furthermore, research on unemployed workers reveals that self-esteem is positively associated with subsequent re-employment (Caplan, Vinokur, Price, & Van Ryn, 1989; Vinokur & Schul, 1997). In effect, global self-esteem generally emerges as being positively related to good outcomes and negatively related to bad outcomes. Furthermore, regardless of the implied mechanism (e.g., self-consistency, affect regulation), the predominant narrative that has surrounded self-esteem is that it is an important cause of many life outcomes and that the higher one's self-esteem, the better off one will be. Although this perspective likely resonates with many readers, we would be remiss if we did not highlight some of the key controversies and debates that exist regarding elements of this viewpoint, three of which we present below.

Causality. Despite the seemingly unequivocal nature of the data, critical reviews have questioned whether global self-esteem is a psychological causal wellspring from which all manner of positive or negative life outcomes derive (Baumeister et al., 2003). Although global self-esteem has intuitive appeal as a causal antecedent, the fact remains that causal inferences are largely tenuous given the predominance of cross-sectional research designs in both social and industrial/organizational psychology. Thus, for instance, although one's self-evaluations correlate with job performance (Ferris et al., 2011) and workplace deviance (Vogel & Mitchell, in press), it is unclear whether performance and deviance are the cause or the consequence of self-esteem. Both social and

industrial/organizational psychologists have attempted to redress this concern in recent years by incorporating stronger research designs into their empirical work. In this regard, several prospective cross-lagged studies have been published which contradict much of the earlier pessimism (Kammeyer-Mueller, Judge, & Piccolo, 2008; Kuster, Orth, & Meier, 2013; Marshall, Parker, Ciarrochi, & Heaven, 2014; Orth, Robins, Trzesniewski, Maes, & Schmitt, 2009; Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012; Trzesniewski et al., 2006). Within the context of understanding work, the results appear to suggest that global self-esteem is an antecedent rather than simply being a consequence. For example, Kammeyer-Mueller et al. (2008) used a cross-lagged regression design with data from 1,765 individuals across a seven-year period. Overall, their findings indicated that self-esteem at the earlier time predicted later occupational prestige and income but that the reverse was not true (i.e., occupational prestige did not predict later self-esteem). Paralleling these results, Orth et al. (2012) reported that self-esteem prospectively predicted job satisfaction, occupational status, and salary, but the reverse relationships were not significant. Although only a limited number of longitudinal studies have been completed to date, the available evidence suggests that global self-esteem is indeed an antecedent of work-related outcomes.

Practical significance. Notwithstanding the ongoing causality debate, critics have also questioned the practical significance of self-esteem by arguing that its effect sizes are too small to be meaningful (Baumeister et al., 2003). In a direct rebuttal, Swann and his colleagues (2007) have argued that such criticisms are ill founded insofar as they neglect the well-established psychological principle of specificity matching (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005). In line with this thinking, several prominent self-esteem scholars have argued that self-esteem might be better conceptualized as a hierarchical construct in which individuals possess a family of self-evaluations that vary across relevant role domains (Korman, 1970; Marsh & Craven, 2006). For instance, if one were interested in assessing performance in math, then academic self-esteem should serve as a better predictor than global self-esteem. An implication of this view is that to fully comprehend the practical relevance of global self-esteem one must necessarily acknowledge that its influence may be indirect and operate through domain-specific sub-dimensions.

Embracing the clear advantages of specificity matching, industrial/organizational psychology introduced the concept of organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) nearly 30 years ago (Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, & Dunham, 1989). Conceptually, OBSE differs from global self-esteem insofar as it reflects an employee's self-perception of worth and competence within the specific setting of work. Since its introduction, more than 66 independent samples have been collected using OBSE (Bowling, Eschleman, Wang, Kirkendall, & Alarcon, 2010). Although directly relevant for understanding the importance of self-esteem at work, the broader conceptual significance of this literature in our view likely lies in that it can inform the specificity debate within an important life domain. That is, given the prolonged systematic energy that has been dedicated

to investigating OBSE, it now seems possible to arrive at reliable conclusions regarding some of the key tenets of the specificity approach. Indeed, a recent meta-analysis by Bowling and his colleagues (2010) appears to support several of the key propositions laid out by global self-esteem proponents (Swann et al., 2007). First, their meta-analysis suggests that OBSE is independent of global self-esteem despite their association. Second, OBSE is significantly related to work-specific job attitudes, work performance, and work stress. Third, their findings supported the importance of specificity revealing that OBSE was generally a stronger predictor of workplace outcomes than global self-esteem. Finally, the results of this work indicated that OBSE explained much of the effect of global self-esteem on workplace outcomes.

In addition to this narrowing focus, industrial/organizational psychologists have tackled criticism regarding the predictive utility of dispositional self-esteem by taking the opposite approach: broadening the nature of the construct (Judge, 2009). Of particular relevance, Judge and colleagues (2002) introduced Core Self-Evaluations (CSE), which they suggest captures a fundamental, bottom-line evaluation of one's sense of self-worth, competence, and capability. Rather than reflecting a novel construct, CSE seemingly only differs from traditional global self-esteem in terms of its breadth since it is composed of four lower-order traits: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and neuroticism. Indeed, considerable evidence suggests that these four lower-order traits have moderate or strong intercorrelations with each other and typically load on a single underlying factor (Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998). Since the introduction of CSE to the literature, its nomological network has rapidly expanded to include diverse work outcomes such as stress, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, job-search persistence, motivation, and reduced work-family conflict (Chang, Ferris, Johnson, Rosen, & Tan, 2012). Impressively, research has also shown that the CSE of organizational owners and CEOs might impact the performance and culture of organizations (Resick, Whitman, Weingarden, & Hiller, 2009). In addition to demonstrating simple associations, remarkable advancements in our understanding of the underlying mechanisms have also occurred in this literature. For example, it has been argued that CSE alters perceptions of the work environment (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997), is related to effective self-regulation (Judge & Hurst, 2007), or relates to tendencies to approach and avoid certain situations (Ferris et al., 2011). Overall, CSE is a promising construct that can speak to the ongoing debate regarding self-esteem's predictive utility.

Despite our general positivity towards CSE, some significant reservations do remain regarding the legitimacy of the construct. For instance, a reoccurring and vexing issue has been the inclusion of locus of control, which does not fit the construct definition, as it does not reflect a self-evaluation (Johnson, Rosen, Chang, & Lin, 2015). In fact, recent work has suggested that locus of control may load on the latent CSE construct for methodological rather than substantive reasons (Johnson, Rosen, & Djurdjevic, 2011). Others have argued that

CSE may simply capture emotional stability (Bono & Judge, 2003) or primarily reflect self-esteem and generalized self-efficacy (Johnson et al., 2011). Finally, some evidence indicates that CSE may hold little predictive utility beyond the constituent elements (Gardner & Pierce, 2010). Thus, despite the popularity of CSE, it is worrisome that there is little agreement or understanding as to what constitutes this construct. To paraphrase one recent review (Chang et al., 2012), it would appear that the scientific cart may have been placed ahead of the horse.

The potential pitfalls of high self-esteem. Individuals generally show a preference for high levels of self-esteem under most conditions (Sedikides, 1993; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). For example, participants who were given the choice between various options often preferred receiving self-esteem enhancements more than engaging in other pleasant activities (e.g., eating a favorite food, engaging in a favorite sexual activity; Bushman, Moeller, & Crocker, 2011). However, this desire for high levels of self-esteem does not mean that it is always beneficial for individuals to feel good about themselves. This is illustrated by the fact that high levels of self-esteem have been found to be associated with negative outcomes including prejudice (Crocker, Thompson, McGraw, & Ingerman, 1987) and aggression (Baumeister et al., 1996). These findings suggest that high self-esteem may have a “dark side” (see Zeigler-Hill et al., 2016, for a review).

One example of this approach that is of increasing interest to industrial/organizational psychologists is recent work investigating the links between high levels of self-esteem and *narcissism*, which is characterized by feelings of superiority and entitlement, expectations for special treatment, the willingness to exploit others, and a tendency to exaggerate one’s own abilities (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Given that both self-esteem and narcissism involve positive self-views, it is not surprising that positive associations have emerged between these constructs across numerous studies (Brown & Zeigler-Hill, 2004). However, it is important to note that self-esteem and narcissism are far from interchangeable (see Bosson, Lakey, Campbell, Zeigler-Hill, Jordan, & Kernis, 2008, for a review). For example, individuals with high self-esteem perceive themselves positively on both agentic (e.g., intelligent) and communal (e.g., moral) traits, whereas narcissistic individuals only view themselves positively on agentic traits (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002). Further, it appears that narcissism may have important similarities to the *fragile* form of high self-esteem (i.e., feelings of self-worth that are vulnerable to challenge, require constant validation, and rely upon some degree of self-deception; see Jordan & Zeigler-Hill, 2013, for a review). That is, individuals with high levels of narcissism are similar in some respects to individuals who possess the fragile form of high self-esteem – as indicated by feelings of self-worth that are unstable or contingent – such that they appear to be preoccupied with protecting and enhancing their vulnerable feelings of self-worth which is often accomplished at the expense of

other people. This may explain why high levels of self-esteem are generally considered to be relatively “healthy,” whereas narcissism is considered to be part of the “Dark Triad” of personality traits alongside psychopathy and Machiavellianism (Brummelman, Thomaes, & Sedikides, 2016; Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

One might reasonably conclude that narcissism is unquestionably negative. In line with this perspective, organizational research is fully aligned with social psychology, demonstrating harmful associations with such outcomes as satisfaction, workplace incivility, job performance, integrity, and contextual performance (Meurs, Fox, Kessler, & Spector, 2013; O’Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012). Moreover, some recent work has documented the conditions under which narcissists behave particularly poorly at work. Chen and his colleagues (Chen, Ferris, Kwan, Yan, Zhou, & Hong, 2013), for instance, noted that narcissists disengage from their work when confronted with self-image threatening information, such as incivility, in order to protect their self-image. Notwithstanding these findings, a closer inspection of the organizational literature suggests that a more nuanced view may be required and that narcissism may be a mixed blessing (Campbell, Hoffman, Campbell, & Marchisio, 2011). In this respect, narcissists’ delusions of grandeur, self-promotion, and attention-seeking behaviors may be adaptive in terms of getting ahead at work (Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006; O’Reilly, Doerr, Caldwell, & Chatman, 2014). Furthermore, some research suggests that narcissism may be beneficial to organizational success (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2011; Resick et al., 2009). To reconcile these findings, organizational scholars have argued that narcissism cannot be studied in isolation, but rather must be considered in terms of the whole person. For instance, some recent research has indicated that leader narcissism is most beneficial when coupled with moral traits such as humility (Owens, Wallace, & Waldman, 2015). Beyond this possibility, other authors have recently argued that it may be advantageous to implement structural or interpersonal tactics in order to leverage the benefits of a narcissistic leader, while avoiding the potential pitfalls (Sedikides & Campbell, *in press*).

Social Cognition and the Dynamic Self

Although the monolithic global trait-based view has been very influential, the infiltration of a cognitive approach into social psychology has provided an alternative view. Rather than conceptualizing the self-concept as a single, stable, memory structure, it has become increasingly common to view it as a system or confederation of knowledge structures (Markus & Wurf, 1987) that has important implications for how individuals feel about themselves (Greenwald, Bellezza, & Banaji, 1988; Leary & Tangney, 2012; Vazire & Wilson, 2012). This more complex and multifaceted perspective of the self includes the idea that individuals possess multiple identities as well as the idea that alterations in perspective or

context can bring to mind different elements of one's self-knowledge (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012). Although much of the theorizing regarding the functioning of self-esteem discussed previously remains applicable here, there are unique considerations that arise from adopting this perspective. Below, we discuss some of these issues. Interestingly, many of these unique considerations are either unnoticed or under researched by industrial/organizational psychologists and, thus, reflect opportunities for future research.

Conceptualizing the self-concept as a confederacy suggests that individuals possess multiple self-evaluations. It is reasonable to assume that the nature of self-relevant knowledge may differ across broad contexts, such as work and school. As touched upon earlier in the context of discussing specificity matching, this idea aligns with the notion that self-esteem is arranged in a hierarchical manner and that individuals' evaluations of themselves are likely to differ across settings (Marsh, Craven, & Martin, 2006). This approach is quite familiar to industrial/organizational psychologists insofar as it serves as the theoretical foundation of OBSE (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). In accordance with this view, domain-specific experiences generate distinct context-specific self-evaluations that in turn serve as more proximal, relative to global self-esteem, predictors of context-specific outcomes. Within industrial/organizational psychology, Pierce and Gardner (2004) have argued that elements of the workplace such as structural features of an organization, treatment and relationships with significant organizational actors, and conditions that foster a sense of competence and efficacy are important precursors to OBSE. Consistent with this argument, past studies have documented numerous links between OBSE and such factors as perceived organizational support (Chen, Aryee, & Lee, 2005), perceived overqualification (Liu, Luksyte, Zhou, Shi, & Wang, 2005), and pay level (Gardner, Van Dyne, & Pierce, 2004). Moreover, several studies have suggested that many of these contextual work features impact workplace behavior indirectly by altering OBSE (Ferris, Brown, & Heller, 2009).

An interesting implication of conceptualizing the self as a confederacy for the study of self-esteem is that it presents the possibility that individuals may differentially stake their overall assessment of the self on different domains. Contingent self-esteem refers to the tendency for individuals to base their feelings of self-worth on internal or external standards (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 1995). In essence, contingent self-esteem represents what an individual believes that he or she must do or be in order to have value and worth as a person. Contingent high self-esteem is considered to be a form of fragile high self-esteem because it can only be maintained so long as the person is able to meet the standards on which his or her self-esteem is based (Deci & Ryan, 1995; Kernis, 2003). For example, college students who base their self-esteem on their academic competence report experiencing higher levels of self-esteem after they receive good grades or an acceptance letter from a graduate program along with significant drops in their self-esteem when they

receive poor grades or a rejection letter from a graduate program (Crocker, Karpinski, Quinn, & Chase, 2003; Crocker, Sommers, & Luhtanen, 2002). Similar consequences have been observed for individuals who base their self-esteem on other life-domains such as the approval of others (Park & Crocker, 2008), friendships (Cambron & Acitelli, 2010), romantic relationships (Knee, Canevello, Bush, & Cook, 2008), physical appearance (Noser & Zeigler-Hill, 2014), or work performance (Ferris, 2014). Contrary to the generally negative connotations of contingent self-esteem in many domains, the findings reported by industrial/organizational psychologists seemingly suggest it might have benefits (Ferris, 2014). In this respect, work by Ferris and his colleagues (Ferris, Brown, Lian, & Keeping, 2009; Ferris, Lian, Brown, Pang, & Keeping, 2010) has shown that self-esteem that is contingent on work performance may mitigate the negative consequences of low self-esteem that would be anticipated on the basis of self-verification theory.

A further logical extension of approaching the self as a dynamic system would be that self-esteem should exhibit state-like properties (Brown & Marshall, 2006). State self-esteem is used to capture temporary feelings of self-worth that people experience and contrasts with “trait” self-esteem, which reflects the way individuals feel about themselves on average. The acknowledgement amongst social scientists that self-esteem has state-like properties has led to the development of state self-esteem scales (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991), serves as an assumption of laboratory investigations which assess the impact of self-relevant threats on self-esteem, and serves as the foundation of field studies that employ diary methods. Diary investigations, which repeatedly assess self-esteem over multiple days or episodes, have been particularly informative in this respect. As with research conducted by social psychologists (Heppner et al., 2008), studies of working samples indicate that within-person fluctuations in self-esteem exist amongst workers (Ferris, Spence, Brown, & Heller, 2012; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). To date, progress has been made in understanding the internal and external events that impact state self-esteem levels (Heppner et al., 2008), and recent work in industrial/organizational psychology has contributed to this understanding. In particular, studies have documented the relevance of relational devaluation as a key driver of daily self-esteem (Eatough et al., 2016; Ferris et al., 2012).

Although fluctuations in self-esteem would appear to be a natural consequence of adopting a dynamic view, it is important to acknowledge that in some circles large fluctuations in state self-esteem are considered to be unhealthy. Self-esteem instability reflects the moment-to-moment changes (i.e., within-subject standard deviation) in state self-esteem that is reported by individuals when asked to respond to the question of how they feel about themselves “right now” across multiple occasions (e.g., once per day for seven consecutive days; Kernis, 2003, 2005). Unstable high self-esteem is considered to be a form of fragile high self-esteem because these fluctuations in state self-esteem suggest

that the positive attitudes these individuals hold about themselves are uncertain or vulnerable to potentially threatening experiences (e.g., failure, rejection). Research concerning self-esteem instability has shown that it often moderates the association that trait self-esteem has with a variety of important life outcomes including anger (Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1989), defensiveness (Kernis, Lakey, & Heppner, 2008), interpersonal style (Zeigler-Hill, Clark, & Beckman, 2011), and aggression (Zeigler-Hill, Enjaian, Holden, & Southard, 2014). These findings suggest that accounting for self-esteem instability allows for a more nuanced understanding of the connections that trait self-esteem has with a variety of important life outcomes. To our knowledge, industrial/organizational psychologists have not yet considered the possible importance of self-esteem instability in their own work.

A further consideration, and one that industrial/organizational psychologists have ignored, is that the dynamic cognitive view of the self highlights the potential importance of structure and interconnections amongst knowledge. It is usually the case that individuals who possess more positive beliefs about themselves (e.g., believe they are “intelligent” and “physically attractive”) report higher levels of self-esteem, but there is more to the connection between the self-concept and self-esteem than the sheer number of positive and negative self-beliefs possessed by individuals. A large body of research has demonstrated that the way in which the content of the self-concept is organized (i.e., self-concept structure) is important, because this has implications for the accessibility of specific aspects of self-knowledge (Showers & Zeigler-Hill, 2012). One implication of the importance of self-concept structure is that two individuals who have identical beliefs about themselves may experience very different feelings of self-worth depending on how their self-concepts are organized (see Showers & Zeigler-Hill, 2006, for a review). For example, Zeigler-Hill and Showers (2007) found that individuals who compartmentalized their self-concepts (i.e., separated their positive self-beliefs from their negative self-beliefs) reported higher levels of self-esteem in general, but their feelings of self-worth were unstable over time such that they experienced larger decreases in their moment-to-moment feelings of self-worth in the wake of negative events (e.g., social rejection).

Finally, approaching the self as a cognitive structure highlights current thinking in cognitive and social psychology, which has argued that human mental activity can be bifurcated into two relatively independent modes of information processing. Historically, the self-esteem literature has focused on judgments that emanate solely from an explicit, conscious system and has ignored the operation of the second implicit, nonconscious system. Coinciding with the larger literature, interest has grown in terms of understanding implicit self-esteem, which is usually defined as self-evaluations that exist primarily outside of conscious awareness (see Zeigler-Hill & Jordan, 2010, for a review). Implicit self-esteem is often measured with nonreactive assessment tools such as the self-esteem version of the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald &

Farnham, 2000; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwarz, 1998) and the Name-Letter Task (Nuttin, 1985, 1987), which rely on response latencies and associations between stimuli rather than directly asking respondents how much they like themselves. Implicit self-esteem has a great deal of potential but there are various psychometric problems surrounding the nonreactive measures that are used to capture implicit self-esteem (Bosson, Swann, & Pennebaker, 2000; Buhrmester, Blanton, & Swann, 2011). Despite these psychometric issues, low implicit self-esteem has been helpful for identifying individuals with fragile forms of high self-esteem that we discussed previously (Zeigler-Hill & Jordan, 2010). For example, individuals with high scores on measures such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (i.e., high *explicit* self-esteem) but who have low implicit self-esteem have been found to base their self-worth on external contingencies (Jordan, Spencer, & Zanna, 2003), experience more fluctuations in their state self-esteem (Zeigler-Hill, 2006), employ more ethnic discrimination when their positive self-views are threatened (Jordan, Spencer, & Zanna, 2005), display more unrealistic optimism (Bosson, Brown, Zeigler-Hill, & Swann, 2003), and become more convinced of their opinions and perceive greater social support for them following self-threat (McGregor & Marigold, 2003; McGregor, Nail, Marigold, & Kang, 2005). Despite growing interest in implicit self-esteem, little consideration has been directed toward this topic in industrial/organizational psychology.

What Does Self-Esteem Actually Do?

Despite the vast literature devoted to the topic of self-esteem, relatively little attention has been paid to the actual function of self-esteem. That is, questions concerning what self-esteem actually does and why it is important were largely ignored until Leary and his colleagues developed the sociometer model (Leary, 1999; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Leary & Downs, 1995; Leary, Haupt, Strausser, & Chokel, 1998). According to the sociometer model, self-esteem is an evolutionary regulatory system that helps individuals form and maintain high-quality social relationships by monitoring perceived inclusionary status. In essence, the sociometer model argues that self-esteem has a *status-tracking property* such that an individual's current level of self-esteem depends on the extent to which the individual perceives himself or herself as having relational value. That is, individuals will experience a decrease in self-esteem when they experience rejection or social exclusion because these events will signal a threat to inclusionary status. Conversely, individuals will experience an increase in self-esteem when they experience acceptance or feel included because these events signal heightened relational value. According to this perspective, people do not actually care about self-esteem for its own sake. Rather, self-esteem is only important because of what it indicates about the degree to which the individual is accepted and valued by others in the social environment (Leary et al., 1995). Leary and Downs

(1995) suggest that self-esteem serves as an indicator of relational value in much the same way that the fuel gauge on the dashboard of a car provides information concerning how much fuel remains in the fuel tank. An impressive amount of empirical support has been found for the sociometer model such that self-esteem is responsive to social acceptance and rejection (see Stinson, Cameron, & Huang, 2015, for a review).

It is noteworthy that, despite the popularity of the sociometer model within social psychology, industrial/organizational psychologists have rarely drawn upon this framework in their own work (for exceptions, see Ferris et al., 2009; Peng & Zeng, in press; Schilpzand, Leavitt, & Lim, 2016). This oversight is somewhat astonishing, given the tendency for industrial/organizational psychologists to both position self-esteem (or OBSE) as a key mediator variable in many of their studies and investigate constructs that, on the surface, reflect relational devaluation of the individual as a key antecedent (e.g., pay, interpersonal justice, supervisor treatment, support from an organization). At first blush, limited application of such an immensely popular framework would seemingly represent a missed opportunity. If researchers do begin to embrace this theory, however, we would caution them to remain cognizant of moderating factors, such as attachment style (Srivastava & Beer, 2005) or in-group/out-group status (Reitz, Motti-Stefanidi, & Asendorpf, 2016), that might bound the operation of sociometer theory.

More generally, however, we think that prior to embracing sociometer theory it is critical for industrial/organizational psychologists to better familiarize themselves with work that has both questioned and expanded upon the conceptualization of self-esteem as monitoring inclusionary status. On this latter point, Kirkpatrick and Ellis (2001, 2006) suggest that there are multiple sociometers associated with functionally distinct systems that provide information about various relationship domains (e.g., mating, coalitions). This proposed extension is consistent with the work of other researchers that has linked self-esteem with domains such as status (Barkow, 1989; Gilbert, Price, & Allan, 1995; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001; Mahadevan et al., 2016) and mate value (Bale & Archer, 2013; Brase & Guy, 2004; Kavanagh, Fletcher, & Ellis, 2014). These models suggest that self-esteem informs individuals about their current status in domains that are relevant to evolutionary outcomes. An example of support for extending status-tracking models beyond general relational value was provided by Mahadevan et al. (2016), who found that higher levels of prior social status promoted behavioral strategies reflecting assertiveness with self-esteem mediating this association. That is, individuals who perceived themselves as possessing greater social status experienced higher levels of self-esteem, which, in turn, was associated with higher levels of assertiveness.

Somewhat troublesome for sociometer theory are recent direct competitive tests, which have contrasted it with the status perspectives. Initial findings here appear, unfortunately for sociometer theory, to better align with the notion that

self-esteem monitors status (Gebauer, Sedikides, Wagner, Bleidorn, Rentfrow, Potter, & Gosling, 2015). Given the relevance of status to the workplace context (Carson & Thau, 2014) it would seem to us that this newer data represents a promising avenue for industrial/organizational psychologists.

An alternative perspective regarding the function of self-esteem is provided by Terror Management Theory (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999), which argues that self-esteem serves as a defense for individuals against the recognition of their own mortality (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004). The basic idea is that individuals develop self-esteem by meeting the standards of their cultural worldview which provides them with a sense that their lives have meaning and value. Thus, self-esteem protects individuals from the potentially paralyzing effects of existential anxiety by allowing individuals to believe their lives have significance (see Pyszczynski & Kesebir, 2013, for a review). For example, Greenberg, Simon, Pyszczynski, Solomon, and Chatel (1992) found that artificially raising the self-esteem of participants via bogus positive feedback decreased their anxiety when exposed to images of death or waiting to receive painful electric shocks. The function of self-esteem offered by proponents of Terror Management Theory is certainly intriguing, but some researchers are skeptical that the function of self-esteem is to buffer people against anxiety regarding their own deaths (Leary, 2004).

Perhaps in part due to skepticism regarding the applicability of Terror Management Theory, it has received limited attention from industrial/organizational psychologists. Such neglect is surprising when considered in light of the fact that many occupations are embedded in contexts in which employees are reminded of their own mortality, exposed to death, and susceptible to accidents or other dangers (Grant & Wade-Benzoni, 2009). It would also seem to us that because organizations are more permanent than the self, they might serve a key role in buffering employees' existential anxiety surrounding death. Highlighting the possible significance of death anxiety to the workplace, recent studies with nurses and firefighters who reported being exposed to mortality cues indicated that they experienced higher levels of burnout, but only if they were already high, versus low, in trait death anxiety (Sliter, Sinclair, Yuan, & Mohr, 2014). Other studies indicate that leadership perceptions and influence may be impacted by cues regarding one's mortality (Cohen, Solomon, Maxfield, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2004; Gordijn & Stapel, 2008; Landau, Greenberg, & Sullivan, 2009). Although no workplace studies have directly examined self-esteem, indirect data does exist. In this respect, research has found that men, but not women, when cued with mortality seek power, presumably because of its association with self-worth (Belmi & Pfeffer, 2016). Despite this promising data, it would appear that numerous untapped opportunities for the application of this theory to the workplace remain to be explored (Grant & Wade-Benzoni, 2009; Stein & Cropanzano, 2011)

Conclusion

As we have highlighted in this chapter, self-esteem has had a long, rich history within social psychology and industrial/organizational psychology. Self-esteem is a complex construct that has been investigated in numerous ways. Industrial/organizational psychologists reasonably have positioned it as a key antecedent as well as a moderator and mediator. They have examined it both as a state and as a trait. They have drawn upon a rich litany of theories to understand important workplace phenomena. Importantly, industrial/organizational psychologists have not simply been debtors in this literature, but have also made significant contributions. They have informed important theoretical debates, introduced novel constructs, been among the earliest proponents of incredibly popular theories, and highlighted how traditional views of self-esteem may not hold in workplace contexts. Our review has also highlighted areas in which industrial/organizational psychologists still have much to learn from their social psychology colleagues. Unfortunately, industrial/organizational psychology has ignored and underutilized some of the most popular theories and approaches to understanding self-esteem that may be beneficial to their work. It is our hope that this chapter will inspire additional industrial/organizational psychologists to incorporate self-esteem into their future research.

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