CHAPTER FIVE

On the utility of the self in social perception: An Egocentric Tactician Model

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Abstract

This chapter describes the Egocentric Tactician Model. The model purports to account for the influence of the self on social thought. Such thought refers to the social world and those who inhabit it (i.e., characterizing or construing another's actions, predicting others' preferences or behaviors, evaluating what is normative or right). The model posits that the influence of the self on social thought is contingent on both the content of the self-concept and the motives that work to maintain or increase the positivity of the self-concept. Two primary motives are self-enhancement and self-protection. The model further asserts that during social thought these motives affect, and are affected by, various cognitive processes and structures. Different chapter sections demonstrate that the Egocentric Tactician Model is empirically grounded, has a broad explanatory scope, is generative, and differs from other models in describing how the self affects social thought.

"[The] self provides the frame of reference from which all else is observed."
Combs and Snygg (1959, 145)

"We don't see things as they are; we see things as we are."
Nin (1961, 124)

"In-groups are often recreated to fit the needs of individuals."
Allport (1954, 37)

We propose a theoretical framework, the Egocentric Tactician Model (ETM). The ETM addresses how, when, and why the self-concept affects the way people think about their social world and those who inhabit it. The notion that the self shapes social perception or social thinking is not new. Indeed, the idea emerged contemporaneously with the establishment of psychology as a scientific discipline. Across the years, the issue was treated by such luminaries as Hall (1898), James (1915), Sullivan (1947), Bruner (1951), Hovland and Sherif (1952), Allport (1954), Kelly (1955), Jones and deCharms (1957), Combs and Snygg (1959), and Krech, Crutchfield, and Ballachey (1962). More recently, an influential review by Shrauger and Patterson (1976), along with catalyzing research by Ross (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977), Markus (Fong & Markus, 1982; Markus, Smith, & Moreland, 1985), and their colleagues, stimulated an intense period of research activity that explored various aspects of this topic. Consequently, the keen and prolonged interest in how the self influences social perception has produced a sizeable literature (Alicke, Dunning, & Krueger, 2005; Dunning, 2012; Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999; Krueger, 2007; Lieberman & Pfeifer, 2005).

However, our reading of the literature suggests that there is no overall framework that specifies when and how the self influences social thinking. It is here that the current chapter aims to make a contribution. Although some aspects of the model have appeared previously in the literature, our view is that

there has been no attempt to organize and integrate these aspects into a single framework. The overarching aim of this chapter is to provide this framework. Other goals of the chapter are to illustrate the utility of the framework by noting how it accounts for existing data, and to highlight new research directions.

In doing so, we advance a motivational perspective on social perception. The extant literature, by contrast, has largely reflected an accuracy motive, and emphasized the structural facets of the self-concept. We incorporate these structural components in accounting for the key role of cognition (i.e., self-knowledge) in social perception. At the same time, we emphasize the interplay between cognition and motivation (i.e., self-enhancement and protection), using this interplay to address unresolved puzzles and generate new hypotheses.

1. An overview of the Egocentric Tactician Model

We assert that the motives and cognitions that drive how one thinks about the self also drive how one thinks about the social world and its inhabitants. Our integrative framework, the ETM, reflects this assertion (Table 1). The ETM capitalizes on the notion that people desire to think of themselves favorably (Alicke, Zell, & Guenther, 2013; Sedikides, 2020). The ETM focuses on the two motives that most directly lead to fulfillment of this self-perception goal: self-enhancement and self-protection (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009, 2011). In describing how and when the self influences social thought, the model relies on the nature of cognitive structures, including: (1) the content and organization of self-knowledge; (2) the content (e.g., personal experiences, beliefs, states, characteristics) and organization of knowledge about the social world and its inhabitants; and (3) how both cognitive structure content and organization, as well as external variables, affect how and when information stored in those structures is accessed. Finally, the ETM assumes that the information that is accessed from cognitive structures directs cognitive processes (Fiske & Taylor, 2013; Kihlstrom, Beer, & Klein, 2002). The cognitive processes that the ELM incorporates include: (1) how and when one searches for information; (2) the extent to which one attends to such information when it is encountered; (3) how one encodes or interprets such information; (4) how (and whether) such information affects judgments; (5) how such information is stored; and (6) how (and whether) such information is retrieved during a memory search.

Table 1 Assumptions, premises, and hypotheses of the Egocentric Tactician Model.

Assumptions
1. Virtually all social judgments are minimally egocentric in that they are derived from phenomenal or subjective experience
2. Social thinking is guided by various self-motives and coordinated to satisfy those motives
3. The self-motives that drive social thought exert both chronic influences and temporary influences on social thought
Premises
1. An actor's behaviors often have many possible meanings
2. Self-knowledge is one source that influences the perceived meaning of an actor's behavior
3. Self-knowledge is mostly positive
4. The motives that drive the maintenance or rise of self-positivity will often determine the influence of the self on social perception
Hypotheses
1. Central self-knowledge influences actor judgments made from low-constraint information
2. With high-constraint actor behaviors, the impact of central self-knowledge on social perception is moderated by additional variables

We adopted the phrase "egocentric tactician" to reflect two broad assumptions. First, we assume that virtually all social judgments are minimally egocentric in the sense that they are derived from phenomenal or subjective experience (Husserl, 1980). That is, the ETM is egocentric in that we assume peoples' actual self-knowledge (e.g., traits, attitudes, memories), as well as their perceptions of their mental world (e.g., metacognitions reflecting beliefs about mental constructs such as traits, attitudes, and memories), affect how they think about their social world. Second, the ETM is tactical, as we assume that social thinking is both guided by various self-motives and coordinated to satisfy those motives.

To illustrate our perspective with a prototypical example, imagine that Professor Pallas is reviewing a manuscript espousing a theoretical view which differs from her own. The ETM suggests that Professor Pallas may choose to write a scathing review, if doing so makes her feel better about herself. This is the essence of the ETM's assertion that how one thinks about

the social world reflects the actions of self-motives: In this instance, Professor Pallas's view of the social world (i.e., the perceived quality of another scholar's work) is directly influenced by her self-motive to feel positively about herself.

We also assert in the ETM that the self-motives that drive social thought sometimes exert chronic influences, and sometimes exert temporary influences on social thought. Chronic influences reflect stable aspects of the self. For example, assume that Professor Pallas is narcissistic. Narcissists react chronically to self-threat (Thomaes, Brummelman, & Sedikides, 2018). According to the ETM, when confronted with a work espousing positions that contradict her theoretical views, Professor Pallas will be especially likely to focus on the flaws in this work. However, this chronic tendency can be altered by current circumstances. For example, assume that, because she recently received a large grant to pursue her scholarship, Professor Pallas is feeling good about herself. As long as the self-affirmation provided by the grant moderates her chronic need to protect herself from threat (Sherman & Cohen, 2006), the review Professor Pallas writes just after receiving the grant will be relatively gentle. Of course, circumstances may also promote the opposite pattern. Suppose that Professor Pallas recently received a scathing review of her work, causing her to feel especially threatened. Here, the ETM suggest that, to redress the potent threat, she will write a particularly blistering review of the next manuscript she receives (Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1985).

When considering such effects, we do not want readers to misconstrue our use of the term "tactician." That term is often perceived as necessitating a high degree of conscious intent. We do hold that self-knowledge can sometimes be applied to social thinking purposively and strategically in a way that reflects conscious intent to satisfy a proximally activated motive. However, in the ETM, the influence of the self on social thinking can also proceed in a habitual manner, one that does not reflect a conscious response to a motive that was necessarily activated immediately prior to the response.

We illustrate the ETM's tactical dualism (conscious versus nonconscious) with a couple of examples. We begin with a case in which social thought is consciously used as a tactic in response to the activation of self-motives. Imagine that, because he is relatively tall, Laquan has had a difficult time mastering a sequence of actions in a gymnastics routine. As a consequence, Laquan experiences self-doubt about his ability to execute this sequence. Laquan might consciously try to make himself feel better about his chances to execute the routine by watching videos of other tall gymnasts who have succeeded. In the ETM, this is how self-motives can, via

intentional thought, affect one's outlook of the social world: The desire to regard his future self as potentially successful can influence the social stimuli that Laquan consciously chooses to view, producing selective exposure to social stimuli.

However, in the ETM, these same selection effects are not always driven by conscious intent at the time of perception. Let us now assume that the young Laquan, having decided that it was good for him to view selectively the successes of other tall gymnasts, frequently and routinely incorporated this tactic into his training routine. Having developed this habit, later in his career, even after successfully executing the necessary action sequences, the experienced Laquan may continue to view selectively the successes of other tall gymnasts, even though that selectivity is no longer motivated proximally by the need to quell self-doubt. To be clear, then, in this latter example of the operation of the ETM, the original social perception effect (selective exposure to others' successes) was consciously and tactically motivated by Laquan's need to overcome self-doubt. However, for the experienced Laquan, activation of the self-protection motive was no longer needed to prompt enactment of the selective exposure behavior. That is, motive activation did not immediately precede the behavior, nor did it immediately cause the behavior. Instead, the motive was responsible for the establishment of a habit, which then proceeded to operate in a fashion that did not depend on the repeated re-activation of the motive immediately prior to behavior execution.

Thus, in the ETM, the influence of the self on social thinking is dualistic. This influence can sometimes reflect consciously directed, intentional attempts to satisfy self-motives. However, such influence can also proceed in a manner that does not reflect a conscious response to a motive that is necessarily activated immediately prior to the response: The influence of the self on social thinking can also reflect ingrained mental habits.

2. The self: A precise

We define the self, this elusive yet familiar construct, by combining insights from James (1890) and Allport (1943). They differentiated between the executive self (James: "the pure ego"; Allport: "ego as knower") and the self-concept (James: "the empirical self or me"; Allport: "ego as object of knowledge"), and discussed their interplay. The executive self does the perceiving and knowing, whereas the self-concept is the depository of information that the executive self accumulates about its own entity, with the two engaging in a constant give-and-take. We conceptualize, then, the self as

"the totality of interrelated yet distinct psychological phenomena that either underlie, causally interact with, or depend upon reflexive consciousness" (Sedikides & Gregg, 2003, 102).

Given that the ETM framework is partially driven by an individual's knowledge about the self, at this juncture it seems fitting to highlight some of the characteristics of the self-concept (we regard the term *self-knowledge* as interchangeable with the term *self-concept*). The self-concept, people's ideas about who they are (Markus, 1983; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006; Sedikides, Gaertner, Luke, O'Mara, & Gebauer, 2013), is rich and varied in content. This content includes (but is not limited to): physical memories (what my face looks in the mirror, how my voice sounds to me); event memories (the picnic where I met my partner, the accident that happened on the catamaran); beliefs in the past, present, and future (I was a good soccer player, I am a decent golfer, I will be weak when I get older); narratives (autobiographical stories); traits (kind, absent-minded, steady); close relationships (I am a spouse, I am a daughter, I am a sister); and important groups (I am an academic, I am a union member).

According to one perspective, the self-concept is a relatively stable mental structure, or set of interconnected structures, that are stored in memory (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984). Support for this notion comes from the observation that aspects of the self-concept are relatively durable across time (Markus, 1977; McCrae & Costa, 1996). A source of this durability may derive from biological influences that conduce to consistency in thinking and acting (Neiss et al., 2005; Power & Pluess, 2015). To the extent that stable biological predispositions influence behavior, it follows that an individual's behavior across time will also be relatively consistent. Another potential source of durability links to the idea that people often live in environments that are relatively stable and predictable (Robinson & Sedikides, 2020; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). To the extent that environment influences behavior, it follows that an individual's behavior in a given environment will also be relatively consistent. Regardless of whether behavior stability reflects biological predispositions or situation-induced consistencies (or other stability sources), people may perceive these behavior consistencies and incorporate these perceptions into their self-concepts (Bem, 1972). They may include both ideas about behaviors that are typical (e.g., "I usually help others") and inferences derived from the behaviors (e.g., "I am kind"). Hence, people may exhibit consistency in their behavior, observe that consistency to produce self-perceptions, and translate these perceptions into relatively stable cognitive structures that contain and organize self-knowledge.

On the other hand, though the self-concept is generally stable, it also manifests a degree of malleability over time (Demo, 1992). One source of malleability can be traced to changes in a person's situations across their life span (Boyce, Wood, Daly, & Sedikides, 2015; Labouvie-Vief, Chiodo, Goguen, & Diehl, 1995; Marks & MacDermid, 1996). Such situational changes can lead to alterations in, or additions to, the content of the stable self structures that are stored in memory. For example, a person's self-conception may alter as the lifetime roles that they occupy change, a theme Ben Folds addresses in the song *The Ascent of Stan*. In that tune, Folds sings about the journey across roles of a character named "Stan" who goes from "revolution" (typical "hippie man") to "being the institution" (the "boss man"). Another example of life change-driven self-concept malleability reflects the self-concept change that is experienced by many as they move from child to teen to parent. This change is illustrated by the thought that many mothers report after they say something to their child, then think "Oh my god, I've become my mother." The important point to extract from these examples is that stored self-perceptions (i.e., the relatively stable content of the self-concept) can sometimes change in a predictable manner over time when these changes reflect systematic alterations in an individual's life contexts.

However, self-concepts can also evince relatively fleeting shifts that are not well accounted for by these long-term changes in roles and situations (McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976; Sedikides & Skowronski, 1991). In an attempt to explain such instability, some theorists have suggested that the self-concept can be a relatively transient construction, which is generated as needed at a given temporal juncture (DeSteno & Salovey, 1997; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Given this perspective, some apparent transience in the self-concept can be attributed to the notion that not all self-related information in memory is accessed and used in the same way all the time. For example, the momentary self-concept is susceptible to the accessibility of mental constructs such that, at any given moment, highly accessible constructs may be especially likely to be incorporated into the current self-concept. Thus, a man may not routinely include the length of his fingers in his self-concept, but may do so temporarily after exposure to news stories implying that sexual potency is linked to the length of the ring finger. Therefore, although self-knowledge may reside in relatively stable cognitive structures, the momentary self-concept is conjured from this self-knowledge, which can be selectively accessed and used in ways that cause momentary self-concepts to vary across time and circumstance.

These examples are all "cold" in that they focus on how the self-concept is linked to cognitive processes and cognitive structures. Yet, people are not "cold"—their thinking often reflects their feelings and desires. Accordingly, the ETM accommodates this observation by suggesting that the content, organization, and use of the self-concept are, in part, directed by motivation, especially how one *wants* to see oneself (Alicke, Sedikides, & Zhang, 2019; Gregg, Hepper, & Sedikides, 2011; Gregg & Sedikides, 2018; Gregg, Sedikides, & Gebauer, 2011). For example, it has been observed that people desire to view themselves favorably (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Sedikides & Skowronski, 2020; Skowronski, 2011), and that this desire often induces them to trumpet their successes and minimize their failures (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; Sedikides, 2020; Sedikides & Alicke, 2012). However, accounting for how these motivations affect self-perceptions requires nuance. For instance, it might be naively assumed that the tendency to minimize failure always pushes individuals to find ways to diminish the impact of, or magnitude of, past failures. This need not be the case: The tendency to diminish past failures may be altered primarily when doing so enhances current self-positivity. As case in point, people sometimes magnify, not belittle, past self-imperfections when doing so supports a positive view of the current self (Wilson & Ross, 2011; Wilson & Shanahan, 2020). This is illustrated by a scenario in which an advanced graduate student readily admits to having been grossly deficient as a scholar at the start of graduate school, but does so because that view of the past contributes to her current self-perception of having become a fine scholar while in graduate school.

One important principle to extract from this motivated view of self-thought is that, when people think about themselves, motives and goals routinely interact with self-knowledge and cognitive processes to affect the products of such thought. To pursue this theme further, consider how motives and cognition may jointly relate to the issue of stability versus malleability in the self-concept. Some motives might work toward stability. For example, given that motives and goals can be persistent, especially in a given context, they can exert relatively durable effects on the self-concept. We will illustrate this point with the following example. Assume that Dr. Goodstudy is a professor who, for his entire career, has wanted to see himself as effective at his job. At that time of year when academic departments request faculty evaluations, to maximize his self-perceived evaluation, Dr. Goodstudy might focus on his excellent publication rate and ignore his mediocre teaching ratings. Hence, in this case, a repeatedly encountered environment (i.e., university faculty position) will routinely prompt activation of a given motive

(i.e., "I want to see myself as good at my job"), which is responded to in a characteristic fashion (i.e., emphasize research productivity, deemphasize teaching flaws; Dunning, Meyerowitz, & Holzberg, 1989; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). This influence of motives and goals on self-relevant thought and behavior need not be conscious or intentional. Goal-directed thinking may nonconsciously or unintentionally influence thought processes (Dunning, 2011; Smith, Trivers, & von Hippel, 2017).

However, though motivationally-driven self-thought may be generally stable, motivationally prompted self-concept shifts can occur rapidly. Rapid shifts may be associated with the information processing requirements that attend different contexts of peoples' lives. Here is an example that illustrates this idea. Given that academic rigor is desirable, while in a university setting, Professor Goodstudy might selectively focus on behaviors enacted in his job which reflect this academic rigor (e.g., high standards when determining student grades). This selective focus may cause the professor, in his job context, to view himself as a rigorous but curmudgeonly academic. However, provided that being an affectionate and loving partner is desirable, after returning home at the end of the workday, Professor Goodstudy might focus on those actions which are pro-partner and facilitate the closeness of his relationship. Thus, when in his domicile, the professor may not see himself as a curmudgeon, but as kind and tender (Mendoza-Denton, Ayduk, Mischel, Shoda, & Testa, 2001; Mischel & Shoda, 1995).

3. General premises of the Egocentric Tactician Model

The preceding arguments and examples suggests that it is no simple task to extend ideas about how one thinks about the self to how one thinks about the social world. The task would be easier, if the self were immutable across time and context. As we have discussed, however, social behavior and construals frequently change in different situations. Indeed, as contexts and motives change, the impact of the self on social thought may change accordingly.

Some might despair at such possibilities, leading them to doubt the feasibility of tracing the influence of the self on how perceivers think about the social world. We are not among the doubters. We believe that the observed effects of the self on social perception can be made sensible and understandable when incorporated into an overarching theoretical viewpoint that focuses on: (1) self-motives, (2) the cognitive processes and mental structures linked to those self-motives, and (3) the interplay between the self-motives

and a perceiver's relevant cognitive processes and structures. The ETM is designed to advance these goals.

We attempt to illustrate the utility of the ETM framework by considering its operation in how perceivers use the self to develop judgments and evaluations of others. In outlining the utility of the framework, we articulate four general ETM premises: (1) an actor's behaviors often have many possible meanings; (2) self-knowledge is one source of knowledge that can be used to disambiguate the meaning of those behaviors; (3) existing self-knowledge emphasizes and prioritizes positivity; and (4) when the self becomes activated and used in social perception, the outcomes of this social perception process will partly serve the goals and motives of the self, typically working to maintain self-positivity.

3.1 Premise 1: An actor's behaviors often have many possible meanings

Exposure to cultural norms and values informs people about the relationship between observable behaviors and unobservable states and traits (for examples of the knowledge structures potentially produced by such learning, see Reeder & Brewer, 1979; Wilson-Mendenhall & Barsalou, 2018). Instances of this idea are that enculturation teaches that stealing candy from a child implies dishonesty, punching a wall implies anger, and practicing the piano for eight hours per day implies a desire for proficiency.

However, one of the clear themes in social psychology research and theory is that enculturation also teaches perceivers that behaviors are often ambiguous: Depending on the lens through which one views the world, an actor's behavior can mean different things. One of this chapter's authors likes to illustrate this ambiguity to his students by re-telling a story that he read in the *Chicago Tribune* many years ago. The news story, written by a native Chicago resident, described how two recent immigrants from Poland were especially impressed by the high social concern of Chicagoans. The immigrants glowingly wrote in a letter to relatives in Poland about how, after heavy snowfalls, Chicagoans would put out chairs in the street so the elderly would have places to sit and rest as they tried to get around. Of course, the immigrants were describing "dibs"—the Chicago practice of putting markers in the street (often lawn chairs) to claim and hold street parking places that had been shoveled out by a Chicagoan. Thus, the same behavior (chairs in the street) was perceived by different people to have different implications: The immigrant viewers saw the behaviors as reflecting the social concerns of Chicagoans, whereas native Chicagoans viewed the

behaviors as reflecting territorial claims that might be justified by an individual's labors (shoveling out a parking place).

This meaning multiplicity can simultaneously reflect one (or more) dimensions. For example, one dimension reflects the *kinds* of implications that a behavior possesses for an actor's characteristics. These implications include (but are not limited to) what a behavior means for an actor's traits, goals, motives, and emotions. Consider, for example, the behavior "Toby cried when he saw his mother's casket." This behavior might reasonably be seen as indicating any one of the following: Toby is scared to be left alone; Toby has the trait of sensitivity; Toby loved his mother; Toby is experiencing grief; or Toby wants his mother back.

Perhaps a perceiver may take into account spontaneously many, or even all, of these implications at once (Reeder, 2009). However, it is also likely that, at a given temporal point, a perceiver will primarily focus on only one of the behavior's meanings for Toby. This leads to the possibility that different perceivers might ultimately derive different conclusions from an actor's behavior. For example, in one case, a perceiver might have had a prior belief that Toby was an unemotional and stoic type, thus inferring that crying is very atypical for him. This may prompt the perceiver to conclude that Toby is experiencing deep grief. Another perceiver may remember that Toby visited his mother almost every day, and might conclude that the crying reflects the fact that Toby loved his mother deeply.

However, even when two people think about the meaning of a behavior along the same dimension, differences between the perceivers in the information that is accessed and in how the information is used may cause them to differ in their perception of the *importance* of the behavior for the meaning dimension extracted. For example, one perceiver may recall cases in which a surviving relative cried and wailed continuously at their mother's funeral. In comparison, Toby's crying seems rather mild, leading the perceiver to conclude that the grief Toby experienced is not very profound. Another perceiver might recall an example of a surviving family member who was cracking jokes at their mother's funeral. In this memory context, the perceiver may conclude that Toby's grief is profound.

Following on the premise that behaviors can have many meanings, one considerable thread of research in social psychology addresses how perceivers determine the meaning of behaviors. The relevant research and theory points to various sources of knowledge that can influence these determinations. For example, attribution theories (Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967) suggest that the extraction of meaning can be influenced

by such variables as one's knowledge of an actor's other (or past) behaviors, as well as by an examination of the situational influences (e.g., social norms, rewards and costs of other possible behaviors) that were present at the behavior's enactment. Other research has extended these ideas so that they incorporate variables such as abstract knowledge about the actor (e.g., as derived from a stereotype), one's feelings about the group to which an actor belongs (e.g., prejudices), and both chronic states and temporary fluctuations in the various cognitive structures (e.g., memories, beliefs) that can be brought to bear by a perceiver during the meaning ascription process (for more information on these ideas, see Ambady & Skowronski, 2008).

3.2 Premise 2: Self-knowledge is one source that influences the perceived meaning of an actor's behavior

One of the bases of knowledge relevant to these determinations is self-knowledge. This assertion presupposes that, in an individual's mental network, self-knowledge is stored in a manner which is distinct from other cognitive categories, such as knowledge about various people who are known to a perceiver (Balcetis & Dunning, 2005, 2013). Considerable evidence supports this assertion.

One evidence source is neuroscience (Beer, 2012; Lieberman, Straccia, Meyer, Du, & Tan, 2019). To some extent, different brain regions are implicated in recognition judgments about one's own face versus recognition judgments of others' faces (Morita et al., 2018; Turk et al., 2002). Moreover, attentional paradigms document brain region distinctions in how the brain processes self-relevant and other-relevant stimuli (Gray, Ambady, Lowenthal, & Deldin, 2004; Yang et al., 2018). Lastly, information processing paradigms showcase differences in how the brain engages in self-referential processing and other-referential processing (Kelley et al., 2002; Northoff et al., 2006).

A second source of support for the distinction between stored self-knowledge and stored social knowledge comes from social psychological research (Dunning, 2012; Sedikides & Alicke, 2019). This research distinguishes between these two knowledge sources by documenting idiosyncratic characteristics of self-referent memory and other-referent memory (Symons & Johnson, 1997), divergent effects of the self on self-relevant memory and other-relevant memory (Sedikides, Green, Saunders, Skowronski, & Zengel, 2016), differences in interpretations of ambiguous performance information for self and others (Klein & Buckingham, 2002), and disparities in judgments of self and others on various trait dimensions (Alicke, 1985).

A third source of support for the distinction between self-knowledge and social knowledge is rooted in an evolutionary tradition. Some have opined that autobiographical memory, along with general self-knowledge, may have functioned as the springboard for social inference and prediction, thus facilitating self-advantageous, rapid, and often pre-emptive action (Humphrey, 1986). In a similar vein, the capacity to process information in a way that is detached from the immediate environment, to simulate the consequences of own actions for others, and to take preparatory steps for what might come, may have been a valuable tool in navigating, managing, and predicting the ancestral social environment (Sedikides, Skowronski, & Dunbar, 2006; Skowronski & Sedikides, 2019). Moreover, some have argued that the autobiographical memory system may have evolved, in part, to allow individuals to place events in the past and to help individuals track status relations with ingroup members (Skowronski et al., 2007; Skowronski & Sedikides, 2007).

Finally, developmental perspectives are likewise consistent with the notion that self-knowledge is distinct in memory from knowledge about others. Neonates can discriminate between the face of their mother and the faces of strangers (Bushnell, Sai, & Mullin, 1989). Young children also show evidence of the early systematic storage of self-knowledge: They usually begin to show self-recognition in the mirror test (a frequently used test assessing the presence of a self-concept) when they are about 18 months old (Archer, 1992). More generally, indications that autobiographical knowledge is accumulated and stored in memory in an organized manner typically appear by a child's second year of life, irrespective of the social context in which the child lives (Howe & Courage, 1997). However, as illustrated by findings that different brain regions are especially activated in self-thought tasks and in social thought tasks (Gray et al., 2004; Morita et al., 2018; Northoff et al., 2006), these two types of knowledge appear to be stored separately in memory. For example, as in adults, in 10-year-old children, two brain areas (the medial prefrontal cortex and the medial posterior parietal cortex) are relatively more active during self-knowledge retrieval than social knowledge retrieval (Pfeifer, Lieberman, & Dapretto, 2007). Nonetheless, despite the separable neural bases of the two types of knowledge, various scholars agree that self-knowledge can shape the understanding of others (Astington & Jenkins, 2008; Carpendale & Lewis, 2004). Most relevant to this chapter are the empirical observations that, by the age of four or five, children typically have a solid grasp of the self/other distinction and are able to use self-knowledge for perceiving, explaining, and predicting others' behavior (Cunningham, Brebner, Quinn, & Turk, 2014; Eisenberg, Murphy, & Shepard, 1997).

These findings ought not to be especially surprising: There are several reasons why one would expect self-knowledge to be used routinely for ascribing meaning to the behaviors of other people. To begin, a perceiver's phenomenological world is perforce the only one they know, so it seems inevitable that the personal perspective will be the one from which self-knowledge and social knowledge are derived (Husserl, 1980; Merleau-Ponty, 2012). Moreover, authors have observed that thinking about the self occurs repeatedly and frequently (Rogers, 1961, 1981). This routine self-thought implies that viewing others' experience through the lens of one's own may simply be a matter of *routine and habit*. Furthermore, because of this frequent self-thought, personal attributes and experiences are likely to be highly available and accessible, so that such knowledge can be easily brought to bear when thinking about others. Finally, the content of self-knowledge is rich, well-developed, and readily applicable to circumstances in which one is thinking about others (Higgins, 1996; Markus, 1983). These mental tendencies help to explain why perceivers would use the self as a standard instead of alternative standards (e.g., a specific exemplar [Ralph] or an idealized abstract actor) to judge a lie-telling Donald. The ETM's answer is that it is *easier* for perceivers to think about Donald's chronic telling of falsehoods in the context of what the perceiver knows about themselves than in the context of what they know about any other person or about any idealized actor.

However, the tendency to use the self in social thought may not lie entirely in the domain of thinking ease. As noted earlier, and consistent with the notion of *social judgeability* (Yzerbyt, Dardenne, & Leyens, 1998), people may regard the use of self-knowledge as especially legitimate when judging others, because people consider their own beliefs as veridical and their actions as normative (Gramzow, Gaertner, & Sedikides, 2001; Ross et al., 1977). Hence, perceivers may also deem their self-knowledge as especially *correct and proper* to use when forming judgments about others.

Taken together, there are many good reasons to expect that self-knowledge is highly likely to be involved in the process of interpreting an actor's behaviors. This idea naturally generates the hypothesis that different perceivers can be led to different conclusions about the meaning of an actor's behavior, and that such differences can occur because of discrepancies in how perceivers view themselves. For example, consider the hypothetical crying behavior of Toby that we described earlier. Some perceivers may regard themselves as unemotional and stoic, perhaps even recalling that, for them, crying is atypical. Thinking about Toby's behavior in the context

of this self-perception may lead these perceivers to infer from Toby's crying that Toby is experiencing deep grief. However, other perceivers might see the meaning of the same behavior very differently. These perceivers may remember that they visited their mothers almost every day. In the context of this recalled self-behavior pattern, the perceivers might conclude that Toby's crying reflects his deep love for his mother.

Alterations in the meaning ascribed to a behavior could emerge not only among people with different self-perceptions, but also within the same perceiver across circumstances or contexts. These shifts can be linked to many factors, including differences between contexts in recent perceiver experiences, differences in the self-knowledge momentarily activated within different contexts, or differences in the status of self-motives across contexts. For example, imagine that a perceiver encounters an actor approaching and asking for a handout. At one moment, the perceiver may recall that they came from an impoverished background, and may therefore judge the approach as motivated by the actor's desperate need. At another moment, influenced by a recent memory of being mugged by a person posing as a street beggar, the perceiver may judge the behavior as indicative of the actor's dishonesty.

The fact that perceivers may have radically different views of the actor complicates the scientific study of the self's influence on social judgment. However, the problem is assuaged when one invokes the ETM to focus on the common principles that drive these divergent judgment results. These are: (1) actor behaviors are ambiguous and can often be interpreted in different ways, (2) people use self-knowledge to interpret or disambiguate behavioral information, and (3) this interpretation process often involves comparing others' behavior to a standard derived from self-knowledge. In our examples, people employ essentially the same judgment process, but with varying results across circumstances because the self-knowledge that constitutes the judgment standard changes to accommodate these different circumstances.

As our examples imply, when the self influences social judgments, it often does so by means of a *comparison of the actor to the self*. We recognize that social comparison theory (Suls, Collins, & Wheeler, 2020) proposes various forms of social comparison (Windschitl, Kruger, & Sims, 2003) that are used for different purposes. For example, some social comparisons are designed to increase self-knowledge, and such comparisons often use knowledge about others as the standard against which self-attributes are compared (i.e., comparison of self to others). However, because our focus

in the ETM is on how perceivers make judgments about others, we are especially concerned with comparisons in the actor-to-self direction.

The ETM assumes that these actor-to-self comparisons can involve any of several forms of self-knowledge. Sometimes, this self-knowledge might lie in the present. For example, to estimate the depth of a boyfriend's affections, a relationship partner may compare the boyfriend's expressed feelings to her own current feelings (does he feel like I do?). However, the self-knowledge might also come from a perceiver's past. For example, a parent may attempt to judge whether his son is a good football player. To make this judgment, the parent might consider how well the parent played at the same age (is he as good as I was in 8th grade?). Indeed, the self-knowledge accessed by a perceiver may even be hypothetical. For example, consider the perceiver reading a story about a person who, because the person failed to react to warning signs that a car was about to catch fire, was injured. A perceiver might judge the person's behavior especially negatively after generating the thought that "I would never do that." On the other hand, the perceiver may have thought "Well, my car does those things all the time, and it's never caught fire," and conclude that the person's non-reactive behavior was perfectly reasonable. Regardless of which type of self-knowledge is used, and the conclusion that use of the self-knowledge produces, in each of these cases, the self is deployed as the standard against which the actor's attributes are judged.

Although the ETM, in concert with most social-cognitive perspectives on the self, assumes that the self is a prevalent and potent judgment standard, it also recognizes that other kinds of knowledge can be used during social judgment. Despite assuming that the use of self-knowledge in social judgment is habitual, we do not exclude the possibility that other sources of knowledge similarly alter social judgments. Indeed, one intriguing line of research could explore those variables that might override the use of the self during social judgment. We hypothesize that such effects may occur when: (1) perceivers have extensive knowledge of the target, (2) perceivers endorse robust target stereotypes, (3) self-knowledge in a particular domain is conspicuously weak, or (4) the self is deemed irrelevant or inappropriate for the judgment task. Another intriguing hypothesis is that the use of these alternative bases of knowledge during social judgment requires active inhibition of the self-standard. This hypothesis is derived from research suggesting that, when it is possible to derive multiple meanings from a stimulus, extraction of a primary meaning necessitates inhibition of the mental elements that can lead to alternative meanings (Neely, 1976, 1977).

3.3 Premise 3: Self-knowledge is mostly positive

A third premise of the ETM is that self-knowledge is predominantly positive. This is not a controversial proposition: The positivity of the self-concept has been well-documented. Most people view their traits, beliefs, and preferences favorably (Sedikides & Strube, 1997; Zell, Strickhouser, Sedikides, & Alicke, 2020), and self-knowledge contains a disproportionately higher number of positive than negative elements (Kendall, Howard, & Hays, 1989; Thomaes, Brummelman, & Sedikides, 2017). Moreover, the self-memory system is also positively biased. For example, controlling for perceived event extremity, people typically report better memory for the positive than for the negative events in their lives (Ritchie, Sedikides, & Skowronski, 2017; Sedikides & Skowronski, 2020; Skowronski, Walker, Henderson, & Bond, 2013; Stanley & De Brigard, 2019), although, when it comes to general (i.e., non-autobiographical or non-self-related) events, the reverse pattern is often observed (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Unkelbach, Alves, & Koch, 2020). In addition, when recalling life events, people feel better about the positive self-events than about the negative ones (Ritchie, Skowronski, Cadogan, & Sedikides, 2014; Skowronski, 2011), and they feel psychologically closer to the positive events (Wilson & Ross, 2003). Finally, people are overly optimistic in projecting how positively they will behave in the future (Epley & Dunning, 2000; Tanner & Carlson, 2009).

It is not that people ignore their negative attributes (Cheung, Wildschut, Sedikides, & Pinter, 2014; Preuss & Alicke, 2017). However, when they do hold negative views of their beliefs, motives, behaviors, and preferences, they typically minimize the impact of such views on their self-concept (Sedikides, 2012; vanDellen, Campbell, Hoyle, & Bradfield, 2011). Minimization might involve such meaning-altering mechanisms as decreasing perceived feature extremity (getting drunk is not so bad) or the importance of the negative feature (my drunkenness has nothing to do with who I really am). Minimization may also involve various mental and social processes: People may avoid thinking of themselves in unfavorable terms, fail to report or review unflattering self-features to others, store incriminating self-information in a manner that makes it difficult to retrieve and review, and dismiss negative features via situational explanations.

The positivity of the self also extends into the domain of self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to an attitude toward the self (Rosenberg, 1965), a person's overall sense of their value or worth (Sedikides & Gregg, 2003), or the extent to which a person likes, approves of, appreciates, or values

themselves (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). Consistent with our assertion about the positivity of the self, people typically report relatively high levels of self-esteem (Baumeister, 1998; Rosenberg, 1965). This positive feeling about the self is also revealed by the fact that people especially value things associated with the self (Gregg, Mahadevan, & Sedikides, 2017; Koole & Pelham, 2003). A useful phrase that captures all of these phenomena is that people tend to "value me and mine" (Smith, Mackie, & Claypoool, 2015).

For most people, then, most of the time, there is a general positivity bias in self-thought. Most people think about themselves, remember about themselves, and feel about themselves in positive than in negative ways. When people think positively about themselves, they tend to savor the positivity. When people think negatively about themselves, they tend to minimize the negativity. These differential thought processes and behaviors contribute to a feedback loop in which positively biased self-thought and behavior work toward the perpetuation of positively biased self-thought and behavior.

The ETM assumes that this positivity is primarily sustained by two motivational engines (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009, 2011). One is the desire to maintain or pursue favorable self-views: people want to think well of themselves (i.e., self-enhancement). The second is the desire to avoid or diminish unfavorable self-views: people do not want to think poorly of themselves (i.e., self-protection). A third motivational engine that also contributes to the routine maintenance of perceived self-positivity is the desire for perceived self-consistency (Swann Jr. & Buhrmester, 2012). This desire specifies that people are especially comfortable when new self-information fits existing beliefs about the self. This consistency motive may occasionally work against the production of self-positivity, as when a person perceives themselves to be socially inept and consequently behaves in a manner that conforms the self-perception (Valentiner, Skowronski, Mounts, & Holzman, 2017). However, given that existing self-beliefs are disproportionately positive, the motive to perceive the world as congruent with existing knowledge should generally "pull on the same rope" as the self-enhancement and self-protection motives, pushing people toward continued self-positivity.

There are clear implications of the self-enhancement and self-protection motivational engines. One implication is that self-relevant thought generally favors important self-positive information over important self-negative information. A second implication is that, when people already think well of themselves, they will be made uncomfortable by information that challenges their positive self-perception and will work to sidestep or minimize

the discomfort. Indeed, empirical evidence points to the many ways in which these ideas are manifest. They include: the ready availability of self-protection mechanisms in infancy (Bronson & Pankey, 1977) and emergence of defense mechanisms in childhood (Cramer, 2008); eschewal of negative information (Frey, 1986); activation and use of defense mechanisms to pre-empt and ward off threat to the self (Baumeister, Dale, & Sommer, 1998); vigorous discounting of negative information about the self (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999); resistance to valid but disconfirming self-relevant feedback (Sherman & Cohen, 2002); abdication of personal responsibility in the face of negative self outcomes (Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, & Hankin, 2004); pursuit of self-affirming feedback in the face of failure (Sherman & Cohen, 2006); exaggeration of outperformers' talents and abilities (Alicke, LoSchiavo, Zerbst, & Zhang, 1997); and selection of social environments that flatter the self (Brown & Dutton, 1995).

Of course, as noted earlier, one other pervasive element of self-thought concerns the strong tendency to regard one's characteristics, preferences, and beliefs as typical or normative. For example, the literatures on the false consensus effect (Marks & Miller, 1987; Ross et al., 1977) and on social projection more broadly (Lee, Sidari, Murphy, Sherlock, & Zietsch, 2020; Robbins & Krueger, 2005) show that people overestimate the typicality of their behavioral choices and preferences and that they assimilate others' characteristics to their own. The proclivity to view oneself as both positive and typical has also been illustrated by Gramzow et al. (2001). In one study, participants rated 100 behaviors for general positivity and typicality. In a second and more crucial study, participants rated the degree to which the positive-typical, negative-typical, positive-atypical, and negative-atypical behaviors were similar or dissimilar to the self. Participants rated positive behaviors as more similar to the self than negative behaviors, and rated typical behaviors as more similar to the self than atypical behaviors. Interestingly, participants regarded the positive-typical behaviors as most similar to the self and the negative-atypical behaviors as least similar to the self. Other empirical findings also support the claim that self-knowledge is both positive and typical. Participants endorse as their own most important *nomothetically-derived* positive and typical traits (e.g., trustworthy, friendly, kind; Sedikides, 1993, 1995). Moreover, the trait terms that participants use to describe themselves are similar to the positive and typical traits that they use to describe others (Dornbusch, Hastorf, Richardson, Muzzy, & Vreeland, 1965; Lemon & Warren, 1974).

Researchers have frequently noted (Alicke & Govorun, 2005; Moore & Small, 2008) the apparent contradiction between people's proclivity to

view their characteristics, behaviors, and abilities unrealistically favorably (i.e., uniqueness bias or the better than average effect—Alicke, 1985; Goethals, Messick, & Allison, 1991; Zell et al., 2020), while assuming that their behaviors are normative (i.e., false consensus or attributive projection—Hsee, Hastie, & Chen, 2008; Krueger & Clement, 1994). This apparent contradiction can be resolved if one assumes that positivity and typicality both serve the same basic need to buttress a favorable self-image (or avert an unfavorable self-image). People generally construe their experiences, and define their characteristics, in the most favorable terms believable to themselves and others, and in ways they deem objectively defensible (Gregg, Hepper, & Sedikides, 2011; Gregg, Sedikides, & Gebauer, 2011; Sedikides, 2020). At the same time, they desire to view themselves as typical when typicality has positive connotations, such as having the "right" opinions, beliefs and values, or exhibiting "normal" and appropriate behaviors and habits.

This duality is illustrated by research examining choice shifts in-group decision-making. The literature indicates that, when group members agree on a discussion topic, one consequence will be to extremitize the self-perceived attitudes of the group members in the direction of group agreement. Stated otherwise, if group members think that building a pedestrian bridge across a busy road is a good idea, then, after discussion, individual group members will perceive themselves as thinking that it is a *really* good idea. One reason this happens is that people learn about the position that is normative in the group (e.g., "bridge is good"), and then shift their own self-perceived position to be even better than the perceived group norm (e.g., "I think that building the bridge is a *really* good idea"). Thus, the perceived positivity of the self can be promoted by the view that one's opinion is normative in that it matches the direction of the group norm, but also that it is better (more extreme) than the view espoused by other group members (Biernat, Manis, & Kobrynowicz, 1997; McFarland & Miller, 1990).

The foregoing example is also useful in resolving the apparent conflict between uniqueness and normativeness. Although the literature suggests that people often perceive themselves positively when they regard themselves as normative group members, it is also the case that people sometimes gain self-positivity from perceiving themselves as having unique, non-normative attributes. However, these perceptions of uniqueness typically occur in such a way that people see themselves as unique on dimensions that are culturally-valued (Machunsky, Toma, Yzerbyt, & Corneille, 2014; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Cai, 2015; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003).

Hence, as with the choice shift research, the perception that one is more skilled than others (e.g., faster, a better video game player, a better writer) sets one apart, but does so in way that matches group values (e.g., valuing skill). The same reasoning applies to the perception that one's dispositions (e.g., trustworthiness, generosity, kindness) are better than the dispositions of others. Yes, people do sometimes perceive themselves as unique, but, because a boost to the self can be obtained when they perceive themselves as unique in a way that emphasizes goodness on an important cultural or sub-group value, their uniqueness perceptions are channeled by those values.

We note that these positivity-promoting thinking tendencies are restricted to self-thought: They are not routinely observed in processing information about an unfamiliar other, and are only moderately or weakly implemented in processing information about close others (Gaertner et al., 2012; Klar, Medding, & Sarel, 1996; Suls, Lemos, & Stewart, 2002). Additional support for this idea comes from research results suggesting that other-relevant information is less positive than self-relevant information (Sedikides, 1993; Skowronski, Betz, Thompson, & Shannon, 1991), and negative (compared to positive) information about others requires less stimulus exposure to be detected (Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2003) and carries disproportionate weight in judgments made about others (Skowronski & Carlston, 1987).

These findings provide discriminative validity for the proposition that people are motivated to promote the self. That is, perceivers are not perceptual and judgmental Pollyannas who evaluate everyone positively. Instead, the impact of the motive that promotes the positivity of the self is magnified when thinking about the self. Indeed, the push to enhance and protect the self may induce an individual to view others in less positive ways than one views the self. We next turn to the topic of how social perceptions can be influenced by the self-concept, and by the goals that drive its formation and maintenance.

3.4 Premise 4: The motives that drive the maintenance or rise of self-positivity will often determine the influence of the self on social perception

The fourth premise of the ETM is that the involvement of the self in social perception will typically proceed in a way that promotes, maintains, elevates, and/or protects self-positivity. Such effects can happen in a multitude of ways. Earlier we proposed that behaviors can have many meanings. Following from this proposition, one way in which the self might influence social perception in a self-enhancing manner is to alter the *interpretations*

given to behaviors (Dunning, 1993; Dunning et al., 1989). One route to this effect involves *altering the meaning* ascribed to a behavior. For example, assume that a perceiver fancies herself to be a good writer, and that such a perception is very important (or central) to her self-concept. In addition, assume that a manuscript read by our hypothetical perceiver includes many examples that might be characterized by some as "colorful." If the manuscript threatens the perceiver (e.g., is written by an author considered to be a competitor), our hypothetical perceiver may protect her positive self-view by instead characterizing the manuscript's writing as "gaudy" or "pretentious."

Another route to self-enhancement occurs by altering the *evaluations* (via changing perceived valence or perceived extremity) of actor behaviors in domains that are central to a perceiver's self-image. For example, when asked to evaluate the overall writing quality of a manuscript produced by a professional rival in a research area that is important to the perceiver, the perceiver may evaluate the manuscript unfavorably (or may provide a weaker positive evaluation to satisfy minimal objective criteria). More generally, then, when encountering a behavior that can be construed as a serious threat to the self, perceivers can protect their self-concepts by lowering their evaluation of the behavior.

However, evaluations of others' behaviors may also increase when doing so promotes the self. For example, our hypothetical perceiver may be especially positive toward the writing displayed by a manuscript that is presented as produced by a person who went to the same university as the perceiver than when the same manuscript is presented as being produced by a source whose heritage is unknown. Sharing a school may cause a perceiver to include the other in the self-concept (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991), so that producing a positive evaluation of the school chum's manuscript indirectly enhances the self. Further, when the other person is clearly superior to the perceiver on a comparison dimension, such as intelligence, perceivers may elevate the other's ability as a way of placing their own skill in the most favorable light possible (Alicke et al., 1997).

An additional route by which the self may alter social perceptions in a way that enhances or protects the self involves the *selection* of the dimension(s) on which an actor might be judged. For example, imagine that, after reading one of Oliver's manuscripts, our hypothetical perceiver is asked "What do you think of Oliver?" The open-ended nature of such a question allows the perceiver to select the dimension(s) on which to judge Oliver. We assert that the perceiver will often chose those dimensions in a way that

protects or enhances the self. For example, our hypothetical perceiver might reply in a manner that maintains her self-perception by focusing on those specific dimensions of the manuscript that are objectively deficient: She may correctly note that "The manuscript is not well-organized and does not tell a coherent story." An alternative selection tactic may involve general evaluative dimensions. For example, in response to the question "What do you think of Oliver?" the perceiver can say "Well, he has a way to go as a writer." The choice to focus on writing (as opposed to the quality of his research, the correctness of the positions he took, or his work ethic) is tactical, promoting the self. The content of the evaluative statement itself may reflect a distortion of the manuscript's true quality or may be objectively correct. Either way, the key idea is that the open-ended nature of the question allowed the perceiver to select the broad dimension on which Oliver was evaluated, and the dimension selected was one in which the evaluation benefitted the perceiver.

Yet another way in which the influence of the self on social perception might emerge concerns the *explanations* that one derives for the behavior of others. For example, assume that our hypothetical perceiver encounters an extremely well-crafted manuscript, one that—even accounting for any possible perceiver evaluative distortion—is far superior to anything that the perceiver has written. The perceiver may respond to the manuscript with explanations such as: "Of course it's good; the author spent years training at the Iowa Writers' Workshop" or "Of course it's good; the author spent 10 years trying to get the manuscript into shape." Although such explanations acknowledge the superior performance, they also protect the perceiver's self-concept by implying that, if the perceiver had the same opportunities, she could have produced work that was equally good, if not better.

One other aspect of the ETM reflected in the prior paragraphs is that the role of the self in social judgment will depend on the extent to which the judgment domain is important or unimportant (our preferred terms are central/peripheral) to the self. Central (relative to peripheral) self-knowledge is positive, typical, meaningful to have, confidently held, available, and accessible (Sedikides, 1993, 1995; Sedikides & Green, 2000). The ETM suggests that, although central self-knowledge will have a strong impact on social perception, peripheral self-knowledge will not necessarily do so. This relative difference ought to emerge, even when the self-knowledge involved is positive. For example, even if perceivers view themselves as punctual, they may not use this self-knowledge in social perception if the punctuality belief is peripheral to their self-concepts.

The ETM suggests that the influence of the self-concept will be negligible on peripheral domains, because there is usually little motivation to enhance the self on these dimensions. Returning to our punctuality example, from a motivational perspective, it makes little sense to denigrate the punctuality of an actor, if one does not gain self-positivity from the comparison. Indeed, research findings confirm that people self-enhance more on central than on peripheral traits or domains (Gebauer, Sedikides, & Schrade, 2017; Gebauer, Wagner, Sedikides, & Neberich, 2013; Sedikides & Strube, 1997).

In addition, the ETM suggests that, in unimportant circumstances, perceiver judgments are much more likely to be influenced by alternative (e.g., non-self) knowledge structures than by self-knowledge structures. For example, when interpretations of behaviors are not especially important to a perceiver's self-concept, the perceiver may rely on their knowledge of how most people supposedly behave in a given situation (or their Person × Situation prototype; Shoda & Mischel, 2000). To concretize this idea, assume that a perceiver sees an actor visiting a foreign country bargain tentatively when trying to purchase an item in a local shop. The perceiver may view themselves as a good bargainer, but may also see this attribute as peripheral to their self-concept, and consider it largely unrelated to central self traits. According to the ETM, perceivers in this instance will eschew the use of the self to think about the actor's behavior, opting instead to consider what they know about people in general (e.g., most individuals bargain persistently until they half the price) or about situations (e.g., small shopkeepers expect haggling), and to use that general knowledge as the reference point for judging the actor's behavior.

4. On the utility of the ETM: More examples of how it fits existing data

One way to evaluate a theory is to review how well it accommodates existing data. Our discussion of the ETM has already illustrated such applications. To further our case for the ETM, we review evidence data from two additional research domains, both of which are concerned with the concept of information constraint.

Before we proceed, we need to take a moment to describe the constraint variable. As we noted earlier, almost all behaviors can have multiple meanings. However, some behaviors are more ambiguous, or can be more easily subject to alternative construals, than others. We term those behaviors that are easily subject to alternative construals as low-constraint behaviors.

Low (relative to high) constraint social information is relatively ambiguous, non-diagnostic, or unverifiable (Dunning, Perie, & Story, 1991; Lambert & Wedell, 1991; Sedikides & Skowronski, 1993); high-constraint social information is relatively unambiguous, diagnostic, or verifiable.

The ETM suggests two constraint-related hypotheses. These are: (1) in social perception, central self-knowledge alters the interpretation of low-constraint information and (2) central self-knowledge is used tactically with high-constraint information to promote and defend the self. In both cases, the observed effects would be consistent with the motives that drive the maintenance and expansion of self-knowledge, producing perceived self-positivity. Each of the two following sections reviews evidence relevant to these hypotheses.

4.1 Hypothesis 1: Central self-knowledge influences actor judgments made from low-constraint information

According to the ETM, when behaviors place few constraints on the meaning extracted from them, central self-knowledge will have a strong and assimilative impact on social perception. An experiment reported by Green and Sedikides (2001) illustrates this effect. Pretesting results allowed participants to be categorized: The trait "independent" was central to half of them, whereas the trait "dependent" was central to the remaining half. All participants read through a description of an unfamiliar target. A pretest had insured that the description was ambiguous on the dimension of independence-dependence (e.g., the target was rated as equally likely to be independent or dependent). Participants for whom the trait independent was central viewed the target as especially independent and especially likely to behave independently in the future, whereas participants for whom the trait dependent was central viewed the target as especially dependent and especially likely to behave dependently in the future (Fig. 1). The extent to which a participant was classified as central on dependence or independence did not influence ratings on non-dependence related traits (organized, disorganized).

Other findings are also consistent with the hypothesis that, when behaviors allow freedom of interpretation, central self-knowledge exerts an assimilative influence on social perception. Some representative results are as follows. In one set of studies, participants for whom the trait sociable was central (compared to those for whom the trait unsociable was central) rated target persons as especially sociable (Lambert & Wedell, 1991). In a second set of studies (Sedikides & Skowronski, 1993), judgments of actors made by

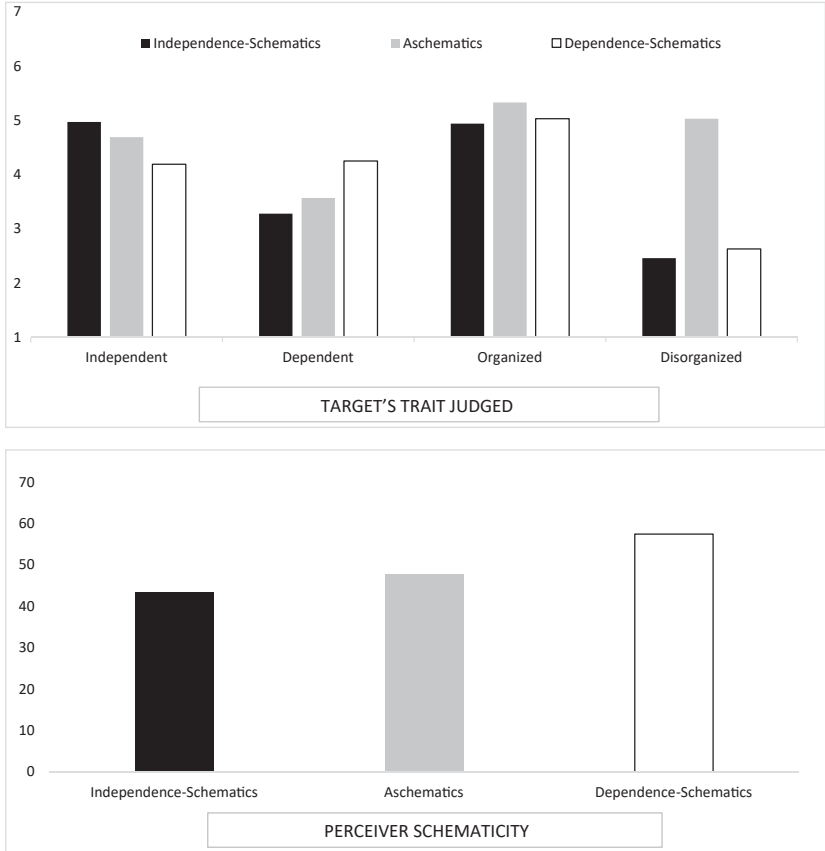

Fig. 1 Trait judgments of social target (top, 1–7 scale) and predictions of social target behavior from hypothetical scenarios (bottom, 0–100% probability of dependent behavior) by perceiver trait self-schematicity on the trait dimension of independence/dependence. *From Green, J. D., & Sedikides, C. (2001). When do self-schemas shape social perception? The role of descriptive ambiguity.* Motivation and Emotion, 25*(1), 67–83. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1010611922816.*

participants for whom the traits intelligence and honesty were central (rather than peripheral) were more influenced by diagnostic (i.e., trait dimension-relevant) target information than the judgments of those for whom these traits were peripheral (Fig. 2). In a third set of studies, compared to their non-anxious counterparts, anxious participants rated an ambiguous target as more anxious (Riggs & Cantor, 1984). In a fourth set of studies, participants found to be central on extraversion (rather than introversion) weighed ambiguous information especially heavily in their social judgments (Carpenter, 1988). In a fifth set of studies, participants made more trait inferences about

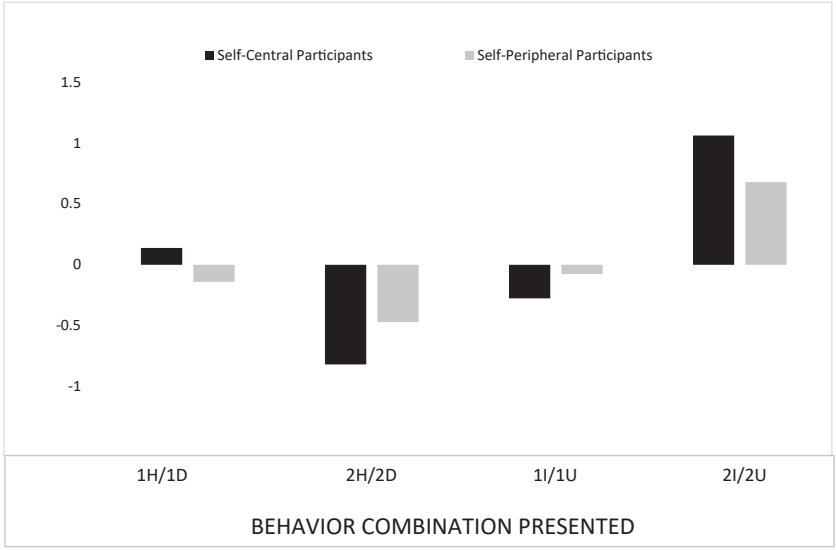

Fig. 2 Trait judgments (−4 to +4 scale) of social targets described by behavior sets with mixed trait implications from Sedikides and Skowronski (1993). Variables are trait dimension of behaviors presented (honesty (H)/dishonesty (D) versus intelligence (I)/unintelligence (U)), participant trait self-centrality (self-central versus self-peripheral), and the behavior set composition (1 positive and 1 negative versus 2 positive and 2 negative).

a person when told that this person shared with the participant a central (rather than peripheral) trait (Alicke, 1993), and made more confident and extreme judgments along trait dimensions that they regarded as central to the self (Eiser & Mower White, 1974). In one final set of studies, changes in a perceiver's central self-beliefs produced corresponding changes in perceptions of a social target (Lewicki, 1984).

These assimilation effects extend to social aggregates. One corpus of studies indicates that social perceivers rely on self-attributes in inferring characteristics of group members (Cadinu & Rothbart, 1996; Howard & Rothbart, 1980; Simon & Hastedt, 1999). In an illustrative investigation, Gramzow et al. (2001) hypothesized that participants expected novel ingroup members to share the positive and typical attributes that participants perceived in themselves. Moreover, one would expect these beliefs to influence participants' group-relevant attributions and recall. Indeed, consistent with this hypothesis, participants exhibited projection, and ascribed their central self-beliefs to ingroup members; they also recalled poorly self-congruent ingroup information. However, participants displayed elevated

recall of ingroup information that was discrepant from their central self-knowledge (Fig. 3), presumably because such information violated their expectancies and thus was processed in an especially elaborative fashion (Olson, Roese, & Zanna, 1996). Importantly, these effects were reversed when participants thought about outgroups: Participants revealed especially poor recall of self-incongruent (i.e., positive-atypical) information, a finding consistent with the notion that expectancies for the outgroup were relatively negative (e.g., they did not share the expectancies for the self/in-group).

These findings align with results reported by Clement and Krueger (2000), which illustrated that social projection influenced judgments about the ingroup, but not the outgroup, perhaps because the latter is perceived as

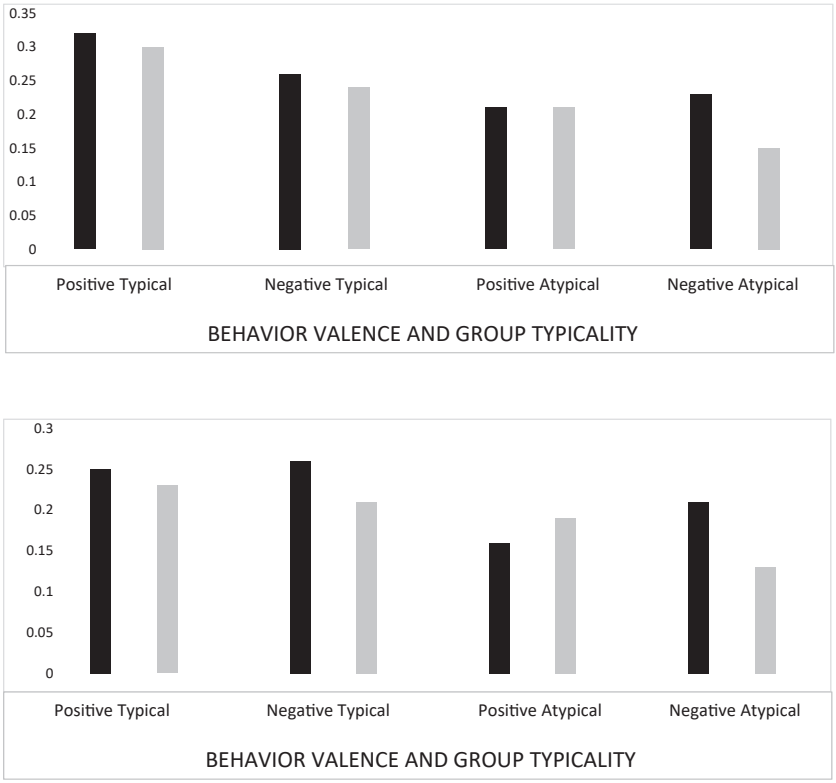

Fig. 3 Proportion of items recalled for in-group items (black bars) versus outgroup items (gray bars) in Gramzow et al. (2001), Experiment 1 (top) and Experiment 2 (bottom; no load condition only). Variables reflect the group described by the items (ingroup versus outgroup), item valence (positive versus negatve), and the extent to which an item was perceived to be typical of the group (typical versus atypical).

more socially distant than the former (Jones, 2004). Likewise, Otten and Moskowitz (2000) reported that positive traits were especially likely to be inferred easily from descriptions of positive ingroup (rather than outgroup) behaviors. Further supporting this differential projection idea, Otten and Wentura (2001) found that positive self-views were more influential in the perception of the ingroup, but negative self-views were more influential in the perception of the outgroup. Similar support for the differential projection idea comes from findings that personal self-esteem is a better predictor of favoritism toward novel ingroups than is collective self-esteem (Aberson, Healy, & Romero, 2000) even when the two types of self-esteem are measured seven days before categorization into novel groups occurs (Gramzow & Gaertner, 2005, Study 2).

Other streams of research demonstrate that, in circumstances of low information constraint, the assimilative influence of the self extends beyond specific groups and individuals onto generalized and abstract others. Given that perceivers regard their characteristics as normative (Alicke & Largo, 1995), they overestimate the extent to which their own characteristics (e.g., attitudes, behaviors) are found in others (false consensus effect; Gross & Miller, 1997). For example, women with body-weight concerns (i.e., women for whose body-weight is more central to the self-concept) were more likely to evince the false consensus effect (Muller, Williamson, & Martin, 2002). Further, perceivers use their own central self-conceptions in constructing the prototype of desirable abstract others, such as intelligent or leader (Dunning et al., 1991).

Many of the studies that we described with respect to self-perceived centrality conceptualized self-knowledge as stable across time. However, as we mentioned earlier, self-centrality perceptions may sometimes be temporary. For example, some studies have provided perceivers with false feedback suggesting that they were successful in a given task domain. Participants came to perceive these false feedback success domains as especially important to the self relative to domains at which they supposedly failed (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1998; Wyer & Frey, 1983). According to the ETM, such transitory centrality shifts ought to (and did) produce the same social perception effects as those produced by self-conceptions that are chronically viewed as central to a perceiver's self.

Though the effects that we have described in the paragraphs above largely detail assimilative effects of the self-concept on cognition measures, we again emphasize that we do not consider these effects as solely reflecting the domain of cognition. Instead, we assert that the abovementioned

assimilation effects arise, at least in part, out of motivational concerns. Faced with perceptual ambiguity, perceivers are tactical in choosing the social category to activate and apply to a specific target: The category activated and used is the one that is most likely to lead to a desired impression of the target—an impression that will put the perceiver in an advantaged position (Kunda & Sinclair, 1999). We assert more generally that the motivation implicitly to ascribe positivity to the ingroup and negativity to the outgroup (Otten & Moskowitz, 2000) partially accounts for the documented role of the self in-group perception (e.g., superior ingroup recall for self-incongruent information, superior outgroup recall for self-congruent information; Gramzow et al., 2001). Likewise, we argue that the false consensus effect is subject to motivational influences. Take the case of projection effects: Individuals will overestimate the representation of their weaknesses in others, but they do not necessarily overestimate the commonness of their strengths (Mullen & Goethals, 1990). The egocentric and tactical nature of self-involvement in thinking about others is also illustrated by perceivers basking in the reflected glory of the generalized other when they use what they believe to be their own personal or interpersonal virtues to construct the social profile of a successful other (Dunning et al., 1991).

4.2 Hypothesis 2: With high-constraint actor behaviors, the impact of central self-knowledge on social perception is moderated by additional variables

Some actor information is more ambiguous (and hence subject to alternative interpretations and construals) than other information. As such, when information is low in ambiguity, the ETM suggests that it will be especially hard for interpretations of behaviors to be altered by central self-knowledge. Indeed, findings indicate that central self-knowledge, albeit available and accessible, is typically not used to process social information when applicability (Sedikides & Skowronski, 1991) or appropriateness (Martin & Achee, 1992) criteria are unmet. For example, in an experiment by Fong and Markus (1982), social information was irrelevant to participants' central traits of either extraversion or introversion, and thus not used. Likewise, the conflicting results of Markus et al. (1985: assimilation in Experiment 1; null results in Experiment 2) are attributable to largely inapplicable (i.e., schema-irrelevant and schema-consistent, but not schema-inconsistent) target information. In another experiment that reported null findings (Park & Hahn, 1988), the target information was largely irrelevant to participants' central self-conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Finally, the assimilation results of Lambert and

Wedell (1991) were not replicated when the target information was irrelevant to participants' central self-conceptions.

Central self-knowledge is also unlikely to be implicated in social perception when the target information is inappropriate. This point is illustrated in an experiment by Catrambone and Markus (1987). Participants for whom the trait independent was either central or peripheral formed impressions of a target who responded to 10 questions. Null results were obtained. However, responses to the questions were unequivocally independent or dependent, as the responses "were designed to be independent-sounding or dependent-sounding and [was] pilot-tested to insure that they were perceived this way" (p. 355). The unambiguous and concrete target information, in the absence of anticipated motivational benefits, precluded the use of self-knowledge to distort self-perceptions.

Thus, the ETM suggests that self-knowledge is sometimes indifferent to social perception. However, the ETM also suggests that, in the presence of sufficiently strong motivational concerns, central self-knowledge may sometimes influence the processing of even relatively unambiguous and concrete target information. For example, when participants are outperformed by a competing actor on a self-defining domain (e.g., intelligence), judgments of this actor are contrasted away from the self (i.e., they exaggerate the actor's ability); however, participants also exaggerate the ability of those they outperform (Alicke et al., 1997) (Fig. 4). The authors suggest that, whereas the tendency to elevate an outperformer salvages a threatened identity image, aggrandizing an inferior performer advances an already favorable image. This is prima facie evidence for motivated use of self-knowledge, as are findings indicating that participants who consider themselves at the low end of a dimension such as athleticism rate unathletic targets favorably, whereas those high on athleticism rate these targets unfavorably (Dunning & Cohen, 1992, Study 4). We consider this tactical and egocentric use of the self in the waxing and waning of social judgment as manifestations of the self-enhancement and self-protection motives (Beauregard & Dunning, 1998; Dunning & Beauregard, 2000).

Central self-knowledge can also be involved in the processing of unambiguous and concrete information about familiar others. In such cases, self-protection and self-enhancement motives influence the direction of social judgment (i.e., contrast versus assimilation). In the case of perceived threat, a close other is contrasted away from the self (Tesser, 1988). In the absence of threat and the golden presence of a self-enhancing opportunity, a close other is over-assimilated to self; that is, one's positive self-characteristics are

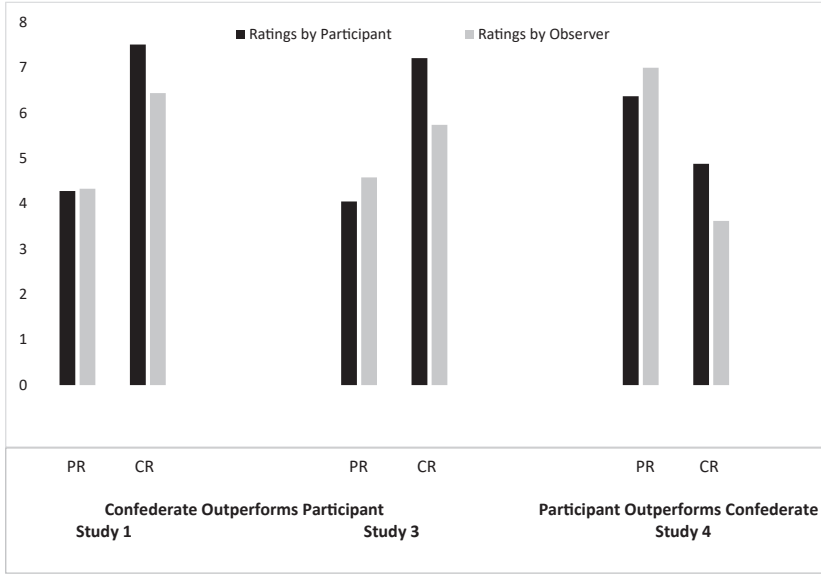

Fig. 4 Ratings from Alicke et al. (1997) of perceptual intelligence (0–9 scale) made by participants and observers from their observations of performance on perceptual intelligence test in which a confederate outperformed the participant (studies 1 and 3), and in which the participant outperformed the confederate (study 4); PR = ratings of the participant, CR = ratings of the confederate.

overattributed to the close other (Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002). Similar phenomena are observed in one's relation to the ingroup. Underperforming groups are contrasted away from the self, whereas overperforming groups are assimilated to the self (Boen et al., 2002).

5. The ETM versus the self-as-distinct model

We stated earlier that extant research linking the self to thinking about the social world has been relatively unstructured in that it has not pursued general principles specifying when and how the self exerts its influence on social thinking. However, there is one theoretical framework that has endeavored to do so: the Self-As-Distinct (S-A-D) model (Karniol, 2003).

We submit that the ETM is a substantive advance over the S-A-D. In this section, we attempt to support this claim and, in the process, clarify further the ETM and its unique predictive power. To begin, we consider key differences between the ETM and the S-A-D model. Next, we highlight the ETM's advantages over the S-A-D model by describing how the ETM

accounts for findings predicted by the S-A-D model. Finally, we argue for the broader scope of the ETM by reviewing findings that fit the ETM, but that are troubling for the S-A-D model.

5.1 Comparing the ETM and the S-A-D model

The ETM proposes a binary classification of social knowledge (me/not me). Moreover, the ETM suggests that self-knowledge is functional and egocentric, as it provides a benchmark for experiencing and social knowing. The ETM also posits that self-knowledge is more positive than other-knowledge, and is perceived to be typical. Furthermore, this model proposes that self-knowledge construction and maintenance is driven largely by the self-enhancement and self-protection motives. These premises contrast sharply with those offered by the S-A-D model, which does not assign a special status to self-knowledge or motivational processes.

Additional differences between the ETM and the S-A-D model emerge in detailing the cognitive mechanisms that underlie social judgment. The ETM attests to the potent role of central self-knowledge in social perception, although whether this role will be assimilative, contrastive, or indifferent depends on aspects of the target information display and the presence of motivational concerns. The S-A-D model, on the other hand, posits that the self is only one of several representations (the others being familiar persons and social categories) applying to social perception, and that the role of such representations is to highlight how a given social target differs from a perceiver's knowledge about what is typical of people in general. As such, the self is not considered to be a particularly potent influence on social perception, and indeed is relevant to it only in limited circumstances. Astute readers will have already noted from our literature review that many research results are far more consistent with the ETM thesis than the S-A-D model.

There is another difference between the two models. The ETM proposes that the extent to which the self influences social perception is moderated by the constraints imposed by behaviors and by the presence versus absence of motivational concerns linked to the self-centrality of actor behaviors. In contrast, the S-A-D model contends that the impact of the self on social perception depends on the co-occurrence of distinct self-attributes and unfamiliar information displays. Therefore, from the perspective of the S-A-D model, given the non-distinctiveness of the self when a perceiver encounters familiar targets, the self will be irrelevant to social perception (and social knowledge of typical traits and behaviors will be relevant) when

familiar targets are judged. In such a case, social judgments about others instead ought to be mostly influenced by generic knowledge about the typical behaviors of others. The complementary prediction from the S-A-D model is that the self only influences social perception when people see themselves as similar to others in general.

If one focuses on the information content to be extracted from comparisons, it is useful to understand that perceivers prefer to make, and gain the most information from, comparisons between entities that share common attributes. For example, perceivers will find it informative to compare one orange to another orange; they should not gain much knowledge from comparing an orange to a cat. Extending this idea to the S-A-D model, when people regard themselves as generally similar to others, they ought to consider themselves useful standards when thinking about others. In contrast, if perceivers regard the self in atypical ways, they may not consider themselves to be informative standards when thinking about others: A better strategy would be to use a standard that shares common features with the target. One such standard reflects a perceiver's knowledge about people in general. For instance, assume that Barney is an academic who perceives himself as having the atypical trait of possessing esoteric expertise about mollusks. According to the S-A-D model, because Barney's expertise is so unusual, it will not play much of a role when Barney thinks about his neighbor, Ashley. Barney will instead think about Ashley in relation to social comparisons that "make sense," such as Barney's generalized knowledge about others.

The S-A-D model's prediction that atypical self-knowledge will not influence social thought conflicts with ETM's prediction. The latter posits that perceivers sometimes use even self-atypical knowledge (when it is self-central and positive) when thinking about others, and they do so because the social comparisons that might be involved in such thought enhance the self. Thus, returning to our example, Barney might spontaneously look for evidence that Ashley is interested in mollusks (or even in biology), because Ashley's interest would confirm Barney's expertise. Moreover, as people assume that self-central traits are shared, when asked to make a judgment about Ashley, Barney might even rate Ashley as having a mildly positive interest in mollusks.

Interestingly, when people are indeed self-atypical, these self-based modes may push them toward inaccuracy in their social thought. In the absence of much specific information about others, it may be best to use generalized knowledge about them. Put otherwise, when asked to predict

Ashley's interest in mollusks, prediction accuracy would probably be enhanced by using generalized social knowledge (most people probably do not care about mollusks). Hence, one way to discriminate between the ETM and S-A-D model is to look for situations in which atypical self-perceptions may be used in such a way as to increase inaccuracy in judgments about others. These inaccuracies ought to emerge in a manner such that they promote the "goodness" of the rater's self-perceived self-atypical traits.

5.2 On the utility of the ETM: How it can account for findings that also fit the S-A-D model

One way to assess the veracity of the ETM is to ask how it can account for some otherwise theoretically puzzling findings. Consider those reported by Srull and Gaelick (1983). Participants judged the self as less similar to others but judged the others as more similar to the self, a pattern that was deemed to be supportive of the S-A-D model. This research was guided by Tversky's (1977) feature-matching model of similarity judgments, according to which judgments of similarity between two objects involve comparisons of feature sets that the two objects share and do not share. As such, the feature-matching model suggests that direction of comparison will influence the judgment. Similarity of the more-to-less elaborate object will be judged to be relatively poor (due to the high number of mismatches), whereas similarity of the less-to-more elaborate object will be judged to be relatively good (due to relatively few mismatches).

However, these findings do not exclusively support the S-A-D model. The findings, and conceptually similar meta-analytic results from the false consensus literature (Mullen & Hu, 1988), are in agreement with the ETM's assumption that self-knowledge is the most complex knowledge structure an individual possesses. That is, given the complexity of central self-knowledge, it should come as no surprise that individuals are able to differentiate themselves better on central than peripheral dimensions (Mandrosz-Wroblewska, 1989). Relatedly, that individuals regard the self as more complex than others does not imply they refrain (or ought to refrain) from using the self in predicting others' characteristics and behavior. Moreover, given that central self-knowledge is motivationally charged, it is not surprising (indeed, it is expected) that individuals tone down, but do not desist from exhibiting, the false consensus effect when they feel a need to assert their uniqueness (Kernis, 1984) or validate a rather problematic self by symbolically associating with others (i.e., seeking comfort in strength-in-numbers;

Kulik, Sledge, & Mahler, 1986). Indeed, this view of the false consensus effect as a social support-seeking tactic is fully congruent with ETM's Premise 4, that the use of the self in social perception is motivated. Finally, given that the use of the self in social perception occurs spontaneously and habitually (and maybe sometimes even automatically), it is unsurprising that explicit instructions to use the self in other-inferences fail to strengthen the observed effect (Biernat et al., 1997). Informatively, the majority of participants (e.g., 70%; Dunning & Hayes, 1996, Study 1) acknowledge in retrospect the use of self in social judgment, and those who report having used the self manifest the especially strong effects of the self on social judgments (e.g., contrast; Dunning & Hayes, 1996, Study 2).

5.3 On the utility of the ETM: Results that are troubling for the S-A-D model but are accounted for by the ETM

In our attempt to discriminate between the ETM and S-A-D model, we noted that they offer divergent proposals about the nature of self-knowledge, and make differing predictions about the potency and breadth of the self's influence on perceptions of central self-knowledge. The differences between the proposals are highlighted by one existing corpus of data: The relative importance in social perception of self-knowledge over prototypic (i.e., consensus) knowledge. The S-A-D model proposes that, in social perception, prototypic knowledge holds the primary role, and self-knowledge takes a secondary role. In contrast, the ETM maintains that self-knowledge is privileged over prototypic knowledge.

Research findings are kinder to the ETM than the S-A-D model. An illustrative list of such findings follows. In social judgment tasks, individuals often ignore consensus information, even when they are explicitly provided with it (Hansen & Donoghue, 1977; Kassin, 1979). The explicit provision of consensus information does not diminish the proclivity to use the self as an information source (Dunning & Cohen, 1992, Studies 4 and 6). The self is cited more frequently as an information influence on social judgment compared to consensus information (i.e., population norms; Dunning & Hayes, 1996, Study 1). Self-knowledge is considered a more crucial information source than other-knowledge. For example, when making judgments about a target person, individuals mention the self more often than acquaintances, persons similar to the target, or persons who exemplify the relevant trait dimension (Dunning & Hayes, 1996, Study 1). Also, when predicting group judgments, individuals rely more on self-knowledge than knowledge about a familiar other (Krueger & Stanke, 2001). Moreover, remarkably,

individuals base their consensus judgments on the self as opposed to another person (Clement & Krueger, 2000). One final source of support for the ETM comes from a key rule of cognition: When relevant, accessible cognitions are preferred to less accessible cognitions. The ETM states that self-information is highly accessible; the S-A-D model instead accords primacy to consensus information. In support of the ETM, as determined by speed of trait ratings, self-knowledge is responded to more quickly (e.g., is more accessible) than consensus information (Clement & Krueger, 2000).

6. New research ideas derived from the ETM

In addition to providing a general account of extant findings, another litmus test for a theory is its generativity: The extent to which it leads researchers to new hypotheses and predictions, and the extent to which those hypotheses and predictions are confirmed by research findings. Our view of the ETM is encouraging in this regard, in that it lends itself to the development of novel research ideas. The paragraphs that follow discuss a few of them.

One idea is to induce participants (via experimental manipulation) to use different comparison standards when making social judgments about an actor. For example, after observing an actor's behavior, different participants might respond to questions that explicitly include different judgment standards. Assume that participants view an ambiguously kind behavior. They may then be asked "In comparison to _____, how kind is this actor?" Comparisons can then vary, and can include entities such as "YOURSELF," "THE AVERAGE PERSON, "THE AVERAGE KIND PERSON," and "THE AVERAGE UNKIND PERSON." Of course, one condition would omit such a standard, and would assume that perceivers would spontaneously use their kind self-concept in making the judgment. The ETM would predict no difference between judgments of the condition in which the self was explicitly used as the anchor and the no anchor condition. In contrast, results from the non-self anchor conditions should differ from the results provided in the no anchor condition.

Additional studies could explore the role of attribute centrality in these effects. According to the ETM, the effect described above (a match of judgments in the explicit self-label condition and the no label condition) should be especially likely to occur for concepts (e.g., trustworthiness) that are perceived to be self-central. The effect should not occur for concepts that are peripheral (e.g., punctual), because presumably in the no label condition

people do not spontaneously use the self-concept to make an actor judgment. Other studies might explore whether matching in this latter case is re-established by manipulations that cause the otherwise-peripheral attribute to attain central status (e.g., exposure to stories highlighting problems created by unpredictable behavior).

Further studies might focus on altering the spontaneous tendency for a perceiver to use their own attribute as a standard when making actor judgments. One method by which this might be accomplished is as follows. After observing the behavior, the experimenter could ask some perceivers to judge how similar they are to the actor, and then ask about the actor's kindness level. Results for the second question could then be compared to a standard condition in which participants answered only questions about the actor's kindness. Explicitly asking an individual to compare themselves to the actor (making the actor the standard of comparison) should reduce the tendency for the perceiver to use the self as the comparison standard in judgments about the actor's kindness.

A final corpus of studies might address the motivational component of the ETM. Imagine a study in which an individual's motive to promote the self was satiated. One way to accomplish this objective would be to have participants engage in tasks that produce self-affirmation. Given the satiation of the need to promote the self, these self-affirmation participants will be less likely to use the self tactically to promote the self when making judgments about a social target than participants who had not been exposed to the self-affirmation manipulation. Of course, the ETM would be supported by results showing that such effects exclusively occurred on attributes which were central to the self.

7. Coda

It has long been thought that the self profoundly influences how one perceives the social world and those who inhabit it. Despite a proliferation of research findings, in our view, there have not been many theoretical conceptions that attempt to create a general framework for accommodating these findings. We attempted to do so by outlining a theoretical model, the ETM. The model purports to account for the influence (or lack thereof) of the self (i.e., self-knowledge) on social thought (i.e., characterizing or construing another's actions, predicting others' preferences or behaviors, evaluating what is normative or right). The ETM postulates that the influence of the self-concept on social perception is affected by both the content

of the self-concept and the motivations that work to maintain the positivity of the self-concept. The ETM can both account for much of the existing data detailing how and when the self-concept influences social perception. The model can also be used to generate new research directions. We encourage researchers to pursue some of those directions in ways that test the model, and to expand and refine the model's proposals.

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