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Self-enhancement: What, where, and why

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In general, people try to present themselves in a favourable manner. This is known as self-enhancement, which basically is the tendency to view one's self in overly positive terms. People will rate themselves more favourably compared to others and view themselves as more superior, especially on traits that are most important to them. The self-enhancement theory has been developed to explain this behaviour.

The self-enhancement theory uses self information in a way that enhances the self-image or self-concept. Components of this theory provide valuable information that helps explain what motivates self-enhancing behaviours. Research has shown that people will self-enhance to maintain *feelings of self worth*, in other words self-esteem. (Brown & Smart, 1991; Brown, Dutton & Cook, 2001).

A review of this research will provide readers with a better understanding of why people self-enhance to maintain self-esteem, how they self-enhance, and under what circumstances they self-enhance the most. The research will look at different types of self-enhancement as well as circumstances that may cause someone to self-enhance. Issues concerning cultural self-enhancement will also be discussed, for it seems that not all cultures self-enhance the same ways or to the same extent. First, we will look at various individual studies that have examined self-enhancement.

High vs. Low Self Esteem

The self-enhancement theory holds that people with high self-esteem will self-enhance more than people with low self-esteem. Research has supported the theory's viewpoint and has shown that people with high self-esteem self-enhance more than people with low self-esteem. For example, people with high self-esteem will emphasize

their superior abilities and describe themselves as better than their partners (Schutz & Tice, 1997). Schutz and Tice (1997) examined the relationship between self-esteem and self enhancement. Participants were asked to write free format descriptions of themselves and their partners. It was predicted that participants with high self-esteem would describe themselves more positively than participants with low self-esteem, plus describe themselves as more positive than their partners. Schutz and Tice (1997) found that overall high self-esteem participants, when compared to low self-esteem participants, described themselves more positively than their partners.

Research has also shown that people with high self-esteem are more likely to inflate the importance of qualities they possess and denigrate the importance of qualities they lack (Brown, Dutton, & Cook, 2001). Brown et al. (2001) had participants engage in problem-solving activities and rate their own performance. It was expected that participants with high self-esteem would be more inclined than participants with low self-esteem to rate themselves more highly on certain abilities (self-enhancement). Brown et al. (2001) found that participants with high self-esteem claimed to possess an ability (self enhancement) when they said it was an important one to possess and have, while this was not found among participants with low self-esteem. Brown et al. (2001) concluded that this behaviour can be another way in which high self-esteem people maintain feelings of self-worth.

It seems that people with high self-esteem use more self-enhancement than people with low self-esteem; however they both use self-enhancement to some extent. This leads us to ask, why does this happen? Well, maybe people with high and low self-esteem engage in different forms of self-enhancement.

Forms of Self-enhancement

Simple vs. Compensatory

Swann, Pelham, and Krull (1989) have distinguished between two forms of the self-enhancement. Simple self-enhancement refers to a process by which all individuals will strive to promote the perception that others will think of them; this promoted perception is mostly always positive. Compensatory or defensive self-enhancement refers to a motive that is closely associated with most drives. People with negative self-concepts rarely receive positive feedback, so they will make compensatory efforts to win the favour of others. If people hear negative information about themselves, they may turn to and focus their attention on their positive qualities that may have not been called into question; this process is known as compensatory self-enhancement. For example, the two studies looked at earlier, Schutz and Tice (1997) and Brown et al. (2001), were examples in which participants engaged in simple self-enhancement. Participants in both studies engaged in simple self-enhancement by over emphasizing positive qualities about themselves.

Baumeister (1982) shows that people will also use compensatory self-enhancement. In an early experiment, participants with high and low self-esteem were given fake results on a personality inventory; half of the inventories responded with positive feedback and half of the inventories responded with negative feedback. This manipulation was crossed with a privacy manipulation; half of the participants were made to believe that their results would be available for the other participants to see and half of the participants were made to believe that their results would not be available for the

other participants to see. After these manipulations the participants were asked to describe themselves to the other participants on a variety of dimensions, including the ones listed on the personality inventory. Participants with high self-esteem who received negative feedback on their fake personality test and who believed that the other participants would be able to see this feedback gave more favourable ratings of themselves to the other participants on dimensions unrelated to the negative feedback than did other participants. There were no self-esteem differences seen in the self-ratings on dimensions related to the original feedback, so participants did not attempt to deny the validity of the original feedback; however they tried to balance the negative feedback with positive information in other areas.

Brown and Smart (1991) found similar results after examining the relationship between situational variables (success vs. failure at an achievement task) and personal factors (self-esteem) and found that people with high self-esteem, more than people with low self-esteem, will exaggerate the positivity of their social qualities after experiencing failure. Participants with high and low self-esteem were given success or failure feedback on an alleged test of their intellectual ability, then rated themselves on a series of trait adjectives. The participants then completed an alleged test of integrative orientation, and then rated themselves on this test. After predicting that participants with high self-esteem, not participants with low self-esteem, would compensate for failure by exaggerating the positivity of their social attributes, Brown and Smart (1991) found that after failure participants with high self-esteem evoked more favourable appraisals of their social attributes than participants with low self-esteem, even when the participants thought that the other participants would not be reading their descriptions. These

examples show us that people will try to compensate for their assumed undesirable qualities by trying to point out more positive traits.

These two forms of self-enhancement are based on two different assumptions; simple self-enhancement theory assumes that all people are equally motivated to self-enhance, while the compensatory theory hold that people with negative self-concepts are more motivated to self-enhance than people with positive self-concepts. More support has been found for the assumptions behind the simple self-enhancement theory. For example, Swann, Pelham, and Krull (1989) examined the relationship between the self-views and feedback seeking activities of people. It was expected that people with both high and low self-esteem people would prefer to verify their positive attributes rather than their negative ones. Participants received feedback on various personality traits from a computer. The results indicated that when given the opportunity to receive feedback from any of their attributes, participants with both high and low self-esteem preferred to see feedback pertaining to their best attributes. All participants engaged in simple self-enhancement; this suggests that all people are motivated to seek positive self-views, but may do so differently.

Direct vs. indirect self-enhancement

Although people with both high and low self-esteem use both simple and compensatory forms of self-enhancement they may actually self-enhance in different ways. Aside from the two forms of self-enhancement, researchers have distinguished between two different types of self-enhancing behaviours: direct and indirect self-enhancement. Direct self-enhancement proposes that the self is directly implicated in

self-enhancement, while indirect self-enhancement holds that the self is indirectly linked to self-enhancement. Therefore direct self-enhancement occurs when people display self-enhancing biases that explicitly center around the self, whereas indirect self-enhancement occurs when people display self-enhancing biases that involve other people.

To clarify this distinction some examples are given. An example of direct self-enhancement is provided by research that has focused on people's evaluations of themselves and of others. It seems that some people will display a self- others bias such that more positive personality attributes are seen as more descriptive of themselves than of others, and that more negative personality attributes are seen as more descriptive of others than of themselves (Brown et al. 1988).

People will also enhance self-esteem by associating themselves with others. For instance, Cialdini et al. (1976) found that university students would bask in the reflected glory of other's accomplishments by using the pronoun *we* when relating the details of a football game won by their team. This represents an indirect form of self-enhancement since individuals played no direct role in the accomplishment.

Another example of direct and indirect self-enhancement is shown in a study that examined the effects of self-esteem and group involvement on group favouritism. Brown et al. (1988) study examined the relationship between self-esteem and self-enhancement. Participants were grouped with other participants and completed group tasks in either direct or indirect ways and the experimenters observed whether the participants engaged in direct or indirect self-enhancement. The participants then completed a dot-estimation task in which subjects were to estimate the number of objects seen; this was used as a measure of self-enhancement because different people tend to overestimate or

underestimate the correct number of objects seen. Brown et al. (1988) proposed that people with high self-esteem will self enhance directly and people with low self-esteem will self-enhance indirectly. Brown et al. (1988) found that participants with both high and low self-esteem engaged in self-enhancing behaviours, but participants with high self-esteem were more likely to use direct self-enhancement, such as display favouritism when they were directly involved in the group tasks, while people with low self-esteem were more likely to use indirect self-enhancement, such as display favouritism when they were not directly involved in the group tasks.

These results suggest that people with high self-esteem will engage in self-enhancement that directly involves the self, whereas people with low self-esteem will engage in self-enhancement that does not directly involve the self. This study proposes that people with low self esteem doubt their capabilities, so their use of self enhancement is limited. For example if people with low self esteem say they are good athletes, they will have difficulties to defend this statement because of their uncertainties regarding their capabilities. In contrast, people with high self esteem are confident in their abilities so their use of self enhancement is unobstructed.

Feedback Situations

Negative Feedback

The research has shown that people with high self-esteem do self-enhance more than people with low self-esteem. We have looked at two different forms of self-enhancement as well as two different ways in which people self-enhance. This still does not answer the questions as to why do people with high self-esteem self-enhance more

than people with low self-esteem. The answer is far from being completely answered but there still is one possible reason as to why it happens.

Self-enhancement may result from the situation a person is in. For example, if we look back at the two studies we looked at that showed how people use compensatory self-enhancement, Beaumeister (1982) and Brown and Smart (1991), we would see that both studies made use of feedback. Feedback is basically a situational variable that is a giant factor in determining the use of self-enhancement. For example, in Beaumeister (1986) it was shown that participants with high self-esteem who received negative feedback on their fake personality test and who believed that the other participants would be able to see this feedback gave more favourable ratings of themselves to the other participants on dimensions unrelated to the negative feedback than did other participants. Likewise, in Brown and Smart (1991) it was found that participants with high self-esteem participants evoked more favourable appraisals of their social attributes than participants with low self-esteem, especially after failure feedback.

As we can see negative feedback certainly has a great impact on self-enhancing tendencies. This suggests that people may perceive negative feedback as a threat to their self-esteem and therefore make more of an effort to get rid of this threat. So this tells us that situations in which people are made to feel lousy about their performance will influence how much they will try to make themselves look better.

Cross-cultural Self-enhancement

We have now looked at some reasons as to why people self-enhance and how they self-enhance. It looks as if we can now almost determine who will self-enhance the most

and how they will self-enhance. However, this may not be the case. As much as we would like to think we are experts in the area of self-enhancement we are not, for people in different cultures may self-enhance quite differently.

Past research has shown that self-enhancement is a motive that is common to everyone. Many say it is a universal motive (Sedikides, C., Gaertner, L., & Toguchi, Y., 2003). Cross-cultural studies have proven that self-enhancement exists in both Western and Eastern cultures. However these studies have shown that people in individualistic cultures (the West) and individuals in collectivists cultures (the East) use different strategies to achieve the same goal.

Sedikides et al. (2003) examined self-enhancement among Americans and Japanese participants on individualistic and collectivistic attributes. Participants engaged in a cultural immersion exercise that allowed them to visualize themselves in their homeland. Next they were to image that they were part of a 16 person group whose objective was to solve a business problem; they imagined conversing and strategizing with the other group members. Finally the participants completed two dependent measures in which they compared themselves to the typical group member. First they rated how likely they were, relative to the typical group member, to perform each of 16 behaviours; half of the behaviours were individualistic and half the behaviours were collectivistic. Participants rated how likely they were to perform each behaviour on an 11-point scale (-5= much less likely than the typical group member, 0= about the same as the typical group member, 5=much more likely than the typical group member). Positive values reflected self-enhancement. Sedikides et al. (2003) found that American

participants self-enhanced more on individualistic behaviours, while Japanese participants self-enhanced more on collectivistic behaviours.

Clearly the importance of the attribute matters. Americans self-enhanced more on individualistic behaviours because they are more personally important, and Japanese self-enhanced more on collectivistic behaviours because they are more personally important. Still, this research lends support to the idea that self-enhancement is a universal motive; however it seems that people in different cultures go about it in different ways.

Discussion

We have looked at some of the past research that has examined self-enhancement and have found that most people are eager to make themselves look as best as they can. Most people, especially those with high self-esteem, will engage in self-enhancing behaviours as a way to maintain their current level of self-esteem. It has also been shown that people will enhance even more when they are put into situations in which their self-esteem is threatened. All of these factors contribute to self-enhancement and each one must be taken into consideration when investigating the topic. Future research in this area will need to be aware of the factors that effect self-enhancement before they begin to ask different questions concerning self-enhancing behaviour.

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Running head: STATE SELF ESTEEM AND SELF ENHANCEMENT

Effect of State Self-esteem on Self-enhancement

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Abstract

Self-enhancement is the tendency to view one's self in overly positive terms. People engage in self-enhancement as a way to maintain their level of self-esteem. Trait self-esteem refers to an individual's overall general level of self-worth, while state self-esteem refers to short-lived fluctuations in emotional states. Generally people with high trait self-esteem self-enhance more than people with low trait self-esteem, especially after receiving negative feedback. The present study hypothesized that people with high state self-esteem will also self-enhance more than people with low state self-esteem, especially after receiving negative feedback. The level of state self-esteem was manipulated by feedback. Participants were assigned to one of three groups in which they received negative, average, or positive feedback. The level of state self-esteem and the level of self-enhancement were measured before and after the feedback manipulations. State self-esteem did not have an effect on the level of self-enhancement. A significant positive correlation was found between the level of trait self-esteem and the level of state self-esteem.

Self-enhancement is the tendency to view one's self in overly positive terms. People will rate themselves more favourably compared to others and view themselves as more superior, especially on traits that are most important to them. Research has shown that people will self-enhance to maintain *feelings of self worth*, particularly after receiving feedback. (Brown & Smart, 1991; Brown, Dutton & Cook, 2001).

Most of the research on self-esteem and self-enhancement is correlational, however it does suggest that trait self-esteem, or overall general level of self-worth, can act as a regulator of self-enhancement. Trait self-esteem is relatively steady, whereas state self-esteem can fluctuate on a daily basis due to negative or positive events. Crocker and Park (2004) have noted that, in attempts to maintain their level of trait self-esteem, people will try to obtain boosts in their state self-esteem, or short-lived fluctuations in emotional states, that raise it over their level of trait self-esteem or avoid drops in state self-esteem that fall below their level of trait self-esteem.

It seems that people want to maintain a steady level of state self-esteem that is slightly over their level of trait self-esteem. When an inconsistency arises between their trait and state self-esteem people will engage in behaviours that change their level of state self-esteem so that it remains slightly above their trait level. For instance, if a person's state self-esteem falls below their level of trait self-esteem they will try to raise their level of state self-esteem back to a level that is slightly above their level of trait self-esteem. It has already been shown that people will self-enhance to maintain their level of trait self-esteem, so we will assume that people will do the same and self-enhance to maintain their level of state self-esteem.

The present study manipulates state self-esteem, using positive and negative feedback situations. I expected that negative feedback will threaten and lower state self-esteem. We already know that people self-enhance to maintain levels self-esteem, so we can assume that if a person's state self-esteem is threatened and lowered they would have to self-enhance more, to make up for the loss in state self-esteem, compared to people who did not receive a threat. Therefore I assumed that people will self-enhance more after receiving negative feedback than receiving average or positive feedback.

Past research has looked at the relationship between trait self-esteem and self-enhancement and has found that, generally, people with high trait self-esteem self-enhance more than those with low trait self-esteem. In keeping with this finding, I also assumed that people with high state self-esteem will self-enhance more than people with low state self-esteem.

People with high trait self-esteem will emphasize their superior abilities and describe themselves as better than their partners (Schutz & Tice, 1997). Schutz and Tice (1997) examined the relationship between trait self-esteem and self enhancement. Participants were asked to write free format descriptions of themselves and their partners. It was predicted that participants with high trait self-esteem would describe themselves more positively than participants with low trait self-esteem, plus describe themselves as more positive than their partners. Schutz and Tice (1997) found that overall high self-esteem participants described themselves more positively than their partners.

Research has also shown that people with high trait self-esteem are more likely to inflate the importance of qualities they possess and denigrate the importance of qualities they lack (Brown, Dutton, & Cook, 2001). Brown et al. (2001) had participants engage in

problem-solving activities and rate their own performance. The participants' trait self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale, a valid measure of trait self-esteem. Self enhancement was measured using a questionnaire that assessed how important participants thought it was to be high in certain abilities; they then rated themselves on these abilities. It was expected that participants with high trait self-esteem would be more inclined than participants with low trait self-esteem to rate themselves more highly on certain abilities. Brown et al. (2001) found that participants with high trait self-esteem claimed to possess an ability (self enhancement) when they said it was an important one to possess and have, while this was not found among participants with low trait self-esteem. Brown et al. (2001) concluded that this behaviour can be another way in which high self-esteem people maintain feelings of self-worth.

Brown et al. (1988) study examined the relationship between trait self-esteem and self-enhancement. In study 1 participants were grouped with other participants and completed group tasks in either direct or indirect ways and the experimenters observed whether the participants engaged in direct or indirect self-enhancement. Participants were given the Texas Social Behaviour Inventory, a validated measure that places emphasis on the social aspects of self-esteem, to measure their trait self-esteem. The participants then completed a dot-estimation task in which subjects were to estimate the number of objects seen; this was used as a measure of self-enhancement because different people tend to overestimate or underestimate the correct number of objects seen. Brown et al. (1988) proposed that people with high trait self-esteem will self enhance directly and people with low trait self-esteem will self-enhance indirectly. Brown et al. (1988) found that participants with both high and low trait self-esteem engaged in self-enhancing

behaviours, but participants with high trait self-esteem were more likely to use direct self-enhancement, such as display favouritism when they were directly involved in the group tasks, while people with low trait self-esteem were more likely to use indirect self-enhancement, such as display favouritism when they were not directly involved in the group tasks. Direct and indirect are two different styles of self-enhancement. Although the two styles may be important in others ways, they are not particularly relevant to the present study.

Furthermore Brown et al. (1988) assessed the degree to which the effects observed in Study 1 are affected by state self-esteem. Study 2 replicated Study 1 except they introduced a new variable, positive and negative feedback, that was expected to raise and lower state self-esteem. Although Brown et al. (1988) attempted to examine the effects of state self-esteem predictions were made regarding trait self-esteem, and state self-esteem was not directly measured. Brown et al. (1988) predicted that people with high trait self-esteem will be more likely to engage in direct self-enhancement after receiving negative feedback than after receiving positive feedback and people with low trait self-esteem will be more likely to engage in indirect self-enhancement after receiving negative feedback than after receiving positive feedback. Brown et al. (1988) predictions were supported and more self-enhancement was seen in individuals with both high and low trait self-esteem after receiving negative feedback rather than positive feedback.

Brown and Smart (1991) found similar results after examining the relationship between situational variables (success vs. failure at an achievement task) and personal factors (self-esteem) and found that people with high trait self-esteem, more than people

with low trait self-esteem, will exaggerate the positivity of their social qualities after experiencing failure. Participants with high and low trait self-esteem were given success or failure feedback on an alleged test of their intellectual ability, then rated themselves on a series of trait adjectives. The Texas Social Behaviour Inventory was used to measure trait self-esteem. The participants then completed an alleged test of integrative orientation, and then rated themselves on this test; this was used as a self-enhancement measure. After predicting that participants with high trait self-esteem, not participants with low trait self-esteem, would compensate for failure by exaggerating the positivity of their social attributes, Brown and Smart (1991) found that after failure participants with high trait self-esteem evoked more favourable appraisals of their social attributes than participants with low trait self-esteem.

A review of the past research suggests that both trait self-esteem and state self-esteem influence self-enhancement, however earlier studies do not differentiate between trait and state self-esteem and most of the studies do not actually measure state self-esteem. Trait self-esteem and state self-esteem need to be measured separately using valid measures for each. If we measure trait self-esteem and state self-esteem separately, a distinction can be made between the two and it may be possible to see what one is a better predictor of self-enhancement. We already know that trait self-esteem plays a role in self-enhancement. Now we want to find out if the level of state self-esteem is of even more importance. Is how a person feels at the moment a better predictor of self-enhancement?

The results of Brown et al. (1988) and Brown and Smart (1991) suggest two things, 1) feedback may influence state self-esteem and 2) state self-esteem may

influences self-enhancement. However in both of these studies we do not really know whether it was the feedback that actually changed the level of state self-esteem for they did not measure the level of state self-esteem. If state self-esteem was not measured then how do we know how it was actually changed, let alone changed by the feedback?

The present study will attempt to add to these two studies by directly measuring state self-esteem and seeing whether changes in the feedback actually change the level of state self-esteem. After determining whether the feedback changes the level of state self-esteem, I then determined whether these changes lead to changes in the level of self-enhancement. In keeping with the past findings that people with high trait self-esteem self-enhance more than people with low trait self-esteem, especially after receiving negative feedback, I hypothesized that people with high state self-esteem will also self-enhance more than people with low state self-esteem, especially after negative feedback.

Although most of the studies attempt to measure only trait self-esteem they also seem to incidentally measure individuals' state self-esteem with the subjective ratings they used as measures of self-enhancement. Many of the studies used questionnaires as self-enhancement measures that recorded how individuals rated themselves compared to others. These ratings are subjective and seem to measure what an individual is feeling at that particular moment (e.g. state self-esteem). Although the researchers are attempting to measure self-enhancement they seem to be measuring state self-esteem instead. If a more objective measure of self-enhancement is used then the problem of incidentally measuring state self-esteem while actually meaning to measure self-enhancement can be avoided.

The present study uses valid measures for both state self-esteem and self-enhancement. The Current Thoughts Scale, a valid measure of short-lived changes in self-esteem, was used to measure state self-esteem (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991), and the Over-claiming Questionnaire, an objective measure of self enhancement that has been proven to be a good measure of self-enhancement, was used to measure self-enhancement (Paulhus, Harms, Bruce, & Lysy, 2003).

This study had three groups that received negative, average, or positive feedback on an alleged creativity test. It was expected that negative feedback will lower state self-esteem, average feedback will keep it constant, and positive feedback will raise state self-esteem. A manipulation check was used to see whether or not feedback actually changed the level of state self-esteem. This was done by measuring state self-esteem before and after the feedback situations. To see if there were any changes in the level of self-enhancement, self-enhancement was also measured before and after the feedback.

According to Crocker and Park (2004) people are motivated to achieve increases and avoid decreases in their state self-esteem. In accordance with this prediction and findings of past research this study has four predictions of its own, it predicted that 1) more self-enhancement will be seen after negative feedback than after positive feedback, 2) more self-enhancement will be seen in individuals with high state self-esteem than in individuals with low state self-esteem 3) an interaction will occur between the type of feedback and level of state self-esteem and 4) state self-esteem will be related to trait self-esteem.

Method

Participants

60 first year psychology students from Algoma University College participated. There was an incentive to motivate students to volunteer to participate; this incentive was extra credit in a psychology class.

Materials

The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale is a 10-item self-report measure of trait self-esteem. It consists of 10 statements that relate to overall feelings of self-worth or self-acceptance, such as “On the whole I am satisfied with myself.” The items are answered on a four-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The Current Thoughts Scale is a 20 item self-report measure of state self-esteem designed to measure what a person is thinking at a given moment. It consists of statements such as, “I feel confident about my abilities.” The items are answered on a five point scale ranging from “not at all” to “extremely.” There are two forms of the Current Thoughts Scale: Form 1 and Form 2. They are identical in structure and nature; however they differ on the actual wording of the test items. This was so the participants will not memorize any test questions the first time they take the test.

The Over-claiming Questionnaire is a shortened made up test that is very similar to Paulhus (2003) Over-claiming Questionnaire-150. Instead of 150 items it contains 100 items that comprise 5 categories. Each item is rated on a seven-point scale ranging from 0 (never heard of it) to 6 (very familiar with it). Within each category, 5 out of 20 items are foils, that is, they are names of fictional items. Hence, any degree of claimed knowledge about them constitutes over-claiming. The foils were created to appear to be plausible

members of the same category as the 15 real items. So, for 100 items a participant could claim false knowledge about 25 foil items. There are two forms of the OCQ: Form 1 and Form 2. They were identical in structure and nature, however they differ on the actual wording of the test items. One sample page from the questionnaire is presented in the Appendix.

The Remote Associates Test (RAT) is a shortened version of the original RAT (Mednick, 1962). It consists of 30 questions in which respondents are shown three words and a blank (eg. birthday, line, surprise, _____). Participants fill in the blank with a word that relates to all three words (i.e. party). The RAT questions were a mix of difficult and easy questions.

Procedure

The experiment took place in a classroom at Algoma University College. As each person entered the room they were given an envelope that was randomly assigned to one of three groups. This envelope contained the first three tests.

The participants were told they were going to be evaluated through a variety of self-report measures in an attempt to find a relationship between creativity and performance feedback. This was to keep the participants from uncovering the real reason of the experiment and to avoid any possible bias results. Participants were asked to be silent during the examination process.

The participants opened the envelope and completed the first three tests. The first was the Current Thoughts Form 1, the second was the Rosenberg Self Esteem-Scale, and

the third was the Over-claiming Questionnaire Form 1. After completed all three tests the participants were given the Remote Associates Test.

The participants were given 5 minutes to complete this test. After 4 minutes they were warned that they had 1 minute left and to make as many guesses as possible as to the questions that they did not know. This was to ensure that the participants did not really know how well or how poorly they did on the test.

Upon completion the participants were asked to raise their hand. Experimenter 1 took the completed test back to the front of the room and gave it to experimenter 2 who was waiting to “mark” the test. The experimenter was not really marking the test forms, but pretending to. This was part of manipulation. After quickly “marking” the test, experimenter 1 gave experimenter 2 the appropriate feedback sheet to be returned to the appropriate participant.

All participants received the same generic feedback sheet, which had a score written on the top right hand corner. The feedback sheet gave quick descriptions as to a personality trait of a person who scores within one of four scoring intervals. For example, if a person scores between 1 and 25 they read a corresponding description that read, “People who score between 1 and 25 are not very creative, they have a hard time recognizing associations between words and have difficulty with similar word problems.” This was considered negative feedback. Participants in the negative feedback group received an approximate score of 24, participants in the average feedback group received an approximate score of 55, while participants in the positive feedback group received an approximate score of 85. An average description corresponded with the average score, while a more positive description corresponded with the positive score.

The feedback sheet was attached to form 2 of both the Current Thoughts Scale and The Over-claiming Questionnaire. Participants were asked to read the feedback sheet and their score and to complete the last two questionnaires. Upon completion the Participants were asked to place all of the tests into their envelopes. Finally the envelopes were collected; the participants were debriefed on the real intent of the experiment, were thanked and told they could leave.

Expected Results

It was expected that participants with high state self-esteem would show more self-enhancement compared to participants with low state self-esteem. Participants with both high and low levels of state self-esteem are expected to show more self-enhancement after receiving negative feedback than after receiving positive feedback. People who receive average and positive feedback are expected to self-enhance less because it is assumed that they would not feel the need to because there was no threat brought to their state self-esteem.

Results

To make the data easier to work with I subtracted the scores from the Current Thoughts Scale Form 2 from the scores of the Current Thoughts Scale Form 1 and the scores from the Over-claiming Questionnaire Form 2 from the scores of the Over – claiming Questionnaire Form 1. This left me with two overall scores for each participant: one score that represented the difference between scores from the first and second

measures of state self-esteem (diffctct) and one score that represented the difference between scores from the first and second measure of self-enhancement (diffocq).

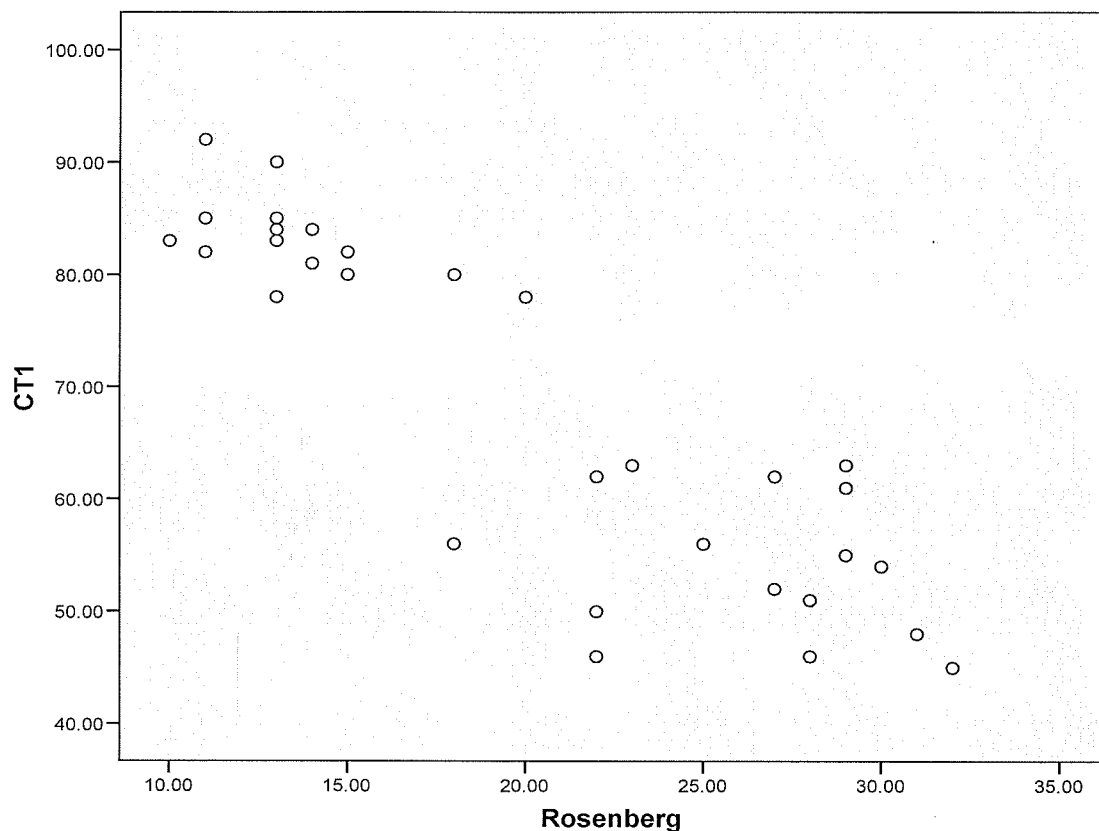
I performed initial analysis to determine whether the feedback manipulation was effective. A simple 1 x 3 (Diffctct x negative, average, positive feedback) analysis of variance (ANOVA) yielded no main effect, $F(2, 26) = 2.817$, $p = 0.076$. Contrary to my predictions, average feedback ($M = -8.4$) actually lowered state self-esteem more than negative feedback ($M = -3.45$). After conducting a post hoc test (Student-Newman-Keuls), results showed that the differences between the groups, although very close, did not reach statistical significance. Feedback did not effectively change the level of state self-esteem.

To determine whether the feedback manipulations altered the participants' level of self-enhancement a simple 1 x 3 (Diffocq x negative, average, positive feedback) ANOVA was conducted. No main effects of feedback were revealed, $F(2, 26) = 0.031$, $p = 0.970$. Feedback did not change the level of self-enhancement; a post hoc test (Student-Newman-Keuls) revealed no significant differences between the groups. It did not matter whether the feedback given was negative ($M = -4.27$), average ($M = 2.89$), or positive ($M = -4.08$), all participants self enhanced less and to the same extent after feedback.

A Pearson correlation was conducted to determine a relationship between trait self-esteem and state self-esteem; a significant positive correlation was found ($r = .88$). Participants with high trait self-esteem (Rosenberg) also had high levels of state self-esteem (ct1). The following scatterplot is displayed to show the relationship (Figure 1). Although a negative correlation is displayed, the relationship is actually positive. Low Rosenberg scores indicate high trait self-esteem scores; therefore the scatterplot shows

that participants who scored high on the Rosenberg also seemed to have high levels of state self-esteem.

Figure 1



Discussion

The hypothesis of this study was not supported. This study hypothesized that people with high state self-esteem would self enhance more than people with low state self-esteem, especially after receiving negative feedback. Feedback did not have an effect on the level of state self-esteem; therefore it would only make sense that feedback also did not have an effect on the level of self-enhancement. Since feedback did not seem to effectively change the level of state self-esteem, the level of self-enhancement did not

change either. If the level of state self-esteem was effectively changed then maybe a change in self-enhancement would have also been seen.

So, why was the feedback manipulation not effective in changing the level of state self-esteem? Well, there are a few reasons as to why this happened, for instance there could have been a problem with the believability of the test or with the credibility of the experimenter.

The test itself may not have been believable. The test was a shortened version of an original test; the original test has been effectively used in the past to measure self-enhancement. Although the test I used was based on the same idea of the original test, the items and categories used may not have been the best choice. The fake items may not have been believable and the categories may have been too easy. The categories were made up of common things, such as dogs or vegetables; people are pretty knowledgeable about these categories and this common knowledge may have resulted in the fake items being less believable.

The participants may not have really believed or trusted the experimenters or the tests. Most of the participants were about the same age or a little younger than the experimenters. This may have resulted in many of the participants taking the experiment lightly and not putting much effort into the questionnaires. For instance, after reviewing some of the Over-claiming Questionnaires it was noticed that some participants claimed never to have heard of some more common items, such as cauliflower or apple. This makes it hard to believe that all participants answered the questions truthfully. More thought should be put into the test items of the Over-claiming Questionnaire. Categories and items that are less common to everyday life may be more effective.

If we take this issue and apply it to the feedback situations, it can be possible that the participants did not believe the feedback they received on the tests. The participants may not have thought highly of the experimenters, perhaps because of their age and status, and brushed the feedback aside. It could be that having a more credible experimenter, such as a university professor, would be more effective in this type of experiment and with this participant age category.

The way the feedback was given may have also led the participants to not believing the feedback; maybe the way the experimenters marked the test had something to do with it. For example, the test may have been “marked” too fast, and maybe it would have been more believable if it took longer to mark each test. Basically, if the participants did not believe the feedback then it would clearly not change how they felt at the moment.

Another problem could have resulted from the nature of the RAT. The RAT came across as an alleged creativity test. The participants were given feedback as to whether or not they succeeded in being creative. Maybe this creativity trait was not an important one to possess. Participants may not have really cared as to whether or not they were creative and this could have been why the feedback on this test was not effective in changing the level of state self-esteem. If a test that was more important to people was given, like an intelligence test, maybe it would have produced different results. If people actually care about trait in which they are being tested on, then maybe the feedback on that trait would have a bigger impact on the level of state self-esteem. A test to see whether or not level of creativity was important to people would have also been useful in analysing the results.

Another important issue to talk about is how people try to keep their state self-esteem level with their trait self-esteem. The positive correlation found between the level

of state self-esteem and trait self-esteem reveals that most people with high trait self-esteem also seem to have high trait self-esteem. This may be important for future research on state self-esteem. Some possible future questions may be, why do people do this, or under what circumstances?

One important finding in regards to this issue was noticed before I did any statistical procedures on the data obtained. I looked at the mean score of state self-esteem of participants with high trait self-esteem before feedback ($M= 81.3$) and after ($M= 81.3$) feedback and low trait self-esteem before ($M= 53.7$) and after ($M= 43.7$) feedback , regardless of the feedback received. As we can see, there is much more variation between the scores for participants with low trait self-esteem before and after feedback, than in participants with high trait self-esteem. This suggests that it may be harder to change the state self-esteem of individuals with high trait self-esteem. This could be an important factor to consider when attempting to manipulate the level of state self-esteem.

In conclusion, if we want to see whether or not the level of state self-esteem has an effect on the level of self-enhancement we must find an effective way to manipulate the level of state self-esteem. If state self-esteem is actually changed then we would be able to see if the changes actually lead to a change in self-enhancement. So what it comes down to, and the goal of future research on this topic, is to find an effective way to manipulate state self-esteem. Reviewing the setbacks of this particular study and taking into consideration the suggestions of ways to possibly improve some components of the study, I am sure that one will eventually find out just how much of a role the level of state self-esteem may play in self-enhancing behaviour.

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