

CHAPTER 8

Peers and the Self

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The idea that children's and adolescents' experiences with their peers are associated with the self-concept is a standard fixture of theory and research on peer relations (Bukowski, Castellanos, Vitaro, & Brendgen, 2015; Rubin, Bukowski, & Bowker, 2015). Typically, this association is discussed in reference to the positive effects that friendship and acceptance can have on a child's self-perceptions of adequacy and well-being. The idea that peer relations have a direct impact on what is presumed to be an important component of adjustment has been a primary motive for studying peers since at least the 1950s (see Bukowski & Hoza [1989] for a historical summary). A search of bibliographic databases that use the key words *peer relations* and *self-concept* or *self-esteem* will turn up thousands of published studies. There is no doubt that peer relations and the self are seen as interrelated.

Although one can look favorably upon the idea that positive peer relations are an antecedent to a healthy self-concept, this view captures only one way by which the self and the peer system are related to each other. By itself this idea represents an interesting effect, but it underestimates the complexity of the self and the complexity of the peer system. Both of these phenomena are vast and richly complicated. Neither one can be reduced to a small set of measures or processes, and each one is more than an antecedent or a consequence of the other. The complexity and diversity of these concepts help make each of these phenomena challenging and fascinating topics of study. Understanding how they are associated with each other is even more challenging and more fascinating than studying either one alone.

In this chapter we discuss some of the many forms of intersection between peer relations and the "self." No chapter can cover every way by which the self and peer relations are interrelated. Instead, we have chosen to focus on a set of key issues that, in our opinion, are most important. The basis of our discussion is a review of how the self has been defined. We show that, although defining the self is not a simple matter, a particular definition may

be possible. This discussion of how the self can be defined is followed by a consideration of three critical issues about the self. The first concerns the basic features of the self and its structure. In regard to the features of the self, we discuss the standard view that the self has a substantive component, which refers to the specific features that are ascribed to the self, and that it has an evaluative component that refers to the degree to which the self has a positive or negative valence. In regard to the evaluative domain of the self, we ask whether it is structured as a single factor that goes from positive to negative or whether it has a two-factor structure in which one dimension is positive and the other is negative. The substantive and evaluative components of the self have two basic characteristics. One is stability. The self fluctuates across time more for some children than for others, particularly because it may be more responsive to proximal experiences. The other is bandwidth. *Bandwidth* refers to the temporal scope of the self. A child focused only on the present moment has a narrow bandwidth; a child whose substantive and evaluative self-components are based on experiences that occurred across a longer period has a broader bandwidth.

The second issue regarding the self is its basic processes. We focus on two broad processes that approach the self from different directions. One process concerns the maintenance of the boundaries around the self and the maintenance of the features of the self. A part of this process is internalization, which conceives of the self as an outcome that is the result of different types of experience. We claim that motivations for change come from interpersonal comparison. This view sees the self as a perceptual system in which the individual compares him- or herself to what others are like or compares his or her own expectations and goals to the expectations and goals of others. We propose that specific forms of self-related comparisons affect whom a child chooses to like, how much a child is likely to change to be more similar to his or her peers, and whether the child can perceive him- or herself as a well-adjusted individual. Efforts to maintain or change the self can also come from defensive strategies. Theory from biology, especially immunology and psychology, claims that the self functions as a form of defense.

Third, we then ask whether the self is “real.” This question comes in two forms. One concerns whether the self can be known or experienced in a fully conscious manner. Another concerns distortions in the self and whether distortions such as narcissism can affect patterns of attraction. Our discussion covers multiple domains, including friendship choice and patterns of attraction, peer influence, gender, school performance, aggression, psychophysiology, and well-being.

Before we begin our discussion, we raise one more issue that concerns whether the self matters. Why should we care about the self? Isn't it just an ephemeral entity that when it is positive, is little more than a sweet bonus to an otherwise happy life, and that when it is negative, is just a bit of extra cloud in an already dark sky? We offer two answers to this question. First, it is known that aspects of the self are antecedents of psychopathology. A meta-analysis assessed the utility of a vulnerability model in which low self-esteem would place individuals at risk for internalizing problems (Sowislo & Orth, 2013). Their analysis of 77 studies of depression and 18 studies of anxiety supported the view that low self-esteem is a risk factor for depression and anxiety. A study by one of us (W. M. B.) showed that distortions in the self were a predictor of aggression in preadolescent boys and girls (Bukowski, Schwartzman, Santo, Bagwell, & Adams, 2009). These findings are just two examples of how the self affects development. We hope that by the end of this chapter, we will have shown that the self matters.

MAIN ISSUES

Defining the Self

The self is never easy. It is hard to define, it is hard to measure, and researchers are never quite sure what to do with it. Definitions of the self are often heavily abstracted and amorphous. When definitions are offered, they often invoke exceedingly abstract concepts such as the “I,” the “me,” the actor, observer, and object, whose meanings are not intuitive or immediately clear. In other cases, many scholars who study the self choose not to provide a specific definition, apparently assuming that everyone knows what it is.

The experiences that are linked to the self are equally elusive. Self-related features and processes are believed to be implicated in a vast array of human systems, including cognition, emotion, memory, social relationships, and consciousness. It seems to touch anything that is related to being an individual who is aware of how one is apart from or connected to others, who can direct his own actions, who is aware of her own thoughts, and who can experience his or her own emotions. This breadth of experience makes defining the self a challenge. It means that a definition of the self needs to be holistic and encompassing, and at the same time, particular and relevant to specific domains. Insofar as the self cannot be tied to any particular or clearly specified domain of experience, and given that the self is implicated in so many functions and activities, it appears to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

This ubiquitous status of the self is reinforced by its centrality to ideas in a very broad array of scholarly domains. The self is claimed as a critical concept by many scholarly disciplines, including art history (Foucault, 1983), biology (Tauber, 2016), cultural and gender studies (Probyn, 1993), literature (Howe, 1991), philosophy (Taylor, 1989), psychology (Harter, 2012), religion (Coleman, 2009), and sociology (Mead, 1934). Surely, the self is one of the world’s most widely adopted constructs. Its status as a central concept of the current cultural moment is seen in the designation of the word *selfie* to be the 2013 “word of the year” by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2013).

The breadth and extensive multidisciplinary interest in the concept of the self can be seen as an indicator of its strength and utility. If everyone wants to use the concept, and if aspects of the self are the basic components of multiple forms of human experience, then how can it not be recognized and adopted as a critical concept for understanding human functioning? This breadth, however, poses a basic problem: As a construct that is shared by so many disciplines, its meaning becomes so general that it is difficult to define, study, and understand.

There are two problems with definitions of the self-concept. One is tautological reasoning, and the other is the excessive use of abstract concepts. Consider, for example, a definition from Baumeister (1999), a psychologist interested in the self. He defined the self as “the individual’s belief about *himself* or *herself*, including the person’s attributes and who and what the *self* is” (p. 13). One can partly grasp what he is saying, but it is hard to accept a definition of a concept that uses the concept as part of the definition. Csikszentmihalyi (2002, p. 23) commits this same error when he says that the self is “the information we use to represent to ourselves who we are.”

Other psychologists have tended to avoid offering a clear definition. In two classic papers, neither Cushman (1990) nor Epstein (1973) offered a specific definition. Cushman

said, “By the self I mean the concept of the individual as articulated by the indigenous psychology of a particular cultural group” (1990, p. 599). Epstein summed it up this way: “Some authors, apparently having despaired of providing an adequate definition, dispense with the matter by an appeal to common sense and by asserting that everyone knows that he has a self and surely as he knows what belongs to him and what does not” (p. 404). Definitions from other social sciences are also limited in their value. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) described the self-concept of people in the Western world by identifying the features of the self rather than saying what the self is. The literary critic Irving Howe (1991) followed a similar approach when he defined the self as “a construct of mind, a hypothesis of being, socially formed even as it can be quickly turned against the very social formations that have brought it into birth. The locus of self often appears as ‘inner,’ experienced as a presence savingly apart from both social milieu and quotidian existence. At its root lies a tacit polemic, in opposition to the ages” (p. 205). Perhaps these conceptualizations lack clarity and precision because the self lacks clarity and precision. Camus’s (1955) description of the self reinforces the view that it is difficult to grasp. He wrote “this self of which I feel sure, if I try to define and to summarize it, it is nothing but water slipping through my fingers” (p 14).

How do we define the self? We offer two definitions. One is intended as a general all-purpose definition that could be used across disciplines: “The *self* refers to how a person perceives, experiences, and thinks about his or her features, existence, and functioning in the past, present, and future.” Another definition has a specifically academic tone: “The *self* is a useful concept for understanding what defines an individual and what does not define an individual.” We believe that both of these definitions capture what the self is in a concise way that is also inclusive and easy to grasp.

Basic Processes

Regardless of whether one has a clear definition of what the self is, one can ask what it does and where it comes from. In terms of what it is does, the self is typically seen as having a regulatory function that affects the evaluative component of the self. It has been speculated that the positive affect associated with a positive view of the self (i.e., high self-esteem) is protective because it blunts the effects of external influence (Rhodes & Woods, 1992; Tesser, Crepaz, Collins, Cornell, & Beach, 2000). Regardless of the specific mechanisms by which this defense occurs (see Tesser et al., 2000), it is apparent that individuals with positive views of themselves are less likely than those with low self-esteem to be affected by negative experiences. Two specific mechanisms have been offered to explain this effect. One mechanism refers to the functioning of a *self-consistency bias* in which ambiguous but possibly negative information is reframed so as to reflect a more positive impression (Bohrnstedt & Felson, 1983). The other is that the positive affect associated with a positive view of self can be transferred or generalized to other experiences, even though these other experiences may have a negative valence (Tesser et al., 2000). In this way the effect of potentially negative experiences is minimized when persons with high self-esteem encounter them. The process of self-consistency also has consequences for motivation. As Harter (2012) has shown, children who see themselves positively may be more likely than others to engage in behaviors that reinforce these views. This idea has maladaptive consequences for children whose evaluative self has a negative valence. It is important to note that an implication of the

description of these processes is that the self includes an important monitoring component in which the self is sensitive to what it is and what it is not.

This concept of self as a form of defense is seen in recent theory about immunology. Tauber (2016) has asked whether the immune system functions as a form of self in the sense that its purpose is to detect whether or not something is part of the individual (i.e., the self), and when it is not, to eliminate it. Tauber is careful to point out that this view of immunology-as-self takes a very strong position on the dividing line between what is part of the individual/self and what it is not. This clean line between self and non-self and the defensive strategies that this distinction provokes stand in contrast to a more fluid and ecological view, in which the self is seen as in constant commerce with the external world, and the features of what do and do not comprise the self are seen as making the self more flexible. This perspective assumes that the substance of the self changes as a function of whether a potentially new feature is identified as being healthy or not healthy for the self.

The concept of the self as having a strong defensive function is not entirely consistent with what we know about peer relations. It is true that children tend to stay away from peers to whom they have very limited similarity or whom they see as a threat. Nevertheless, the strong self–non-self distinction stands in dialectical contrast to the well-established views that common ground is important for peer relations and that friendships are transcendent experiences in which the two friends become increasingly more similar (i.e., less distinct from each other).

Is the Self Real?

It is important to keep in mind that the self has two broad components. One component is substantive and refers to the features that a person ascribes to the self. These features could be superficial (“I have brown hair”) or abstract (“I am a socialist”). The second component is evaluative and refers to the degree to which one perceives the self in a positive or negative manner. For either of these aspects of the self, one can ask whether it is real. From one perspective this question is nonsensical. How a person perceives him- or herself is how the person perceives him- or herself and there is nothing more to say. A perception is a perception. The degree to which these views approximate an objective set of indicators may be irrelevant. At the same time, there has been interest in individuals whose views of themselves appear to be especially discrepant from how they are seen by others or from impartial assessment. This distortion in the self-perception is the core feature of narcissism. Narcissistic individuals see themselves as more important and competent than others, but these views are not shared by others. Narcissism has two important features. One is that this inflated sense of self coexists with a need for external validation (e.g., Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). The narcissistic individual feels superior to others, while at the same time having a profound need to be validated by the individuals to whom the narcissistic person feels superior (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Morf, Tochetti, & Schürch, 2011). A second feature is that this sense of self is very fragile and can be threatened easily. This fragility and the sensitivity to threat are strong indicators that in one way, the narcissistic self is real (i.e., narcissistic persons see themselves this way), but in others ways the narcissistic self is weak and unstable.

Along these same lines one can ask whether a child can know the real self. A distinction has been drawn between implicit self-esteem and explicit self-esteem. *Implicit self-esteem* refers to a child’s evaluations of him- or herself that occur in a spontaneous, automatic, or

unconscious manner, whereas *explicit self-esteem* consists of more conscious and reflective self-evaluations that are presumably part of a child's awareness.

Does the Evaluative Self Have a One-Factor or Two-Factor Structure?

The evaluative dimension of the self is typically treated as a single dimension whose ends are positive and negative. Self-esteem, for example, is conceived as being either high or low. Although this single-factor view of the evaluative self appears to be widely accepted, there is reason to think that it may be too simple. Instead, there is reason to think that the evaluative self may have a two-factor structure: one for positive and one for negative valence. The idea that the evaluative self has a two-dimensional structure comes from two research domains. One is concerned with the divergence between positive and negative emotions. Warr, Barter, and Brownbridge (1983) have shown that positive and negative affects are "relatively" independent dimensions of experience. They are not polar opposites, in which the presence of one form implies the absence of the other. Second, there is evidence from studies of functional brain imaging that positive and negative experiences are processed in different regions of the brain (de Bruijn, de Lange, von Cramon, & Ullsperger, 2009). According to the idea that the self has a two-dimensional structure, a child can maintain positive views and negative views of his or her functioning in a single domain at the same time. For example, one can perceive the self as both positive ("I am happy with the way I am") and negative ("If I could, I would change the way I am").

In summary, basic questions about the self can be framed according to what it is, how it works, whether it is real, and how it is structured. One can, of course, ask other questions. These questions often come up in theories about the self and are covered in the next section.

THEORY

Theory about the self is too extensive and broad to cover in a chapter. For purposes of exploring the association between the self and peer relations, however, we can address three theoretical perspectives: One has to do with the concept of discrepancy, one with internalization, and one with the primacy of emotion.

Discrepancy and the Self

One way to think about the self concerns the discrepancies between the features of the self. One example of discrepancy would be a difference between a current state and a desired one. This sort of discrepancy is akin to the Piagetian concept of disequilibrium. Disequilibrium occurs when one's perception of one's functioning is discrepant from one's experience of it. According to the Piagetian model, disequilibrium, as a form of discrepancy, will motivate change.

One can argue that discrepancy is inherent in the evaluative component of the self. Typically, a child with low self-esteem is seen as experiencing a difference between who he or she is and who he or she wants to be. Measures of self-esteem often refer directly to this discrepancy between what one is like and what one would like to be. For example, in

Harter's (1982) well-known Perceived Competence Scale for Children, the items in the self-esteem subscale (i.e., the measure of general self-worth) refer to whether one would change things about oneself if these changes were possible.

This idea that self-esteem can be treated as a form of difference is part of Leary's conceptualization of self-esteem as a "sociometer" (Leary, 1999; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Leary & Downs, 1995; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Leary sees the "self" as a descriptive and motivational construct that functions as a monitor of the degree to which one is being included or excluded by other people. He proposes that this perception of self will motivate a person to change so as to behave in ways that minimize exclusion. Low self-esteem will motivate children to change in ways that will increase their connections to others; in contrast, children who have high self-esteem will see no discrepancy between their social involvement and their desire to be included, and they will see no need for change. An assumption of this idea is that self-perceptions are reasonably accurate. When they are not, the sociometer would not be useful.

The concept of discrepancy and self-esteem is also seen in Rhodes and Woods's (1992) ideas about self-esteem and susceptibility to change. They argued that persons with low self-esteem—that is, those who see a discrepancy between who they are and who they want to be—would be more vulnerable to peer pressure. When applied to the concept of peer influence, this view implies that children who are low in self-esteem may be more easily influenced by peers than are children with high self-esteem.

It is important to note that according to these theories, discrepancies in the evaluative self affect the likelihood of changes in the features of the substantive self. In this way, self-evaluations affect the formation of the substantive self, such that negative evaluations are the impetus for change.

Internalization

According to theory from a group of sociologists known as the symbolic interactionists (Mead, 1934), and from American psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan (1953/1997), the self is formed via a process of internalization. They claim that persons define themselves according to how they believe others perceive them. According to the symbolic interactionists, one's recognition of how one is perceived and treated by others is internalized to form both the substantive and evaluative self. Mead (1934) argued that exchanges among peers that involve cooperation, competition, conflict, and/or friendly discussion afford opportunities for learning about the self because it is in these contexts that one can see how one is perceived by others.

Sullivan (1953/1997) also believed that the self was formed within the context of peer relations. He proposed that relationships with co-equals in early adolescence provides opportunities for self-validation that would promote an enduring sense of a positive self. Sullivan's claim about peer relations and the formation of the self was very specific. He argued that the critical feature of peer experiences is validation, specifically that peer relations affect the formation of the self by providing experiences that either confirm or disconfirm its value. In this way, the evaluative self comes from the experiences of validation and security by peers. According to this view, the effects on well-being of experiences such as companionship and intimacy are mediated by validity and security.

The Primacy of Affect

One final area of theory concerns the relative importance of the substantive self and the evaluative self. We have seen already that importance is ascribed to the substantive self in social-cognitive theories of self-consistency (Bohrnstedt & Felson, 1983). The substantive self is at the center of ideas regarding the self and the functioning of the immune system. One view of this system is that it distinguishes between what is part of the self and what is not and that the system functions to maintain this distinction.

Other approaches privilege the evaluative self (Harter, 2012). It is presumed to be the source of energy and motivation, and it is likely to be the aspect of the self that is associated most directly with one's sense of subjective well-being. This point is especially apparent in the time-honored theories of Sullivan (1953/1997) and Zajonc (1984). It is also implied in the idea that low self-esteem is a form of vulnerability that puts children at risk for internalizing problems (Sowislo & Orth, 2013) and increases their susceptibility to negative peer influences (Bukowski, Velasquez, & Brendgen, 2008). If it is the case that the evaluative component of the self is the more important antecedent of well-being, then the measures of this aspect of the self would be better predictors of the self than are indices of the substantive self.

MEASURES AND METHODS

Measures of the self can be either explicit or implicit. An example of explicit measures are self-report scales in which children indicate how much they agree with statements indicating either a positive or negative view of the self. A well-known example is Harter's (1982) Perceived Competence Scale for Children. Harter (2012) has described the available measures of the explicit self. Measures of the implicit self are used less frequently. In contrast with measures of explicit self-esteem, measures of implicit self-esteem are intended to index unconscious and automatic representations and responses. These typically rely on measures of response latencies. Van Lier and colleagues developed a measure of implicit self-esteem for use with adolescents (Leeuwis, Koot, Creemers, & van Lier, 2015).

MAIN FINDINGS

In this section we report findings from four areas of the self. We see the four areas as important evidence of the diverse ways in which the self has been studied. These areas are (1) the effect of peer relations on the academic self-concept, (2) the effect of friendship on the evaluative self, (3) the effect of self-perceptions of gender typicality on self-esteem, and (4) the effects of the fragility of the self on aggression. We highlight research on academic self-concept because this domain is often overlooked and because the available database is rich in measures and findings.

The Academic Self-Concept

The academic self-concept comes from experiences in the school environment with its main determinant being the achievement of the individual (Schöne, Dickhaeuser, Spinath, &

Steinsmeier-Pelster, 2002). Achievement does not influence the formation of the academic self-concept directly; instead, individuals use processes of comparison of their own achievement to arrive at a conclusion about their abilities/talents (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2002). Most achievement situations occur in a social context, especially scholastic achievement. Therefore, research assumes that persons use social comparison to make a statement about the degree of their own abilities (see Festinger, 1954; Meyer, 1984; Schöne et al., 2002). In other words, individuals make statements about their own abilities based on comparisons with the abilities of their peers. Such processes of social comparison are also used to explain group effects on the individual's academic self-concept, such as the so-called "big fish, little pond effect": The same degree of an individual's achievement results in a lower academic self-concept when compared to a high-capacity versus a low-capacity comparison group, because comparisons with others who have a higher capacity are more probable (see Marsh & Hau, 2003; Schöne et al., 2002).

These social comparisons are only one of three potential points of reference: The multidimensional approach of academic self-concept (Schöne et al., 2002) distinguishes between individual, social, and criteria benchmarks. Furthermore, an individual's academic self-concept, lacking any benchmarks, is called an "absolute academic self-concept" in self research (Schöne et al., 2002). Academic self-concept is an important protective factor fostering well-being (Jerusalem, 1993) and promoting positive educational outcomes, such as effort, aspirations, and academic achievement (Green et al., 2012; Yeung, 2011), which makes it a significant determinant of educational success.

Peers function not only as a social reference group in the formation of one's academic self-concept, but they are also an important source of social support (positive) and/or rejection (negative), which contributes to the formation of the academic self-concept as well. In other words, the self-concept is also developed through feedback from others (Pajares & Schunk, 2005), and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to peer acceptance or rejection (McLachlan, Zimmer-Gembeck, & McGregor, 2010; Sebastian, Viding, Williams, & Blakemore, 2010). This phenomenon, known as *hypersensitivity to acceptance and rejection by peers* (McLachlan et al., 2010), manifests itself in the fact that difficulties with peers (e.g., peer rejection and exclusion) during adolescence show a particularly harmful effect and represent a powerful predictor of many psychological problems such as loneliness and depression (London, Downey, Bonica, & Paltin, 2007; Platt, Kadosh, & Lau, 2013; Zimmer-Gembeck, Hunter, & Pronk, 2007). This finding might also explain the results of several studies that provide proof that, especially during adolescence, the self-concept is quite inconsistent in level and stability (Brinthaup & Lipka, 2002; Savin-Williams & Demo, 1984).

In summary, although the academic self-concept is likely to derive most directly from achievement-related experiences in school, the self-perceptions that form the academic self-concept are not independent of the peer context. Peers serve as points of comparison and as sources of support. In the next section we consider the effects of peer experiences on self-esteem.

Peer Experiences and the Evaluative Self

The idea that relationships with peers affect self-perceptions of well-being has been examined in several studies and summarized in a widely cited meta-analysis by Gorrese and Ruggieri (2013). They examined the results of 24 studies investigating the association between

peer experiences and self-esteem in adolescents. The bulk of these studies examined the association between broad indices of peer relations and self-esteem. Only a few studies had assessed specific dimensions of experience, such as trust or intimacy. The researchers' analysis demonstrated significant correlations between the measures of peer relations and self-esteem. These associations were found in studies that used broad measures of peer relations as well as in those that used more specific dimensions. Importantly, Gorrese and Ruggieri observed a large degree of heterogeneity across the studies they reviewed.

Although this research supports the general hypothesis, Gorrese and Ruggieri (2013) were wise to point out that their analysis could not specify which aspects of peer experience are most important. This consideration is important in relation to Sullivan's theory, which placed specific emphasis on the importance of validation as the primary feature of friendship for well-being. In this way, the meta-analysis by Gorrese and Ruggieri, although important, leaves the more important hypothesis unaddressed.

The Self and Aggression

The traditional view in psychology that self-esteem and aggression are independent of each other or are negatively interrelated has been challenged by theory and empirical evidence. Baumeister, Smart, and Boden (1996) proposed that an inflated sense of self is fragile and can be threatened easily. They proposed that aggression can be the result of the need to defend one's illusory self from perceived threats. That is, when there is a discrepancy between one's view of the self and the feedback one receives about one's functioning, an individual will act aggressively in a defensive manner against the source of this information. This form of aggressive retaliatory defense will be activated even when the attack is based on accurate information. As seen in other models that invoke the notion of self-discrepancy (e.g., Kupersmidt, Sigda, Sedikides, & Voelger, 1999), Baumeister and his colleagues are careful to point out that it is not high self-esteem, *per se*, that leads to aggression but, instead, that aggression results from the perceived need to defend a fragile self.

The ideas of Baumeister and colleagues (1996) are similar to ideas proposed Raskin, Novacek, and Hogan (1991a, 1991b), who proposed that hostility, grandiosity, and a need for dominance are interrelated constructs and are strongly related to narcissism. Raskin and colleagues proposed that narcissistic persons have high needs for dominance, have a fragile sense of self, and are deeply invested in maintaining a highly positive view of the self. Despite the similarities between the perspectives of Baumeister and colleagues and Raskin and colleagues, there are some notable differences between their models. Whereas Baumeister and colleagues specify a particular mechanism by which the self and aggression are linked (i.e., the discrepancy-based process discussed above), Raskin and colleagues treat this association as a core feature of the personality and do not tie it to a particular process. They argue that dominance, grandiosity, and the narcissistic style serve to manage hostile feelings and to maintain a sense of well-being. In this way, their model implies a more general or pervasive personality type that involves specific generalized motives (e.g., dominance, self-enhancement) rather than being a phenomenon that derives from a particular process. Either way, it is reasonable to expect that measures that index a fragile and or inflated self will be associated with measures of aggression.

This hypothesis has been tested in at least three studies. In their study of older school-age children, Bukowski and colleagues (2009) examined the association between a measure

of narcissism and four types of aggression: reactive, proactive, physical, and relational. Consistent with the ideas of Baumeister and colleagues (1996) and Raskin and colleagues (1991a, 1991b), the measure of narcissism was observed to be more strongly associated with reactive aggression than to proactive aggression and more strongly associated with relational aggression than to physical aggression. Lee (2014) reported similar findings. Using a sample of early adolescents, Lee created an index of temporal instability in the self by assessing fluctuations in a measure of the self across a 4-day period. Her findings indicated that this index of instability in the self was positively related to a measure of reactive aggression. These findings were replicated and extended by Lynch, Kistner, Stephens, and David-Ferdon (2016) in a study of school-age children. They reported that positively biased (i.e., inflated) self-perceptions led to increases in relational, but not overt, aggression.

Together these three studies show that indices of weakness in the self, as manifested in measures indicating the presence of a fragile or inflated self, are antecedents of reactive and relational forms of aggression. These results are evidence of a downside to the self's defensive or regulatory functions. In an effort to protect a weak self, children are likely to act out against their peers.

Gender Typicality and Well-Being

In this last section of findings, we discuss the association between gender identity and well-being. Gender identity has been conceptualized according to four dimensions: *felt typicality* (i.e., the degree to which a child sees him- or herself to be similar to other members of his or her gender), *contentedness* (how content the child is with his or her gender), *felt pressure* (how much pressure the child feels to conform to gender norms), and *intergroup bias* (how much the child favors his or her own gender category over another (Egan & Perry, 2001). It is important to note that the two specifically self-focused dimensions of this conceptualization (i.e., typicality and contentedness) parallel the two basic dimensions of the self, specifically the substantive (in this case, one's sense of typicality) and the evaluative (in this case, one's sense of contentedness or satisfaction).

Research examining the relationship between gender identity and self-worth has been much more focused on typicality than on contentedness. The most widely cited studies have revealed a positive association between typicality and well-being. Egan and Perry (2001) reported that children who perceived themselves to have a high level of gender typicality were more likely than their peers to have a high level of self-esteem; children who perceived themselves to have a low degree of gender typicality were more likely than their peers to have a lower self-worth (Egan & Perry, 2001). Following this initial study, Smith and Leaper (2006) wanted to replicate this finding and to extend it by testing for the presence of an indirect pathway that would account for the association between typicality and well-being. They examined whether gender-typical children have higher self-esteem in part because their peers accept them, and whether gender-atypical children have lower self-esteem in part because their peers do not accept them. In other words, they wished to address the role of the peer group in the social process of gender development. In a sample of adolescents attending a summer sports camp, they found that the positive association between gender typicality and perceived self-worth was partially due to an indirect pathway via a measure of perceived peer acceptance (Smith & Leaper, 2006). This finding shows that the association between two aspects of the self (i.e., perceiving the self as typical

and having a positive view of the self) was explained by the children's view of their functioning within the peer group.

Summary

In this section we have shown the diverse ways in which the self-concept is associated with peer experiences. The associations cover multiple aspects of the self, including the academic self-concept, self-esteem, the fragility of the self and distortions in the self, and perceptions of gender typicality. They also cover different forms of peer experiences, including comparative processes, friendship, and different forms of aggression. These findings point to the breadth and the depth of the association between peer relations and the self.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this final section we point to some directions for future research. We propose that five domains provide rich opportunities for the next wave of studies on the intersection between peer experiences and the self. We offer a brief summary of each one.

One potential direction concerns the topic covered in the last part of the prior section. As we indicated, research on the association between gender identity and well-being has used a substantive measure of the self, specifically, typicality. As we have seen, these studies have produced clear and interesting findings. One can argue, however, that it might be as profitable to study this association with an evaluative measure of the self. In this case, this type of measure would be a measure of gender contentedness. If, as we argued in a prior section, the affective components of the self have more significance than the substantive features, then the measure of contentedness would mean more than the measure of typicality.

Another direction would address whether a distorted self affects the selection of friends. It has been argued that children with an inflated sense of self seek the approval of high-status peers. If this is the case, then children who are high in narcissism will be more likely than other children to choose high-status peers as friends, and their inflated sense of self will be supported and maintained by being liked by high-status peers. These hypotheses are distinct because they point to the effect of the self on peer experience. Attraction to peers is an understudied topic by peer researchers. The study of these hypotheses would increase research on this neglected topic.

Research on the structure of the self has also been neglected in developmental research. Most research on the evaluative self assumes it is a single factor. We have argued that there is reason to challenge this claim. Nearly every measure of the evaluative self includes positive and negative items. Problems can arise when negative items include the word *not* or another word indicating negation. Often, however, positively and negatively worded items differ in their content ("I am pleased with how I function" and "I wish I could change the way I am"). Anyone who has a measure of the evaluative self that includes positive and negative items can assess whether these items fit one dimension or two.

Another structurally oriented aspect of the self that is ripe for study is bandwidth. *Bandwidth* refers to the temporal breadth of the self. A child whose self has a narrow bandwidth is situated too much in the present moment. One can hypothesize that the child's evaluative self may be at the mercy of moment-by-moment fluctuations in experience. One can

also hypothesize that a child whose self has a broad bandwidth that is based on experiences that have occurred across a longer period will be less vulnerable to momentary experiences. Bandwidth deserves our attention.

Finally, there is culture. It is claimed (see Geertz, 1973) that cultures vary in their sense of self. This concept has come up in some aspects of developmental research (e.g., Cole, Bruschi, & Tamang, 2002), but it has not made much of a direct appearance in peer research. It is conceivable that the study of cultural variations in the implicit self may be especially interesting.

CONCLUSIONS

The concept of the self is broad and elusive. The peer system is equally broad but easier to grasp. The associations between these systems are important. They account for variations in well-being, for processes of affiliation, for school competence, for aggression, and for children's susceptibility to the harmful effects of peer influence and the negative experiences in the peer group. The understanding of the self and the understanding of peer relations will be enhanced by further research on how these systems intersect.

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