Introduction

Feelings of self-worth and personal value are important to self-concept and predict an individual’s health and well-being. However, previous studies suggest the pursuit of high self-esteem (i.e., trying to feel good about yourself) may be costly to learning, relationships, and health. We suggest that self-esteem goals can serve a positive function in maintaining overall well-being instead of a costly one by motivating people to pursue important goals. People may pursue these goals because they serve as means to achieving high self-esteem.

Hypothesis

People who pursue high self-esteem will have greater intentions to pursue other important life goals, relative to people who do not pursue high self-esteem.

Methods

Two studies (n=200, n=200)

Pre-registered study design, analyses, and hypotheses for both studies

Study 1: Sample of undergraduates from UMD

Study 2: Sample of full-time U.S. employees

Participants assigned to two counterbalanced conditions using a within-subject design: a high self-esteem condition and a neutral self-esteem condition.

Manipulated self-esteem goals using explicit instructions to maintain high versus neutral feelings of self-worth and measured participants’ intentions to engage in specific behaviors related to important life outcomes.

When individuals pursue high self-esteem (versus neutral self-esteem), they plan to try harder at important goals such as academic/work achievement, relationships, reappraisal, self-compassion, self-improvement and health.

Measures

Academic and Workplace Achievement: Achievement Goal Questionnaire, performance & mastery goals; adapted Goal Orientations measure

Relationships: Compassionate Goals in Friendships measure

Reappraisal: Emotion Regulation Questionnaire

Self-compassion: Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form

Self-improvement: Self-Improvement Motivation

Health: Revised Hardiness Health Inventory for General Health; health promoting behaviors from the Wellness Behavior Inventory

Results

Repeated measure ANOVA and MANOVAs revealed that participants reported significantly greater behavioral intentions for all seven DVs in the high-self esteem versus neutral self-esteem conditions (p's<.001).

Conclusions/Future Directions

Results replicated in two different samples.

All hypotheses were supported.

Our study extends previous literature about the effects of self-esteem goals, suggesting that self-esteem goals can have positive outcomes.

Future directions could examine potential moderators (e.g. culture, personality).

References:


For more information: jrfern14@umd.edu and elemay@umd.edu