Reconciling Autonomy and Self-Enhancement: Is Consistency the Key to Well-Being?

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Reconciling Autonomy and Self-Enhancement: Is Consistency the Key to Well-Being?

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**Universal Motivations?**

Self-enhancement: The desire to see the self positively is a widespread and dominant motivation, and has been shown to exist cross-culturally (e.g., O’Mara et al., 2012).

Autonomy: feeling responsible for one’s life, that one’s choices and behaviors are self-made and consistent with one’s beliefs and values (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

**Relevant Research**


**The Present Study**

**Goal 1**

Replicate previous research by finding support for a positive association between autonomy and approach oriented self-enhancement. (Lynch & O’Mara, 2012).

**Goal 2**

Examine whether self-enhancement results in greatest well-being when the strategy used is congruent with one's level of autonomy (e.g., high autonomy and approach oriented self-enhancement).

**Method**

378 participants (169 women, 206 men, 3 did not specify gender) completed the following measures online (Time 1).

- **Self-Enhancement:** Self-Enhancement and Self-Protection Strategies Scale (Hepper et al., 2010)
- **Autonomy:** General Causality Orientations Scale (Deci & Ryan, 1985; as cited in Hodgins, Koestner, and Duncan, 1996)
- **Psychological well-being:** Satisfaction with Life Scale (Pavot & Diener, 1993), Subjective Well-Being Scale (Sevastos et al., 1992), Subjective Vitality Scale (Ryan & Frederick, 1997), Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983), and Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977).

105 of those participants (54 men and 51 women) returned for the lab portion. All participants were:
- Given 45 seconds each to complete 3 impossible mazes.
- Then given false negative performance feedback.
- Randomly assigned to 1 of 3 conditions to cope with the negative feedback:
  - Approach—generate 3 past experiences where you performed well.
  - Avoidant—generate 3 external reasons that prevented you from succeeding.
  - Control—list everything you at for your last 3 meals.
- Finally, participants completed the well-being measures from Time 1.

**Results**

**Goal 1**

Using a multi-level model, self-enhancement was regressed onto autonomy, and subscale scale.

Successfully replicated previous findings—autonomous individuals engage in approach but not avoidance strategies of self-enhancement

**Goal 2**

A multi-level model regressed well-being onto autonomy, condition, and well-being scale.

Results indicated the autonomy by condition interaction did not significantly predict well-being, $F(2, 95) = 2.14, p = 0.12$.

Additionally, neither autonomy, $F(1, 95) = 0.72, p = 0.49$, nor condition, $F(2, 95) = 0.72, p = 0.49$, significantly predicted well-being.

**Conclusions**

The current research contributes to the debate over the universality of self-enhancement by identifying strategies that autonomous individuals use to self-enhance.

Future research should continue to investigate which strategies promote psychological well-being for autonomous individuals.

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