
In Search of Clarity: Self-Esteem and Domains of Confidence and Confusion

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To date, research suggests that self-concept clarity is a monolithic construct: Some people have clearly defined self-concepts in all domains, whereas others do not. The authors argued that self-concept clarity is instead multifaceted and varies across trait domains. The authors predicted that social commodities (SCs; e.g., looks, popularity, social skills) would show less self-concept clarity than would communal qualities (CQs; e.g., kindness, warmth, honesty), due to domain differences in observability, ambiguity, and controllability. Results replicated past findings that self-esteem predicts self-concept clarity but also demonstrated that participants' SC self-views were less clear than their CQ self-views. Moreover, people showed greater clarity about traits that were lower in observability and higher in ambiguity and controllability. These findings suggest that everyone, regardless of self-esteem, has self-concept domains of relative confidence and confusion.

Keywords: *self-concept; self-concept clarity; self-esteem; trait domains*

How pathetically scanty my self-knowledge is when compared to, say, my knowledge of my room. There is no such thing as observation of the inner world, as there is of the outer world.

—Franz Kafka

Although Kafka was commenting on the nature of human perception in the above quotation, his observation also reveals that he may have had poor self-concept clarity. *Self-concept clarity* refers to the extent to which one's beliefs about one's attributes are clear, confidently held, internally consistent, stable, and cognitively accessible (Campbell, 1990; Campbell et al., 1996). In her influential 1990 article, Campbell demonstrated that

self-esteem predicts variation in self-concept clarity (see also Baumgardner, 1990). Specifically, higher self-esteem individuals have relatively clear self-concepts, whereas lower self-esteem individuals have relatively unclear self-concepts. In the present research, we test a novel clarity hypothesis: People's self-knowledge is more "pathetically scanty" in some trait domains than in others. We propose that self-concept clarity is not a monolithic construct but that everyone, regardless of level of self-esteem, has greater self-concept clarity about certain domains of traits and poorer self-concept clarity about other domains of traits.

Self-Concept Clarity and Self-Esteem

Clarity has been widely accepted as a key characteristic that distinguishes individuals with higher self-esteem (HSEs) from individuals with lower self-esteem (LSEs; e.g., Baumeister, 1993). Self-esteem differences in clarity have been used to explain a wide array of findings. For example, self-concept clarity may account for *low*

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self-esteem plasticity (Brockner, 1984). That is, LSEs may be more susceptible than HSEs to self-relevant social cues because a lack of self-concept clarity leaves LSEs more open to their influence (Campbell & Lavalley, 1993). In addition, poor self-concept clarity may help to explain the positive association between self-esteem and well-being; HSEs may be able to draw on their clear self-knowledge to manage their lives effectively, whereas LSEs may have problems setting appropriate or achievable goals because of their unclear self-knowledge (Baumeister, 1993). In addition, HSEs excel at bringing to mind their positive traits after a threat to self-esteem (e.g., Dodgson & Wood, 1998), a technique that allows HSEs to reestablish their self-worth following negative experiences. LSEs find this task more difficult, only in part because they believe they have fewer personal strengths than do HSEs; poor self-concept clarity may lead LSEs to have more difficulty bringing to mind the strengths they do believe they possess.

As the preceding discussion suggests, to date, self-concept clarity has been conceptualized as a *monolithic construct*: HSEs have clearly defined self-concepts across all domains of self-knowledge, whereas LSEs do not, again across all domains. In contrast to this traditional conceptualization of clarity, we propose that self-concept clarity is multifaceted and varies systematically across some domains of traits. As we will describe shortly, our hypothesis suggests that LSEs are not globally unclear about their self-views and that HSEs are not globally clear.

Why Would Self-Concept Clarity Vary Across Trait Domains?

Our theorizing is predicated on the assumption that the self-concept is a distinctly social entity (Pelham, 1991; Tice & Wallace, 2003). Sources of self-knowledge include reflected appraisals, social comparison, and self-reflection (Wayment & Taylor, 1995). Clearly, reflected appraisal and social comparison are social processes. Less obvious is that self-reflection is a social process, but it typically involves thinking about one's behavior during social interactions (Sedikides & Skowronski, 1995). If one's self-views are formed via interpersonal processes, then self-concept clarity—the certainty, confidence, and stability of those self-views—is likely to be socially determined as well (e.g., Campbell & Lavalley, 1993).

Campbell and Lavalley (1993) share the view that self-concept clarity develops through social processes. They suggested that people's daily lives are filled with both positive and negative self-relevant social cues, and that if one pays attention to all social cues, one will develop poor self-concept clarity. Campbell and Lavalley argued further that differences in attention to social cues

may lead to self-esteem differences in clarity: HSEs may be better than LSEs at selectively attending to positive self-relevant social cues, and this selective attention may lead to HSEs' clearer self-concepts.

We suggest that one's ability to selectively attend to self-relevant social cues is influenced not only by self-esteem. Rather, one's ability to selectively attend to only positive social cues is influenced by at least three important factors: the ambiguity, controllability, and observability of the traits that are the subject of the self-relevant social cues. Recently, Anthony, Holmes, and Wood (2007) identified two domains of socially valued traits that compose distinct and important content domains of the self-concept: *social commodities* and *communal qualities*. We believe that these domains differ on important dimensions that influence self-concept clarity.

Social Commodities and Communal Qualities

People have a strong "need to belong" that motivates them to obtain and maintain high-quality social bonds (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Because of the need to belong, people are also strongly motivated to monitor their relational value to others (e.g., Leary & Baumeister, 2000). But which traits determine one's relational value? Anthony et al. (2007) argued that the traits that are most valued in an interaction partner are those that can be quickly and accurately assessed. Social commodities (SCs), such as physical attractiveness, social skills, and social status, are relatively unambiguous and easily observable traits. Moreover, it is very difficult to fake one's SCs because confirmatory or disconfirmatory evidence concerning one's true possession of SCs is so easy for others to notice. For example, it is nearly impossible to significantly mislead other people about one's physical attractiveness, even with makeup and clothing. Moreover, it is difficult to fake good social skills, because one simply possesses, or does not possess, good conversational skills.

Whereas SCs are relatively simple to accurately assess in an interaction partner, communal qualities (CQs), such as kindness, warmth, and honesty, are socially prized traits that are relatively unobservable and ambiguous and thus difficult for others to accurately assess. We suggest that one important reason for this difficulty may be that CQs are relatively easy to fake; one may behave in a warm, kind, and accepting manner yet be actually cold, unkind, and rejecting. Thus, confirmatory evidence regarding one's standing on CQs is relatively easy to come by, yet such confirmatory evidence is probably discounted because it is not a reliable indicator of one's actual level of CQs.

Perhaps because of the ease with which people can assess SCs, social psychologists contend that SCs are the

most valuable traits on the “interpersonal marketplace” and that people try to initiate relationships with partners who match their own levels of SCs (e.g., Rubin, 1973). For better or worse, people who possess SCs—who are good looking and have better social skills—have high relational value and are well liked and well treated (e.g., Reis et al., 1982). Anthony et al. (2007) provided additional evidence that SCs are generally more socially valued than CQs. For example, people believe that others notice and evaluate their SCs more than their CQs. People anticipate greater acceptance from a group when they are told that the group members think they are “socially skilled, popular, and outgoing” (SCs), whereas feedback that they are “accepting, supportive, and honest” (CQs) does not raise their expectations of acceptance above baseline expectations. In addition, self-esteem—which has been characterized as a sociometer designed to monitor one’s value as a relational partner (Leary & Baumeister, 2000)—is more strongly associated with the self-ratings of SCs than of CQs.¹

In summary, Anthony et al. (2007) proposed that because SCs are easily observable, unambiguously defined, and difficult to control, they are traits that people can use to accurately determine the social value of an interaction partner. In contrast, because CQs take a long time to accurately assess, have ambiguous definitions, and are easily controlled, Anthony et al. argued that CQs are *not* traits that one can generally use to accurately determine the social value of an interaction partner. Hence, SCs are generally more socially valued than CQs (for an examination of moderators of this general rule, see Anthony et al., 2007).

Although SCs and CQs are distinct domains of the self-concept, not all socially valued traits can be classified as an SC or a CQ. Intelligence, for example, is highly prized in social partners, yet it is neither an SC nor a CQ (Anthony et al., 2007). We suspect that intelligence falls somewhere in between the two domains on the critical features of observability, ambiguity, and controllability. Intelligence is less observable, more ambiguous, and more controllable than SCs such as physical attractiveness and popularity; yet intelligence is also more observable, less ambiguous, and less controllable than CQs such as kindness and honesty. Hence, intelligence is not included in either the SC or CQ domain, nor are many other socially valued traits that fall between the two domains on the key dimensions of observability, ambiguity, and controllability (e.g., assertiveness, confidence, charm).

In the present research, we extend Anthony et al.’s (2007) arguments by suggesting that domain differences in observability, ambiguity, and controllability also lead to domain differences in self-concept clarity. That is, people have poorer clarity about their SCs than about their CQs due to differences in the observability, ambiguity, and

controllability of SC and CQ traits. Although it may seem to be a paradoxical hypothesis at first, we argue that people have clearer self-concepts about traits that are relatively unobservable, ambiguous, and controllable and less clear self-concepts regarding traits that are relatively observable, unambiguous, and uncontrollable. Just as Campbell and Lavelle (1993) proposed that self-esteem differences in clarity are due to differences in attention to social cues, we suggest that these three characteristics affect people’s susceptibility to social cues about their traits.

Domain Differences in Clarity

Domain Differences in Observability

CQs are much less observable than SCs, which makes it easier to dismiss negative self-relevant social cues about CQs. For example, if Kafka’s colleague says that he is disloyal (a CQ trait), Kafka can dismiss the feedback as coming from an ill-informed source who does not know him well enough to judge his loyalty. Kafka can thereby maintain his clear self-image as loyal. In contrast, if Kafka’s colleague says that he has poor social skills (an SC trait), Kafka cannot dismiss the negative feedback so readily, because Kafka’s colleague is in a good position to judge his social skills. Such feedback may challenge Kafka’s self-view, making him less sure about his social skills. Thus, domain differences in observability predict that people’s SC self-views will be less clear than their CQ self-views.

Domain Differences in Ambiguity

CQs are also more ambiguous than SCs: Countless behaviors could earn someone the title “kind,” whereas a more limited list of characteristics is necessary for one to be deemed “attractive.” Ambiguous information is usually interpreted as being consistent with prior beliefs (Taylor & Crocker, 1981), so self-relevant social cues about CQs are probably easily interpreted as being self-concept consistent. Hence, people will rarely perceive that social cues about their CQs are self-concept inconsistent, resulting in a high level of self-concept clarity about CQs. In contrast, the more concrete nature of SCs means that people cannot always interpret self-relevant social cues as being consistent with their prior self-views. Over time, instances of inconsistent social cues regarding SCs will undermine people’s self-concept clarity about SCs. Thus, domain differences in ambiguity predict less clear SC than CQ self-views.

It is important to note that although we predict that the association between ambiguity and self-concept clarity will be linear when comparing SCs and CQs, we suspect that the association between ambiguity and self-concept clarity may be curvilinear if one considers a

wider variety of traits. Although SCs are less ambiguous than CQs, other traits such as height, weight, or hair color are less ambiguous than SCs. For such highly unambiguous traits, we suspect that people are very clear about their self-views.

Domain Differences in Controllability

CQs such as warmth, kindness, and honesty are behaviors over which one has considerable personal control. If Kafka wishes to improve his warmth, for example, he can make a concerted effort to behave in a warmer manner. People have relatively less personal control over SC traits. Although one may apply makeup or choose clothes to enhance one's appearance, one cannot suddenly exhibit social skills that one lacks. Moreover, if people can vary their CQs more readily than their SCs, they may more readily dismiss self-discrepant feedback as being specific to the situation. For example, because Kafka can adjust his warmth to suit his goals and a given situation, when he is told that he is cold, he can attribute that coldness to the situation and maintain the view that, overall, he is a warm person. In contrast, it is relatively difficult to blame the situation for one's being "unpopular" or "unattractive." Without such techniques for ignoring social cues that contradict one's self-views, people's SC self-concept clarity will suffer. Thus, differences in controllability predict that SCs will be less clear than CQs.

In sum, we hypothesize that SCs are more observable, less ambiguous, and less controllable than CQs, each of which predicts that SC self-views will be less clear than CQ self-views.

Self-Esteem and Domain Differences in Clarity

In keeping with previous research, we predict that HSEs' self-views will be clearer than LSEs' self-views. However, we predict that the factors that influence the clarity of SCs and CQs will affect everyone, regardless of level of self-esteem. Thus, although HSEs will be clearer about their SCs than are LSEs, both HSEs and LSEs will show within-person differences in clarity such that SCs are much less clear than CQs. If correct, our hypothesis implies that HSEs (like LSEs) are not universally clear about their self-views and may be vulnerable to the ill effects of poor self-concept clarity in the SC domain. In contrast, LSEs (like HSEs) may be able to reap the benefits of high relative self-concept clarity in the CQ domain.

Overview of Studies

In Studies 1 and 2, we use five of Campbell's (1990) unobtrusive methods for assessing self-concept clarity, which range from response latencies to an actual social

interaction task. Moreover, in Study 3a, we use an explicit method for assessing self-concept clarity, adapted from Campbell et al. (1996). On each of these six distinct indices of clarity, we attempt first to replicate Campbell's and her colleagues' original findings that LSEs have poorer self-concept clarity than do HSEs. Then we examine within-person variability in self-concept clarity for SCs and CQs to test our prediction that SC self-views are less clear than CQ self-views. In Study 3b, we examine our proposed explanations for the predicted domain differences in self-concept clarity. Although Anthony et al. (2007) argued that SCs and CQs differ in observability, ambiguity, and controllability, they did not test this hypothesis. Hence, in the present research, we directly test the hypothesis that SCs are more observable but less ambiguous and controllable than CQs, and then we examine whether these proposed mechanisms explain within-person variation in self-concept clarity.

STUDY 1: EXTREMITY, CONFIDENCE, AND INTERNAL CONSISTENCY

This study replicates Campbell's (1990) method of assessing self-concept clarity via extremity, confidence, and internal consistency of self-ratings. We replicate Campbell's original findings first and then test our prediction that the SC self-concept is less clear than the CQ self-concept. For each measure of self-concept clarity, we anticipate two main effects: one for trait domain (SCs are less clear than CQs) and one for self-esteem (LSEs have less clear self-concepts than do HSEs).

Method

Participants

During a mass-testing session, potential participants completed Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale, modified to include 9-point rather than 4-point response scales for each item. This version of Rosenberg's scale was used throughout the studies reported in this article. Two hundred seventy-nine (71% female, 29% male) undergraduates scoring in the top third (HSE; $n = 138$; $M = 8.01$, $SD = 0.49$) and bottom third (LSE; $n = 141$; $M = 4.90$, $SD = 0.82$) of the distribution of self-esteem scores participated in this study as partial fulfillment of a course requirement.

Procedure

The measures used in this study were administered in two separate questionnaires included in an online mass-testing survey that also included a variety of other scales. On the first questionnaire, participants rated themselves on nine SCs, eight CQs, and nine negative

interpersonal traits (e.g., jealous) using 7-point scales (1 = *not at all descriptive of me*, 4 = *moderately descriptive of me*, 7 = *extremely descriptive of me*). For each trait, participants also indicated how confident they felt about their self-ratings (1 = *not at all confident*, 5 = *extremely confident*). After completing a number of unrelated surveys (cf. Campbell, 1990), participants completed the second questionnaire, on which they rated themselves on the polar opposites of the traits assessed in the first questionnaire. For example, participants rated themselves on “affectionate,” “popular,” “warm,” and “jealous” in the first questionnaire and then rated themselves on “unaffectionate,” “unpopular,” “cold,” and “secure” on the second questionnaire. Once again, participants indicated how confident they felt about their self-ratings on the second questionnaire (1 = *not at all confident*, 5 = *extremely confident*).

Results and Discussion

Preliminary analyses indicated that neither gender nor ethnicity moderated the results that we will describe shortly. Thus, we report analyses without these factors.²

Extremity and Confidence of Self-Ratings

Campbell (1990) found that LSEs' self-ratings on traits were nearer the midpoint of the scale than were HSEs'. According to Campbell, this suggests that LSEs may have less clear self-concepts than do HSEs, because people with clearer self-concepts maintain more extreme self-views (either above or below the scale midpoint), whereas people with unclear self-concepts maintain more equivocal self-views. Campbell found that LSEs reported that they were less confident in their self-ratings than HSEs. To replicate these findings in our data and to examine potential domain differences, we computed participants' average absolute deviation from the midpoint of the scale for all 26 traits, for CQs only and for SCs only. We also calculated the averages of participants' ratings of confidence for all traits, for CQs only and for SCs only.

Replicating Campbell. We conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with self-esteem group as a predictor and deviation score as the dependent variable. Results replicated Campbell's (1990): Across all 26 traits that we assessed, LSEs' scores deviated less than HSEs' from the midpoint of the scale ($M_s = 1.05$ and 1.42 , respectively; $SD_s = 0.28$ and 0.40 , respectively), $F(1, 276) = 79.73$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .22$, and LSEs reported less confidence in their ratings than did HSEs ($M_s = 3.10$ and 3.49 , respectively; $SD_s = 0.66$ and 0.59 , respectively), $F(1, 276) = 26.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$.

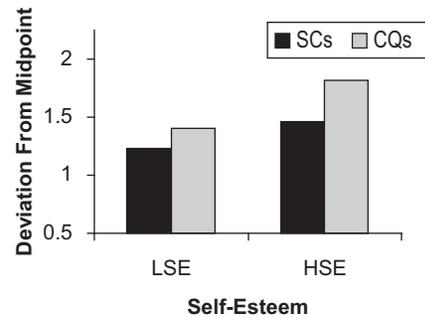


Figure 1 Deviation of self-ratings from the midpoint of the scale as a function of trait domain and self-esteem in Study 1.

NOTE: Higher scores suggest a clearer self-concept. SCs = social commodities; CQs = communal qualities; LSE = individual with lower self-esteem; HSE = individual with higher self-esteem.

Domain differences in extremity. We conducted a 2 (domain of deviation score: SC vs. CQ) \times 2 (self-esteem group: LSE vs. HSE) repeated-measures ANOVA, wherein the within-subject variable was domain of the deviation from the midpoint of the scale and self-esteem was a between-subjects variable. Results are presented in Figure 1. As predicted, two main effects occurred: one for domain, such that participants' SC scores were nearer to the midpoint of the scale than their CQ scores ($M_s = 1.30$ and 1.59 , respectively; $SD_s = 0.49$ and 0.58 , respectively), $F(1, 275) = 53.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$, and one for self-esteem, such that LSEs' self-ratings were less extreme than HSEs' ($M_s = 1.30$ and 1.60 , respectively; $SD_s = 0.48$ and 0.55 , respectively), $F(1, 275) = 36.26$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$. Although not anticipated, there was also an interaction between domain and self-esteem, $F(1, 275) = 5.01$, $p = .026$, $\eta^2 = .018$. The predicted domain effect was present for both HSEs and LSEs, but the difference in extremity between SCs and CQs was larger for HSEs ($M_s = 1.46$ and 1.82 , respectively; $SD_s = 0.48$ and 0.56 , respectively), $F(1, 137) = 49.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .27$, than for LSEs ($M_s = 1.23$ and 1.40 , respectively; $SD_s = 0.42$ and 0.52 , respectively), $F(1, 138) = 11.69$, $p = .010$, $\eta^2 = .08$. Moreover, the self-esteem difference in extremity for CQs, $F(1, 275) = 32.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$, was larger than the self-esteem difference in extremity for SCs, $F(1, 275) = 12.98$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$.

Domain differences in confidence. A similar pattern emerged for participants' confidence in their self-ratings. Again, a 2 (domain of confidence score: SC vs. CQ) \times 2 (self-esteem group: LSE vs. HSE) repeated-measures ANOVA yielded two main effects and an unexpected interaction. Results are depicted in Figure 2. All participants were less confident in their SCs than in their CQs ($M_s = 3.14$ and 3.56 , respectively; $SD_s = 0.73$ and 0.70 ,

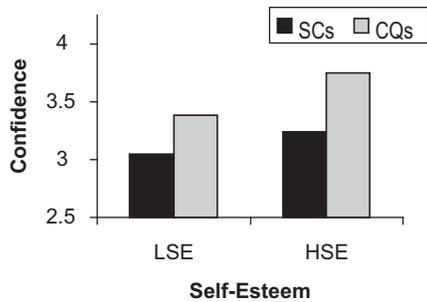


Figure 2 Confidence in self-ratings as a function of trait domain and self-esteem in Study 1.

NOTE: Higher scores suggest a clearer self-concept. SCs = social commodities; CQs = communal qualities; LSE = individual with lower self-esteem; HSE = individual with higher self-esteem.

respectively), $F(1, 276) = 170.27, p < .001, \eta^2 = .38$; LSEs were less confident than HSEs ($M_s = 3.21$ and 3.50 , respectively; $SD_s = 0.73$ and 0.67 , respectively), $F(1, 276) = 13.82, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$; and domain moderated this association between self-esteem and confidence, $F(1, 276) = 7.51, p = .007, \eta^2 = .03$. Once again, the domain effect was larger for HSEs ($M_s = 3.24$ and 3.75 , respectively; $SD_s = 0.67$ and 0.66 , respectively), $F(1, 137) = 127.87, p < .001, \eta^2 = .52$, than for LSEs ($M_s = 3.05$ and 3.38 , respectively; $SD_s = 0.77$ and 0.69 , respectively), $F(1, 139) = 53.50, p < .001, \eta^2 = .25$. Moreover, the self-esteem difference in extremity for CQs, $F(1, 275) = 31.36, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11$, was larger than the self-esteem difference in extremity for SCs, $F(1, 275) = 16.10, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$.

Unanticipated interactions on these two measures of clarity indicated that HSEs were especially extreme and confident about their CQ self-views (see Figures 1 and 2). One possible explanation for these results is that HSEs are particularly adept at applying self-concept maintenance techniques to CQs. In general, HSEs are better able than LSEs to maintain self-views in the face of contradictory social feedback (Brockner, 1984) and to maintain positive self-views after failure (Blaine & Crocker, 1993), which may explain why HSEs have generally clearer self-concepts than do LSEs. However, we suggest that the greater ambiguity and controllability, and lesser observability, of CQs compared to SCs implies that it may be particularly easy for HSEs to maintain their highly positive self-views in the CQ domain, resulting in the observed Self-Esteem \times Trait Domain interaction.

Internal Consistency of Self-Concept

Replicating Campbell. Campbell (1990) studied internal consistency using a “me–not me” computer task. If people rejected the polar opposites of the traits

they claimed to possess (e.g., said “not me” to *beautiful* if they said “me” to *ugly*), they were thought to have a more consistent sense of self than people who endorsed trait opposites (e.g., saying “me” to both *beautiful* and *ugly*). However, because Campbell did not list the specific traits that she used, an exact replication of her method was not possible. Hence, we reverse scored participants’ self-ratings on the negatively phrased items (e.g., *unpopular*) and then computed the average absolute difference between participants’ ratings on the positively phrased (e.g., *popular*) and negatively phrased traits. Large absolute differences suggest less consistency in responses to synonymous items; small differences suggest more consistent responding. Greater internal consistency in self-ratings for bipolar pairs of adjectives (i.e., rejecting the term *cold* to the same degree that one accepts the term *warm*) reflects a clearer self-concept.

Results of a one-way ANOVA in which self-esteem was the predictor and average absolute difference was the dependent variable indicated that across the 26 traits that we assessed, LSEs were, on average, less consistent than HSEs ($M_s = 1.99$ and 1.72 , respectively; $SD_s = 0.57$ and 0.47 , respectively), $F(1, 264) = 18.13, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$. This result replicates Campbell’s (1990) findings for internal consistency.

Domain differences in internal consistency. Next we examined whether internal consistency depended on domain of trait. We entered the absolute difference scores averaged for CQs and SCs into the usual 2 (domain of absolute difference score: SC vs. CQ) \times 2 (self-esteem group: LSE vs. HSE) repeated-measures ANOVA. This time only the predicted main effects emerged. Participants were more consistent in their responses to CQ traits than to SC traits ($M_s = 1.31$ and 2.34 , respectively; $SD_s = 0.67$ and 0.81 , respectively), $F(1, 263) = 462.41, p < .001, \eta^2 = .64$. Additionally, across both domains, HSEs responded more consistently than did LSEs ($M_s = 1.96$ and 1.70 , respectively; $SD_s = 0.68$ and 0.57 , respectively), $F(1, 263) = 11.43, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$. Domain of self-concept did not moderate the association between self-esteem and internal consistency, $F < 1$. These results suggest that people’s self-concepts were less internally consistent for SCs than for CQs and that HSEs had more internally consistent self-concepts than did LSEs.

In summary, these results clearly replicated Campbell’s (1990) finding that LSEs have less extreme, less confidently held, and less internally consistent self-concepts than do HSEs. Additionally, results supported our hypothesis about domain differences in clarity: People’s SC self-concepts are less extreme, less confidently held, and less internally consistent than their CQ self-concepts.

STUDY 2: RESPONSE LATENCY AND CONGRUENCE

This study uses two more of Campbell's (1990) methods of assessing self-concept clarity: response latencies on a trait categorization task and the congruence between global self-ratings and situation-specific self-ratings following an actual social interaction. Campbell inferred that the faster one claims to possess a trait, and the more one's general self-ratings match self-ratings in a specific situation, the clearer one's self-concept. We again predict two main effects: The SC self-concept is less clear than the CQ self-concept, and LSEs have less clarity than do HSEs.

Method

Participants

Ninety-five (45 male, 50 female) Caucasian undergraduate students scoring in the top third (HSE; $n = 53$; $M = 7.97$, $SD = 0.50$) and bottom third (LSE; $n = 42$; $M = 4.73$, $SD = 0.94$) of the distribution of scores on Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale participated in this study as partial fulfillment of a course requirement. Participant ages ranged from 17 to 23 ($M = 18.76$).

Procedure

Following Campbell (1990), the present study consisted of two phases. Participants first completed questionnaires and then participated in a lab session a few weeks later.

Pretest measures. Prior to their in-lab session, participants completed an online questionnaire on which they rated themselves on 13 target trait adjectives "relative to other people," using a 100-point scale (0 = *lower than the rest of the population*, 50 = *average for this characteristic*, 100 = *higher than the rest of the population*). This questionnaire included three SCs ("physically attractive," "popular," and "socially skilled"); four CQs ("responsive and supportive," "honest," "kind and understanding," and "warm"); and eight of Campbell's original items, one of which was also an SC and one of which was also a CQ ("assertive," "boring," "confident," "intelligent," "obnoxious," "rude," "socially skilled" and "warm").

Lab session. To create a context in which participants' general self-ratings could be compared to their self-ratings of their behavior in a specific situation, the procedure included an interaction between same-sex pairs of participants approximately 2 to 3 weeks after they completed the online measure. Following Campbell's (1990)

method, each participant was assigned a partner with either the same or opposite level of self-esteem, with the stipulation that cell sizes were kept equal during the course of the study. Consequently, three types of pairs were created: HSE/HSE, HSE/LSE, and LSE/LSE. Research assistants were instructed to confirm that participants did not know each other before beginning the study. Because another research assistant randomly assigned participant pairings, the researcher running the session was blind to participants' self-esteem.

Computer task. Prior to meeting the interaction partner during the lab session, each participant completed a computer task individually. Participants were asked to indicate whether a list of adjectives described them ("me") or not ("not me"), based on their "first instinct" but without responding so quickly that they made many errors. Following the instructions, 15 practice adjectives, which did not fall into either the SC or CQ domains, were presented to familiarize participants with the task (e.g., "casual," "practical"). These practice trials were followed by 22 trait adjectives, including 11 SCs, 10 CQs, and 5 words that Campbell (1990) had used: "intelligent," "warm," "kind," "understanding," and "socially skilled" (three of the latter four words were also CQs and one, "socially skilled," was an SC). The sequence of adjectives within the practice and experimental trials was randomized for each participant. The time it took participants to respond to each adjective was recorded, as well as the response made ("me" or "not me").

Interaction. Following Campbell's (1990) method, we next brought participants together to complete a two-part interaction task. This task gave participants the opportunity to interact so that they could rate their situation-specific self-concepts afterward. First, participants discussed a subset of items from Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, and Elliot's (1999) Relationship Closeness Induction (e.g., "What is your name?" "What is your favorite class this semester?" "If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go and why?"). The selected questions allowed participants to become acquainted without disclosing overly personal information. Pairs of participants were then given approximately 10 minutes to complete a problem-solving task together (Oakman, Gifford, & Chlebowski, 2003).

Postinteraction measures. When the interaction task was finished, participants were again separated to complete the final questionnaire. Participants were asked to indicate how well a list of trait adjectives described their behavior during the interaction, using a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely well*). Participants rated

themselves on the same SCs, CQs, and Campbell words that were assessed in the premeasure.

Results

Preliminary analyses indicated that gender, ethnicity, and pair type (i.e., HSE/HSE, LSE/LSE, or HSE/LSE) did not moderate the results that we will describe shortly. Thus, we report analyses without these factors.

Cognitive Accessibility of Trait Domains

Prior to analyses, the distributions of response latencies for each item were examined for extreme scores that may have indicated a lapse in attention to the task. Two such responses were identified and were treated as missing data points in analyses (i.e., one SC and one CQ response latency from separate participants, each in excess of 8,000 ms).³

Replicating Campbell. Campbell (1990) found that LSEs exhibited longer reaction times than HSEs when categorizing traits on the “me–not me” computer task, which suggests that LSEs had greater difficulty than HSEs accessing that self-concept information. Response latencies for the five Campbell words were averaged, and self-esteem was used to predict these latencies in an ANOVA. As Campbell found, LSE participants took longer to make “me–not me” decisions than did HSE participants ($M_s = 1,182.26$ and $1,060.80$ ms, respectively; $SD_s = 283.20$ and 302.50 , respectively), $F(1, 93) = 4.00$, $p = .048$, $\eta^2 = .04$.

Domain differences in cognitive accessibility. We separately averaged participants’ response latencies for CQs and SCs and entered them into a 2 (domain of response latency: SC vs. CQ) \times 2 (self-esteem group: LSE vs. HSE) repeated-measures ANOVA, wherein domain of response latency was the within-subject variable. As predicted, CQs yielded faster response times than did SCs ($M_s = 1,320.10$ and $1,500.47$, respectively; $SD_s = 640.88$ and 570.14 , respectively), $F(1, 93) = 5.98$, $p = .016$, $\eta^2 = .06$, and LSEs had greater response latencies than did HSEs, $F(1, 93) = 4.00$, $p = .048$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Self-esteem and domain did not interact to predict response latencies, $F < 1$. These results suggest that not only do HSEs have more accessible self-concepts than LSEs, but CQs are more cognitively accessible than SCs.

General Versus Specific Self-Concept Congruence

Although people’s behavior varies across situations (Fleeson, 2004), people appear to differ in the extent to which situation-specific variability is incorporated into

their self-conceptions. Campbell (1990) found that LSEs’ self-conceptions following a social interaction differed more from their global self-conceptions than did the situation-specific self-conceptions of HSEs. Such incongruence between global self-views and situation-specific self-ratings suggests that one’s self-conceptions are labile and unclear.

Replicating Campbell. For analyses, specific self-concept scores (self-ratings about participants’ behavior in the interaction) were transformed to a 100-point scale so that they used the same metric as the general scale (global self-ratings during the pretest). We calculated the average absolute difference between general and specific self-ratings for the eight Campbell words included in this study. As predicted and as Campbell (1990) found, LSEs’ general self-concepts differed from their specific self-concepts to a greater degree than did HSEs’ ($M_s = 18.20$ and 15.54 , respectively; $SD_s = 5.70$ and 5.00 , respectively), $F(1, 86) = 5.45$, $p = .022$, $\eta^2 = .06$.

Domain differences in congruence. We calculated the absolute difference between each pair of traits (i.e., general and specific) and then averaged these difference scores for each domain of traits (i.e., SCs and CQs). We then conducted a 2 (domain of absolute difference score: SC vs. CQ) \times 2 (self-esteem group: LSE vs. HSE) repeated measures ANOVA. Results are graphed in Figure 3. Results revealed a main effect of domain, such that participants’ SC self-ratings changed more from the general (self-ratings at pretest) to the specific (self-ratings of behavior in the specific interaction) than their CQ self-ratings ($M_s = 17.47$ and 14.41 , respectively; $SD_s = 8.28$ and 7.43 , respectively), $F(1, 86) = 8.36$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .09$. Also, as expected, a main effect of self-esteem emerged, such that LSEs’ self-ratings changed more than HSEs’ self-ratings ($M_s = 18.22$ and 14.14 , respectively; $SD_s = 8.53$ and 6.47 , respectively), $F(1, 86) = 10.09$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .11$. Self-esteem and domain did not interact to predict self-concept congruence, $F(1, 86) = 1.31$, ns . These results indicate that people maintain more congruent CQ self-concepts than SC self-concepts.

STUDY 3A: EXPLICIT SELF-CONCEPT UNCERTAINTY

Studies 1 and 2 examined whether domain differences in self-concept clarity were evident on five of Campbell’s (1990) unobtrusive clarity measures. This study examines whether domain differences in clarity are also evident on an explicit measure of self-concept clarity. Campbell et al. (1996) created and validated an explicit measure of global self-concept uncertainty and

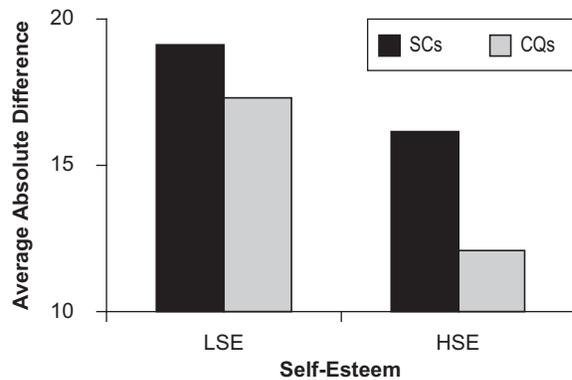


Figure 3 Average absolute difference between global and specific self-concepts as a function of trait domain and self-esteem in Study 2.

NOTE: Lower scores suggest a clearer self-concept. SCs = social commodities; CQs = communal qualities; LSE = individual with lower self-esteem; HSE = individual with higher self-esteem.

found that LSEs reported greater explicit self-concept uncertainty than did HSEs. We adapt Campbell et al.'s measure to assess explicit self-concept uncertainty for SCs and CQs. For example, participants indicate their agreement with statements such as "My beliefs about my physical attractiveness are often uncertain" and "Sometimes I think I can judge other people's loyalty better than I can judge my own." As in Studies 1 and 2, on this explicit measure of self-concept clarity we anticipate two main effects: one for trait domain (people are more uncertain about SCs than about CQs) and one for self-esteem (LSEs are more uncertain about their self-concepts than are HSEs).

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were 88 undergraduates (68 female, 20 male; age $M = 20.47$, $SD = 1.73$; 59 Caucasian, 16 Asian, 5 East Indian, 8 unknown) who participated as partial fulfillment of a course requirement.

Procedure

As part of an online survey that included scales not relevant to the present study, participants completed the same modified Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) that was used in Studies 1 and 2. In addition, participants completed our explicit measure of self-concept uncertainty that was adapted from Campbell et al. (1996). Participants indicated their agreement with seven items assessing their explicit self-concept uncertainty about

three SCs (i.e., "social skills," "popularity," and "physical attractiveness"; e.g., "I spend a lot of time wondering about whether I am really physically attractive or not") and also indicated their agreement with the *same* seven items reworded to assess their self-concept uncertainty about three CQs (i.e., "kindness," "warmth," and "loyalty"; e.g., "When I think about how kind I have been in the past, I'm not sure what I was really like").

Results and Discussion

Preliminary analyses indicated that ethnicity and gender did not moderate any of the results that we will describe, so these variables were not included in the analyses that follow.

Explicit ratings of clarity for each domain were averaged to form a reliable index of explicit SC self-concept uncertainty ($\alpha = .78$) and a reliable index of explicit CQ self-concept uncertainty ($\alpha = .84$). We conducted a repeated measures ANOVA in which domain of self-concept uncertainty score (SC vs. CQ) was the repeated measure and self-esteem was a covariate. Replicating Campbell et al.'s (1996) findings, people with lower self-esteem generally expressed greater self-concept uncertainty than people with higher self-esteem ($M_s = 2.90$ and 2.36 , respectively, for participants 1 SD below and above the mean for self-esteem), $F(1, 84) = 26.05$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .24$. In addition, and as predicted, results revealed a main effect of domain, such that people reported greater SC self-concept uncertainty than CQ self-concept uncertainty ($M_s = 2.99$ and 2.29 , respectively; $SD_s = 0.73$ and 0.67 , respectively), $F(1, 84) = 7.06$, $p = .009$, $\eta^2 = .08$. Self-esteem and trait domain did not interact to predict explicit self-concept uncertainty, $F(1, 84) = 1.55$, *ns*. These results complement those of Studies 1 and 2 by revealing that people are explicitly aware of feeling more confused about their SCs than about their CQs.

STUDY 3B: TESTING MECHANISMS FOR DOMAIN DIFFERENCES IN CLARITY

We proposed that people are clearer about CQs than SCs because CQs are less observable, more ambiguously defined, and more controllable than SCs. In essence, we proposed a mediation model wherein domain differences in self-concept clarity are explained by domain differences in observability, ambiguity, and controllability (i.e., trait domain \rightarrow observability, ambiguity, and controllability \rightarrow self-concept clarity). Consistent with this mediation hypothesis, the results of Studies 1, 2, and 3a already revealed that trait domain predicts six

distinct indices of self-concept clarity (i.e., trait domain → self-concept clarity). In the present study, we examine whether trait domain also predicts the proposed mediators (i.e., trait domain → observability, ambiguity, and controllability).

The nature of our within-person hypothesis means that we cannot use formal mediation analyses to test whether the proposed mechanisms explain domain differences in self-concept clarity. Formal mediation analysis requires that the predictor (i.e., trait domain) is a distinct variable from the criterion variable (i.e., self-concept clarity). This distinctness allows one to determine the amount of variance in the criterion variable that is explained by the predictor variable and to determine whether the mediator variable (e.g., observability) explains that shared variance. In contrast, in our case, the predictor and criterion variables are inextricably linked. That is, participants each have a value for (a) self-concept clarity in the SC domain and for (b) self-concept clarity in the CQ domain. They do not have a value for “SC domain” that is separate from their value for “self-concept clarity in the SC domain” nor a value for “CQ domain” that is separate from their value for “self-concept clarity in the CQ domain.” Thus, because we cannot separate trait domain from self-concept clarity and maintain the within-person nature of our hypothesis, we cannot conduct formal mediation analysis.

Yet our data do allow us to test whether variations in the proposed mechanisms generally explain within-person variability in self-concept clarity across traits (i.e., observability, ambiguity, and controllability → self-concept clarity). In particular, using data from Studies 1 and 2, and from the present Study 3b, we can compute, across respondents, the average levels of observability, ambiguity, or controllability of a list of traits including both SCs and CQs and then correlate these average values with each participant’s self-concept clarity for those same traits. If the average of these within-person correlations between each proposed mechanism and self-concept clarity is statistically significant, this will suggest that people indeed have clearer self-concepts for traits that take longer to accurately assess, are more ambiguous, and are more controllable.

Method

Participants

This study included two samples. Sample 1 consisted of 261 undergraduates (141 female, 120 male). Age and ethnicity information was not collected from this sample. Sample 2 consisted of the same 88 participants from Study 3a. Both samples participated as partial fulfillment of a course requirement.

Procedure

Data from both samples were collected as part of a larger scale mass-testing session that included surveys not relevant to the present study. Participants in Sample 1 rated the observability of traits by indicating how long it took to accurately assess a list of traits that included eight SCs (i.e., “physically attractive,” “exciting personality,” “sexy,” “interesting to talk to,” “physically active,” “popular,” “socially skilled,” and “good sense of humor”) and eight CQs (i.e., “kind,” “understanding,” “responsive & supportive,” “warm,” “honest,” “loyal,” “loving,” and “considerate”). The rating scales used a 9-point format (1 = *a few minutes*, 5 = *a few days*, 9 = *a year or more*).

In addition to completing the measures described in Study 3a, Sample 2 also completed scales assessing the ambiguity and controllability of 17 traits, including nine SCs (i.e., “physically attractive,” “exciting personality,” “sexy,” “interesting to talk to,” “physically active,” “popular,” “social skilled,” “stylish” and “good sense of humor”) and eight CQs (i.e., “kind & understanding,” “accepting,” “responsive & supportive,” “warm,” “honest,” “loyal,” “affectionate,” and “loving”). Scales assessing ambiguity and controllability were counterbalanced across participants. The definition of trait ambiguity was drawn from Dunning, Meyerowitz, and Holzberg (1989). Participants rated each trait on a 9-point scale (1 = *extremely unambiguous*, 9 = *extremely ambiguous*) based on the following instructions:

If a trait is *extremely unambiguous*, this means that the trait refers to one and only one type of behaviour or characteristic. If a trait is *extremely ambiguous*, this means that the characteristic can refer to many different behaviours or characteristics in many different domains of life.

The definition of trait controllability was drawn from Alicke (1985). Participants again rated each trait on a 9-point scale (1 = *extremely uncontrollable*, 9 = *extremely controllable*) based on the following instructions:

If a trait is *extremely uncontrollable*, this means that a person *cannot* change their standing on the trait, no matter how hard they try. If a trait is *extremely controllable*, this means that a person can increase or decrease their standing on the trait if they try hard enough.

Results and Discussion

Preliminary analyses indicated that ethnicity and gender did not moderate any of the results that we will describe, so these variables were not included in the analyses that follow.

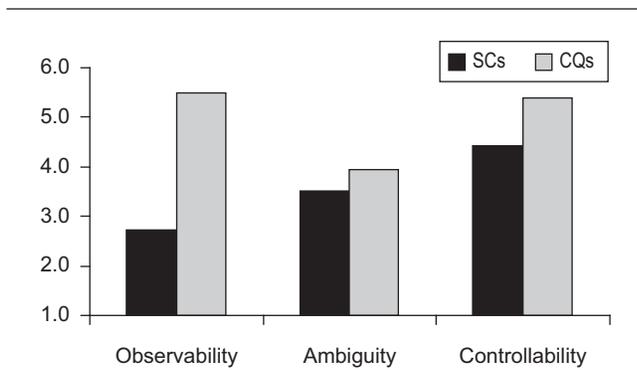


Figure 4 Observability, ambiguity, and controllability of traits as a function of trait domain in Study 3b.

NOTE: Higher scores indicate greater time to accurately observe a trait (observability), increased ambiguity of trait definitions (ambiguity), and increased controllability over one's traits (controllability), respectively. SCs = social commodities; CQs = communal qualities.

First we sought to determine whether the SC and CQ trait domains differed on the dimensions proposed to explain within-person domain differences in clarity: observability, ambiguity, and controllability. We averaged trait ratings on each of these three dimensions within each domain, resulting in six reliable indices (all $\alpha > .75$). We conducted three repeated-measures ANOVAs in which observability, ambiguity, or controllability of domain (SCs vs. CQs) were the repeated measures. The first analysis was conducted on data from Sample 1, and the latter two analyses were conducted on data from Sample 2. Results are depicted in Figure 4. As predicted, participants reported that it takes longer to accurately assess CQs than to accurately assess SCs ($M_s = 5.50$ and 2.73 , respectively; $SD_s = 1.26$ and 1.12 , respectively), $F(1, 260) = 1,250.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .83$, suggesting that SCs are higher in observability than CQs. Moreover, they also reported that CQs are more ambiguously defined than SCs ($M_s = 3.94$ and 3.51 , respectively; $SD_s = 1.45$ and 1.28 , respectively), $F(1, 86) = 5.18$, $p = .025$, $\eta^2 = .06$, and that CQs are more controllable than SCs ($M_s = 5.38$ and 4.42 , respectively; $SD_s = 0.93$ and 0.81 , respectively), $F(1, 86) = 82.56$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .49$. These results offer support for the path from the predictor to the proposed mediators in our hypothesized mediation model (i.e., trait domain \rightarrow observability, ambiguity, and controllability).

Next, we used data from the present Samples 1 and 2 to compute average observability, ambiguity, and controllability scores for the traits that were used to assess self-concept clarity in Studies 1 and 2. Mean ratings of observability, ambiguity, and controllability are presented in Table 1, listed in ascending order for each characteristic.⁴ These scores represent the consensually agreed-on levels of observability, ambiguity, and

controllability for each trait. Examination of the means in Table 1 reveals that with very few exceptions, the distribution of ratings for SCs and CQs are almost nonoverlapping, with SCs dominating the lower scoring ends of the lists and CQs dominating the higher scoring ends of the lists.

The preceding results offer support for our contention that the characteristics of observability, ambiguity, and controllability differentiate SCs from CQs, but do domain differences in these characteristics actually explain domain differences in self-concept clarity? To address this question, for each participant in Studies 1 and 2, we computed the within-person correlation between the participant's clarity scores for each trait and the consensually determined level of observability, ambiguity, or controllability of those same traits, as reported by participants in Study 3a. Specifically, for each of the participants in Study 1, we obtained within-person correlations indicating the associations between confidence in self-ratings for traits and the average ratings of observability, ambiguity, or controllability of the same traits, as reported by participants in Study 3a. We also obtained similar within-person correlations between the proposed mechanisms and internal consistency and between the proposed mechanisms and extremity of self-ratings. These analyses yielded nine within-person correlation coefficients for each participant in Study 1.

To facilitate comparison of results across studies, for Study 2 we first reverse coded the two indices of clarity—general-to-specific self-concept incongruence and response latency on the categorical decision task—so that *higher* scores represented *greater* self-concept clarity. Then, for each participant in Study 2, we calculated within-person correlations between the general-to-specific self-concept congruence for traits and observability, ambiguity, or controllability of the same traits, as reported by participants in Study 3a. We obtained similar within-person correlations between trait reverse-scored response latencies on the categorization task and the proposed mechanisms. Hence, these analyses yielded six within-person correlation coefficients for each participant in Study 2.

We then applied Fisher's r -to- z transformation to each within-person correlation coefficient. Then, for each pairing of clarity measure and trait characteristic (e.g., confidence in self-ratings with observability in Study 1; reverse-scored latency with controllability in Study 2), we averaged the transformed coefficients across participants and then transformed the resulting means back into correlation coefficients.

The resulting average within-person correlations between the five indices of clarity used in Studies 1 and 2 and the observability, ambiguity, or controllability of traits are presented in Table 2. As the table illustrates,

TABLE 1: Mean Observability, Ambiguity, and Controllability of Traits, Listed in Ascending Order Within Each Category

<i>Observability</i>	<i>Ambiguity</i>	<i>Controllability</i>
Physically attractive (SC; 1.56) ^a	Exciting personality (SC; 3.21)	High social status (SC; 3.53)
Sexy (SC; 2.36)	Popular (SC; 3.33) ^a	Good sense of humor (SC; 3.71)
Exciting personality (SC; 2.40)	Stylish (SC; 3.39)	Popular (SC; 3.79) ^a
Interesting to talk to (SC; 2.55)	Responsive (CQ; 3.41) ^a	Physically attractive (SC; 3.86) ^a
Good sense of humor (SC; 2.57)	Interesting to talk to (SC; 3.52)	Exciting personality (SC; 4.38)
Socially skilled (SC; 2.93) ^a	Sexy (SC; 3.56)	Interesting to talk to (SC; 4.41)
Warm (CQ; 3.51) ^a	Warm (CQ; 3.56) ^a	Socially skilled (SC; 4.48) ^a
Popular (CQ; 3.59) ^a	Loving (CQ; 3.69)	Patient (CQ; 4.79)
Kind (CQ; 4.49) ^a	Good sense of humor (SC; 3.77)	Sexy (SC; 4.83)
Accepting (CQ; 4.64)	Socially skilled (SC; 3.79) ^a	Loving (CQ; 5.07)
Responsive (CQ; 5.85) ^a	Physically attractive (SC; 3.82) ^a	Warm (CQ; 5.14) ^a
Loving (CQ; 6.01)	Accepting (CQ; 3.85)	Kind (CQ; 5.26) ^a
Honest (CQ; 6.50) ^a	Kind (CQ; 4.01) ^a	Responsive (CQ; 5.40) ^a
Loyal (CQ; 7.41)	Patient (CQ; 4.05)	Affectionate (CQ; 5.47)
	Affectionate (CQ; 4.05)	Accepting (CQ; 5.53)
	High social status (SC; 4.18)	Loyal (CQ; 5.86)
	Loyal (CQ; 4.21)	Stylish (SC; 5.86)
	Honest (CQ; 4.63) ^a	Honest (CQ; 5.98) ^a

NOTE: Parentheses indicate whether the trait is a social commodity (SC) or a communal quality (CQ), and the mean rating of the trait for observability, ambiguity, or controllability.

a. Traits that were also included in Study 2; all traits were included in Study 1.

TABLE 2: Average Within-Person Correlations Between Observability, Ambiguity, or Controllability and Indices of Clarity in Studies 1 and 2

	<i>Average Within-Person Correlation</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²
Study 1			
Observability (i.e., time required to accurately assess traits)			
Confidence in self-rating	.45	< .001	.20
Internal consistency	.38	< .001	.14
Extremity	.29	< .001	.08
Average <i>r</i> across clarity indices	.37	< .001	.14
Ambiguity			
Confidence in self-rating	.22	.008	.05
Internal consistency	.21	.001	.04
Extremity	.14	.096	.02
Average <i>r</i> across clarity indices	.19	.016	.04
Controllability			
Confidence in self-rating	.35	< .001	.12
Internal consistency	.39	< .001	.15
Extremity	.24	.003	.06
Average <i>r</i> across clarity indices	.33	< .001	.11
Study 2			
Observability			
General-to-specific self-concept congruence	.16	.126	.03
Latency (reverse scored)	.30	.006	.09
Average <i>r</i> across clarity indices	.24	.024	.06
Ambiguity			
General-to-specific self-concept congruence	.02	.861	< .01
Latency (reverse scored)	.16	.126	.03
Average <i>r</i> across clarity indices	.09	.404	.01
Controllability			
General-to-specific self-concept congruence	.19	.076	.04
Latency (reverse scored)	.35	< .001	.12
Average <i>r</i> across clarity indices	.28	.008	.08

increased time to accurately assess traits (i.e., decreased observability), greater ambiguity of trait definitions, and increased controllability of traits were each predictive of greater trait clarity in Study 1. Similar results emerged in Study 2, although ambiguity did not emerge as a statistically significant predictor of within-person variance in clarity on the indices used in that study. Nevertheless, meta-analysis of the results of Studies 1 and 2 indicated that across all five clarity measures, increased time to accurately assess traits was associated with increased trait clarity within individuals, $Z = 3.92, p < .001$, as was increased trait ambiguity, $Z = 2.29, p = .011$, and increased trait controllability, $Z = 4.20, p < .001$.⁵

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Summary of Results

In two studies, we conducted an almost exact replication of five of Campbell's (1990) original methods and, on each of the five methods, replicated her influential finding that LSEs have less clear self-concepts than do HSEs. Moreover, using a modified version of a self-report measure that Campbell et al. (1996) developed later, we replicated their finding that LSEs explicitly acknowledge that they are relatively unclear about their self-views. We then tested our hypothesis that people's SC self-concepts are less clear than their CQ self-concepts. Although across both domains of traits, LSEs had less clear self-concepts than did HSEs, both LSEs' and HSEs' SC self-concepts were less extreme, less confidently held, and less internally consistent than their CQ self-concepts. People also had more difficulty cognitively accessing their SC self-concepts than CQ self-concepts (as shown by slower responses latencies), and they showed greater deviation between general and situation-specific self-beliefs for SCs than for CQs following a social interaction. Respondents also explicitly reported that they feel more uncertain about their SC self-views than about their CQ self-views. Such within-person, across-domain variability reveals that everyone has self-concept domains of both confidence and confusion, and it contradicts the prevailing belief that HSEs have globally clearer self-views than do LSEs.

An Alternative Explanation

Campbell (1990) argued that the measures that she used in her original research index self-concept clarity. However, is it possible that her measures actually assess the ease with which people can reach a positive conclusion about the self? People are motivated to maintain a positive self-image (Taylor & Brown, 1988), and it is

possible that it is easier to maintain a positive self-concept for traits that are less observable, more ambiguous, and more controllable. For example, is it possible that confidence in one's self-views actually reflects one's confidence in a *positive* self-view? Similarly, could the response latency measure assess the speed with which people judge their self-views to be positive?

We suggest that this alternative account cannot explain two of our important findings. First, in the analyses that revealed domain differences in self-concept clarity, we controlled for global self-esteem. By definition, HSEs maintain more positive self-views than do LSEs. Hence, if the domain differences on our measures were explained by people's ability or motivation to maintain positive self-views, then domain differences should have been reduced or eliminated when self-esteem was included in the analysis. In fact, domain differences in self-concept clarity were typically independent of participants' self-esteem. A second finding that the alternative account cannot explain occurred in Study 3a, in which participants explicitly reported that they felt more uncertain about their SCs than about their CQs. The positivity account cannot easily explain why participants spent more time wondering about their "true" level of SCs than of CQs and why participants reported greater difficulty describing their SCs than CQs to other people.

At the same time, we acknowledge that this apparently alternative account of our findings may not actually be incompatible with our clarity account. Campbell and Lavalley (1993) proposed that HSEs maintain more positive self-views than do LSEs because they are better at selectively attending to positive social cues, and this selective attention leads to HSEs' clearer self-concepts. It may indeed be easier to maintain positive self-views about traits that are less observable, more ambiguous, and more controllable. To the extent that one cannot maintain a positive self-image about a particular trait, one may experience lower self-concept clarity regarding that trait: On that trait, one may pinpoint one's standing as being more middling than extreme and have less confidence in that judgment, as well as have more difficulty accessing the self-concept, experience more discrepancies between one's general and situation-specific self-concepts, and explicitly acknowledge more feelings of uncertainty.

The Multifaceted Nature of Self-Concept Clarity

Our findings demonstrate that a structural aspect of the self-concept, clarity, is not monolithic. Although self-esteem theorists have assumed that some people had clear self-concepts whereas others had unclear self-concepts, our results reveal within-person variability in self-concept clarity. This within-person variability suggests that the

positive and negative consequences of high and low self-concept clarity may also vary within persons.

For example, if poor self-concept clarity undermines one's ability to set appropriate and achievable goals (Baumeister, 1993), then setting achievable goals that pertain to one's relatively unclear SCs (e.g., weight loss) may be especially challenging for everyone, regardless of level of self-esteem. In contrast, even LSEs may have a relatively easy time setting achievable goals in areas that draw on their relatively clear CQs (e.g., volunteering). Similarly, if people with clear self-concepts are especially able to bring to mind their strengths following failure (e.g., Dodgson & Wood, 1998), then everyone, regardless of level of self-esteem, may be better able to recall their CQ strengths than their SC strengths following failure. If people can enjoy the psychological benefits of self-enhancement (Taylor & Brown, 1988) in trait domains about which they are clear, then everyone, regardless of level of self-esteem, may enjoy the benefits of self-enhancement to a greater degree in the CQ domain than in the SC domain (Dunning et al., 1989). Indeed, LSEs hold self-views of their CQs that are nearly as positive as those of HSEs (Anthony et al., 2007).

Thus, the negative effects of poor self-concept clarity may plague not only LSEs; HSEs also may suffer the effects of poor self-concept clarity in the SC domain. Conversely, LSEs may enjoy the benefits of high self-concept clarity in the CQ domain.

NOTES

1. Although social commodities (SCs) are *generally* more socially valued than communal qualities (CQs), both domains of traits are highly valued on the interpersonal marketplace. The traits included in the SC and CQ domains were derived from a large literature examining the social value of traits, and these two domains represent the most highly desired traits across cultures, genders, and varying social milieu (see Anthony, Holmes, & Wood, 2007). As a result, we suggest that SCs and CQs are highly relevant traits for the majority of people. This generally high level of trait relevance limits the possibility that measurement error will affect one domain of traits more than the other (for a review of trait relevance as it applies to measurement issues, see Britt & Shepperd, 1999).

2. The degrees of freedom in the following analyses vary because data were missing for some participants.

3. These two participants were excluded because their 8,000 ms response latencies were more than 3 standard deviations above the mean. Adopting a more stringent cutoff point for response latencies (i.e., excluding latencies longer than 3,000 ms) did not change the results that will be described shortly.

4. Study 1 used 9 SCs and 9 CQs to assess domain differences in self-concept clarity, and in Study 3a participants rated the controllability and ambiguity of all 18 of these traits. However, participants in Study 3b rated the observability of only 6 of the SCs and 8 of the CQs used in Study 1. Study 3a yielded observability, ambiguity, and controllability scores for all 3 SCs and 4 CQs that were used to assess self-concept clarity in Study 2.

5. Based on these results and the results presented in Table 2, readers may be tempted to conclude that observability and controllability are stronger predictors of self-concept clarity than is ambiguity. This

may be the case, but in our data, ambiguity ratings had less variance than did ratings of observability and controllability (ranges = 1.42, 5.85, and 2.45, respectively). Hence, because restriction of range could have restricted the correlations between ambiguity and clarity, our data cannot be used to compare the relative strength of ambiguity, observability, and controllability as predictors of self-concept clarity.

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