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DOI:10.1037/0003-066X.63.1.65

## Yes, Cavalier Attitudes Can Have Pernicious Consequences

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In their thoughtful commentary on our article (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, February–March 2007), Krueger, Vohs, and Baumeister (2008, this issue) brought up many points with which we agree. Nevertheless, as they noted these points of agreement, we focus instead on several points of continued disagreement. In addition, we comment on a few new twists that they have added to their argument.

Krueger et al. (2008) began by disputing our claim that they “have violated the specificity matching principle by focusing on the capacity of global measures of self-esteem to predict specific outcomes” (Swann et al., 2007, p. 87). They protested that they specifically drew attention to the specificity matching principle, reminding the reader that in their original article (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003) they indicated that “it is difficult to detect a correspondence between a global attitude and specific behaviors” (p. 6).

It is true that Baumeister et al. (2003) acknowledged the specificity matching principle in their original article. Nevertheless, as Krueger et al. (2008) themselves allowed, after acknowledging the principle, Baumeister et al. focused their review on the relative incapacity of measures of global self-esteem to predict specific outcomes, which is to say they violated the principle repeatedly. If Baumeister et al. had faithfully followed the implications of

the specificity matching principle, they would have likely reached the same conclusion we reached, which is that most of the research conducted on self-esteem offers little insight into the capacity of self-knowledge to predict important outcomes because it violates the specificity matching principle. Furthermore, they also would have acknowledged (as we did) that when researchers have conformed to the specificity matching principle, they have discovered that the relationship between self-views and outcome variables improves considerably. For example, we cited evidence that specific academic self-concepts offered better predictions of academic ability than did global self-esteem (Hansford & Hattie, 1982).

Krueger et al. (2008) introduced a novel argument into their comment, suggesting that the alleged predictive impotence of self-esteem stems from a tendency for responses to measures of self-esteem to have no motivational implications. To make their point, they singled out an item from the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale: “I feel that I have a number of good qualities.”

We were startled by Krueger et al.'s (2008) attempt to discredit one of psychology's most venerable constructs by questioning the properties of this single item of a single self-esteem scale. But even if the viability of the self-esteem construct could be imagined to rest on the validity of a single item, the research literature suggests that believing that one has lots of good qualities does indeed have motivational implications. Indeed, Baumeister himself (McFarlin, Baumeister, & Blascovich, 1984) has published evidence that people with high self-esteem persist longer in the wake of failure than do people with low self-esteem.

Also, there is growing evidence that people who feel that they lack good qualities will be surprised and upset by positive treatment and that such reactions guide subsequent behavior. In fact, in our article we cited evidence that people with positive self-views withdraw from their marriage partners (either psychologically or through divorce/separation) insofar as their partners perceive them negatively and that people with negative self-views withdraw from their marriage partners insofar as their partners perceive them positively (e.g., Cast & Burke, 2002; Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). Moreover, in a recent series of four studies, Wiesenfeld, Swann, Brockner, and Bartel (2007) discovered that self-esteem moderated people's reactions to “procedural justice” (how fairly one is treated by one's organization). For people

with high self-esteem, being treated more fairly by their work organization increased emotional and behavioral commitment to the organization, but people with low self-esteem showed no such preference for fair treatment. In short, there is growing evidence that believing that one has good qualities and is worthwhile has profound motivational implications, influencing behaviors ranging from task persistence and relationship longevity to the frequency with which people show up for work.

Krueger et al. (2008) also reinforced one of their key assertions in their original article (Baumeister et al., 2003), which was that self-esteem and narcissism are closely allied. From their vantage point, self-esteem is, by association, guilty of all the negative qualities that have been empirically linked to narcissism. This association, in turn, supposedly explains why success in maintaining high self-esteem is a nasty, competitive process in which one person's success requires another person's failure. Although it is true that measures of self-esteem and narcissism are related, the relation is modest. More important, narcissism is a multifaceted construct, and only the socially benign components of narcissism (e.g., vanity, authority) covary with self-esteem; the socially noxious aspects of self-esteem (e.g., entitlement, aggressiveness) are largely independent of self-esteem (Trzesniewski et al., 2006). Given this, it is not surprising that just as narcissism predicts negative behaviors such as defensiveness, self-esteem predicts a wide array of happy, prosocial outcomes; see p. 87 of Swann et al. (2007) for citations to six papers that report evidence that supports this conclusion. We urge readers to examine these articles and reach their own judgment about the viability of Krueger et al.'s continued insistence that conflating self-esteem and narcissism represents a scientific advance.

Krueger et al. (2008) strove to buttress their conviction that self-esteem has deleterious consequences by pointing to a press release reporting the findings of Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell (Associated Press, 2007). The press release contended that these researchers found that narcissism has increased in recent years among young Americans. The researchers did not explain precisely why narcissism appears to have increased but instead implied that it is linked to self-enhancement, which is, in turn, related to high self-esteem. The wisdom of using data summarized in a press release to buttress a scientific argument aside, we find ourselves persuaded by a recent study that challenges the premise of this press release. On the basis of a careful

study of nearly 26,000 respondents, Trzesniewski, Donnellan, and Robins (in press) concluded that there is no evidence that narcissism has increased over the last few decades. A detailed report of their methods and findings will soon appear in a reputable scientific journal.

On a more general note, Krueger et al.'s (2008) comment on our article is remarkable for what it does not say. For example, no mention is made of the implications of their failure to consider recent developments in psychometric theory in concluding that the effects of self-esteem are negligible. In particular, they failed to adjust their conclusions in light of the fact that many of the criterion variables that they focused on were multiply determined and enormously significant for the larger society. Both of these qualities call for lowering the standards needed for a given research finding to be considered important. Krueger et al.'s failure to make this accommodation appears to have led them to ignore recent evidence that high self-esteem is associated with outcomes such as participating in fewer delinquent activities, getting arrested less often, graduating from college, and staying off unemployment (Trzesniewski et al., 2006).

Let us close by emphasizing a point of agreement with Krueger et al. (2008). They noted that "the self-esteem movement and many academic investigators have taken a cavalier attitude toward the choice of behavioral criteria" (p. xx). We agree wholeheartedly with their concern about the dangers of assuming a cavalier attitude. In fact, this was precisely our worry upon reading

Baumeister et al.'s (2003) original critique of the self-esteem literature. Although we agreed that the self-esteem movement sometimes contributed to a theoretically uninformed search for correlates of self-esteem and strategies designed to improve it, we felt that the appropriate response to this unfortunate development was not to summarily dismiss the potential value of the self-esteem construct. Rather, what was needed was a systematic attempt to distinguish the true consequences of self-esteem as well as effective programs for improving it. If mistakes were made in developing a deeper understanding of one of psychology's most important constructs, there is nothing to be gained—and much to be lost—from cavalierly dismissing the construct itself.

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