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The Multifaceted Self Effect: Flexibility or Merely Self-Enhancement?

Kenneth D. Locke

University of Idaho

and

Leonard M. Horowitz

Stanford University

Previous research has shown that people ascribe more traits to themselves than to others, and more traits to liked others than to disliked others, suggesting that the self and liked others are viewed as ''multifaceted.'' A limitation of those studies was their use of generally desirable traits. The present studies asked subjects to describe themselves and liked and disliked well-known others and acquaintances on trait pairs spanning the full range of social desirability. The results for desirable traits replicated previous studies, but the results for undesirable traits did not. Subjects judged themselves to have the same number of undesirable traits as others and judged liked others to have fewer undesirable traits than disliked others. Nondepressed subjects showed these biases to enhance the self and liked others to a greater degree than did depressed subjects.

Do people perceive themselves as multifaceted and as more multifaceted than others? That is, do people describe themselves as having many different (and often contrasting and contradictory) traits? Several researchers have attempted to address these questions by presenting people with lists of traits and asking them to indicate which traits describe themselves or which describe various other people. When Monson, Tanke, and Lund (1980) gave subjects such a list, they found that their subjects used more traits, including more contrasting traits (such as ''serious'' and ''carefree''), to describe the self than to describe others. Sande, Goethals, and Radloff (1988) presented subjects with pairs of contrasting traits and offered subjects four response options: ''trait a,'' ''trait b,'' ''both,'' or ''neither.'' Across several studies,

Correspondence and reprint requests should be addressed to Kenneth Locke, Department of Psychology, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID 83844-3043. E-mail: klocke@uidaho.edu.

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they also found that their subjects were more likely to use ''both'' and less likely to use ''neither'' when describing the self than when describing others. On the basis of these findings, Sande *et al.* (1988) concluded that people perceive the self as multifaceted and as more multifaceted than others. Let us call this hypothesized tendency the multifaceted self effect.

The multifaceted self effect is interesting for several reasons. One is that the above results, which show that people ascribe more traits to themselves than to other people, appear to conflict with other studies which show that people are more likely to use traits (as opposed to situational causes) to explain the behavior of other people than to explain their own behavior (Jones, 1976). To reconcile their findings with this ''actor–observer difference'' in situational attributions, Sande *et al.* (1988) suggested that people view traits as behavioral potentials which can be actualized or not depending on the situation. Thus, when people describe themselves as having many traits, it shows that they ''perceive themselves as multifaceted, that is, as having a personality that is rich, complex, and deep, and that they perceive themselves as adaptive and flexible'' (p. 20). The multifaceted self effect has also generated interest because it may provide a way to understand or explain other phenomena, such as androgynous self-schemas (''I am both masculine and feminine''; Vonk & Ashmore, 1993) and self-relevant judgment biases (Fiedler, 1996).

Unfortunately, in all of the demonstrations of the multifaceted self effect described above there is an important confound: The traits used as stimuli were generally socially desirable traits. Thus, describing the self as multifaceted was confounded with describing the self as good. Indeed, the traits used by Sande *et al.* (1988) were virtually identical to those used by Monson *et al.* (1980) and to those used even earlier by Nisbett, Caputo, Legant, and Maracek (1973). Nisbett *et al.* (1973) stated that, in forming those pairs, ''an effort was made to use trait adjectives that were socially desirable . . . Only 2 of the 40 terms received a mean rating of less than neutral'' (p. 161). Thus, the traits used by Nisbett *et al.* (1973), Monson *et al.* (1980), and Sande *et al.* (1988) were almost exclusively positive in social desirability. Therefore, we do not know if the tendency of people to ascribe more traits to themselves than to others is specific to desirable traits and may not hold for undesirable traits.

Sande *et al.* (1988) recognized that the multifaceted self effect is less interesting if it holds only for highly desirable traits (p. 16), so they attempted to test the effect of desirability by dividing the traits according to whether they were above or below the median in social desirability *for that set of traits.* They concluded that ''within levels of social desirability, the initial pattern of results remained the same'' (Sande *et al.*, 1988, p. 18). However, given that the traits were generally positive, even those traits below the median in desirability would have been positive, on average. Thus, we do not

know if the pattern of results will generalize to traits that are truly neutral or negative in social desirability.

To summarize, the studies reviewed above did not systematically sample traits from all levels of social desirability. As a result, we do not know if endorsing more traits reflects a multifaceted self-image or simply a bias to endorse favorable traits. In the present research, we asked subjects to describe themselves and others on an expanded set of trait pairs that systematically sampled traits from all levels of social desirability—positive and negative. If the multifaceted self effect is the result of perceiving the self as cross-situationally flexible, then the effect should be robust across all levels of trait desirability. However, if the effect is the result of enhancing the self, then the effect should not replicate when the traits in question are socially undesirable.

A second purpose of the present study was to examine the multifaceted self effect among depressed people. Each of the above interpretations of the effect would have a different implication for depression. If the multifaceted self effect resulted from people perceiving themselves as having complex and flexible personalities, then we might expect depressed individuals to show a smaller effect across the full range of social desirability. In that case, a goal for treating depressed people might be to help the person view themselves as having more traits and thus more ''arrows in their behavioral quivers'' (Sande *et al.*, 1988, p. 13). On the other hand, if the multifaceted self effect resulted from people perceiving themselves as having desirable personalities, then we might expect depressed people to show a smaller effect only for socially desirable traits, and perhaps show a larger effect for undesirable traits. In that case, the goal for treatment would be to enhance the person's self-esteem. These hypotheses are tested in the studies reported below.

STUDY 1

Sande *et al.* (1988, Experiments 2 and 3) had subjects describe themselves and an acquaintance on pairs of traits by indicating whether that person had the first trait, the second trait, both, or neither. For example, the first item was:

1. I am: (a) Serious
   (b) Carefree
   (c) Both
   (d) Neither

Study 1 replicated this procedure using trait pairs which systematically sampled the full range of social desirability from very highly negative to very highly positive. The new set of traits was selected to control for desirability within trait pairs: Within each pair the opposing traits differed only in meaning, not in desirability. The responses of dysphoric and nondysphoric subjects were also compared.

Method

Subjects. The subjects were 100 undergraduates in introductory psychology at San Jose State University who participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement. Four questionnaires were either not completed or not returned, resulting in 96 usable questionnaires.

Adjective pairs. The adjective pairs were selected as follows. We started with a pool of over 400 adjectives for which there existed published social desirability norms from two independent samples: University of Michigan undergraduates in 1967 (Norman, 1967) and University of London adult students in 1986 (Hampson, Goldberg, & John, 1987). In both samples, subjects rated how desirable people in general think it would be for an individual to possess the characteristic on a nine-point scale (1 = extremely undesirable, 5 = neutral, 9 = extremely desirable). After eliminating adjectives whose mean rating by British and American judges differed by more than two scale points, we averaged the British and American ratings in order to obtain a more stable index of desirability. Then we paired together adjectives (a) that were contrasting in meaning but (b) whose mean social desirability ratings were within 0.5 units of each other.

Finally, we selected 5 such pairs at each of six levels of social desirability. The pairs were ambitious–easy-going, practical–principled, lively–relaxed, independent–sociable, adaptable–stable (desirability between 7 and 8 = *very high*); humble–bold, modest–daring, dignified–playful, firm–accommodating, frank–sensitive (desirability between 6 and 7 = *medium high*); reserved–mischievous, soft–tough, outspoken–quiet, compliant–forceful, cautious–carefree (desirability between 5 and 6 = *mildly high*); docile–dominant, conventional–rebellious, shy–dramatic, bashful–flirtatious, restrained–rambunctious (desirability between 4 and 5 = *mildly low*); highly-strung–lethargic, impatient–indecisive, immodest–inhibited, submissive–argumentative, meek–demanding (desirability between 3 and 4 = *medium low*); self-pitying–conceited, irritable–apathetic, unsociable–nosey, distrustful–gullible, vain–insecure (mean desirability between 2 and 3 = *very low*). Thus, there were 30 pairs of traits, half desirable and half undesirable.

Procedure. Subjects described themselves and an acquaintance on 30 pairs of traits. Each pair was accompanied by the four options: trait a, trait b, both, and neither. The subjects also completed the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock & Erbaugh, 1961), a 21-item self-report measure of depression on which scores can range from 0 to 63. Approximately half completed the BDI before and half after rating the traits. Following Beck (1976), subjects were called dysphoric (mildly depressed) if their BDI score was 10 or more; 41 subjects were dysphoric and 55 were nondysphoric. Finally, subjects rated the desirability of each of the 60 traits on scales ranging from 1 (extremely undesirable) to 5 (neutral) to 9 (extremely desirable).

Results and Discussion

Trait ascriptions. The dependent measures used by Sande *et al.* (1988, Experiment 2) were the frequencies with which subjects circled ''both'' and ''neither.'' Because these measures are not independent, we combined them into a single measure which reported the total number of traits (T) ascribed to the target. T was computed as the frequency with which a single trait was ascribed plus twice the frequency with which both traits were ascribed. (Separate analyses were also performed on the frequencies of circling ''both'' and ''neither.'' Almost without exception, these measures yielded identical results and conclusions.)

The total number of traits ascribed (T) was subjected to a 2 × 2 × 6

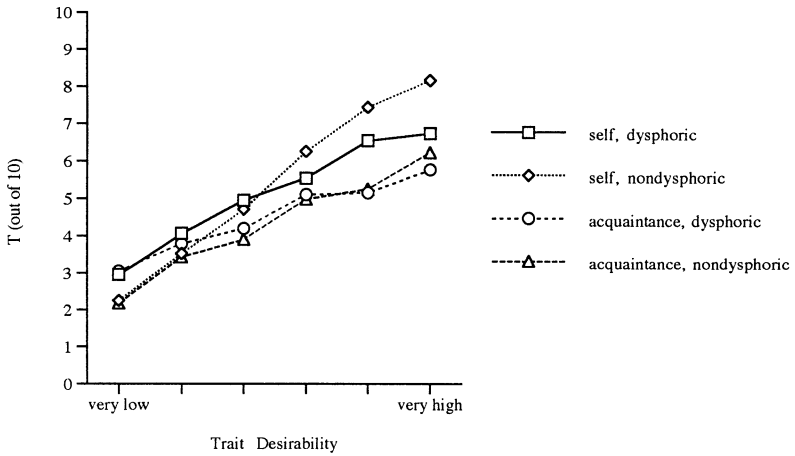

FIG. 1. Mean T as a function of subject dysphoria, target, and trait desirability (Study 1).

(Depression × Target × Social Desirability) ANOVA, with target and trait desirability as repeated measures variables. The mean values of T for each cell of the design are shown in Fig. 1.

The effect of target was significant: Subjects ascribed more traits to themselves than to their acquaintances, $F(1, 94) = 42.17$, $p < .001$. This result replicates the corresponding result of Sande *et al.* (1988). The effect of trait desirability was also significant: The frequency of endorsement increased with trait desirability, $F(5, 470) = 134.60$, $p < .001$. Moreover, these two variables interacted significantly, $F(5, 470) = 10.56$, $p < .001$. To clarify this interaction, we combined traits in adjacent categories: Traits high and very high in desirability were called ''desirable traits,'' those slightly high or slightly low in desirability were called ''neutral traits,'' and those low or very low in desirability were called ''undesirable traits.'' The tendency for subjects to ascribe more traits to themselves than to others was greatest for desirable traits, $t(95) = 7.23$, $p < .001$, smaller for neutral traits, $t(95) = 4.89$, $p < .001$, and nonsignificant for undesirable traits, $t(95) = .46$, $p > .1$.

The main effect of depression was not significant, $F(1, 94) = .03$, $p > .1$. However, depression interacted significantly with trait desirability, $F(5, 470) = 6.00$, $p < .001$. Whereas nondysphoric subjects endorsed more desirable traits than dysphoric subjects, $t(94) = 2.64$, $p = .01$, there was no difference for neutral traits, $t(94) = .05$, $p > .1$, and there was a tendency for dysphoric subjects to endorse more undesirable traits than nondysphoric subjects, $t(94) = -1.89$, $p = .06$. Thus, both dysphoric and nondysphoric people ascribed more positive than negative traits to themselves (both in

absolute terms and relative to their descriptions of others), but the bias was less extreme in dysphoric people.[1]

For the sake of clarity, in the above analyses depression was analyzed as a dichotomous variable. However, depression is probably better viewed as a continuous variable. In order to confirm and clarify our results for all levels of depression, we also performed analogous analyses with depression as a continuous variable (BDI score). First, we correlated the BDI scores with the T scores (a) for the self and (b) for an acquaintance. In accord with the ANOVA results, neither correlation was significant, indicating that depression does not predict the overall number of traits used to describe the self or an acquaintance. We then determined whether BDI scores were related to the strength of the relationship between trait endorsement and trait desirability. For each subject we computed the correlation between (a) the number of traits endorsed for a target at each level of social desirability and (b) the normative social desirability of traits at that level (2.5, 3.5, 4.5, 5.5, 6.5, 7.5.) The means (and standard deviations) of the Pearson *r*s were, for ratings the self, .76 (.27), and for ratings of acquaintances, .50 (.55). For ratings of the self, the Pearson *r* between trait desirability and trait endorsement was itself negatively correlated with BDI score, $r(94) = -.36$, $p < .001$. For ratings of acquaintances, the Pearson *r* between trait desirability and trait endorsement was not significantly correlated with BDI score. Thus, the lower the level of depression, the greater the tendency to endorse positive and deny negative traits when describing the self.

Desirability ratings. Since the subjects endorsed neutral items relatively more often in describing themselves, it is possible that the self is more multifaceted with regard to neutral descriptors. However, as shown next, a neutral word was only applied to the self more often if the subject personally regarded that word as socially desirable.

Every subject rated the social desirability of each trait, so we were able to examine the relationship between the subjects' judgment of social desir-

[1] As mentioned earlier, using frequency of circling the ''both'' option or the ''neither'' option as the dependent variable yields similar results and conclusions. Subjects ascribed ''both'' more often and ''neither'' less often to themselves than to their acquaintances, Fs(1, 94) = 53.37 and 4.14, ps $< .05$. Social desirability had an even stronger effect on ascriptions of ''both'' and ''neither'', Fs(5, 470) = 67.13 and 123.28, ps $< .001$, with subjects circling ''both'' more often and ''neither'' less often on more desirable trait pairs. Social desirability interacted with target, Fs(5, 470) = 10.81 and 5.14, ps $< .001$. The tendency to ascribe ''both'' more often to the self than others increased with trait desirability; the tendency to ascribe ''neither'' more often to others than the self increased with trait *un*desirability. Trait desirability also interacted with depression, $F(5, 470) = 6.66$ and 2.90, ps $< .01$. Depressed people were not globally less inclined to ascribe ''both'' traits or more inclined to ascribe ''neither'' trait. Rather, it depended on the desirability of the traits, with depressed persons being less inclined to circle ''both'' on desirable pairs and ''neither'' on undesirable pairs.

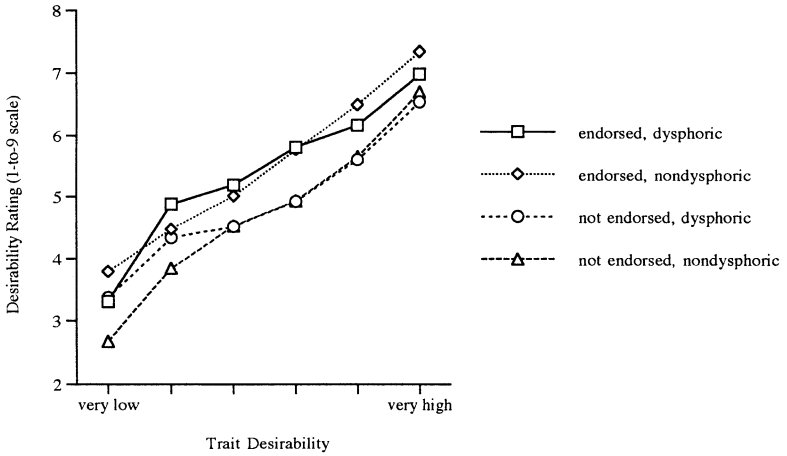

FIG. 2. Mean trait desirability rating as a function of subject dysphoria, normative desirability level, and whether the trait was ascribed to the self.

ability on a particular trait and their likelihood of using that trait to describe the self. For each subject we separated traits that were ascribed to the self from those that were not. (Note that if a subject endorsed either none or all of the traits at a particular level, we had a missing datum at that level; in each such case, we replaced the missing datum with the sample mean for that level.) The desirability ratings were subjected to a $2 \times 2 \times 6$ (Depression $\times$ Endorsement $\times$ Normative Desirability Level) ANOVA, with endorsement and desirability as repeated measures variables. The mean desirability rating for each cell of the design is shown in Fig. 2.

The effect of desirability level was highly significant, $F(5, 470) = 230.92$, $p < .001$. Figure 2 shows that the ratings by our subjects and by the subjects in the normative samples were very similar. The effect of endorsement was also highly significant, $F(1, 94) = 92.30$, $p < .001$. The mean desirability rating of the endorsed traits (5.44) was significantly greater than the neutral point of 5, $t(95) = 7.33$, $p < .001$. Conversely, the mean rating of the nonendorsed traits (4.79) was significantly lower than neutral, $t(95) = 4.20$, $p < .001$.

The interaction of endorsement and desirability level was not significant, $F(5, 470) = 1.16$, $p > .1$. Thus, within every level of desirability, subjects were more likely to endorse the traits they perceived as more desirable. This clarifies why subjects ascribed more ''neutral'' traits to themselves than others: many of the ''neutral'' traits were not actually perceived as neutral. In fact, the traits in the neutral category that were ascribed to the self were perceived as above neutral in desirability (5.43), $t(95) = 5.38$, $p < .001$;

and those that were not ascribed to the self were perceived as below neutral in desirability (4.73), $t(95) = 3.38$, $p < .005$.

The main effect of depression was not significant, $F(1, 94) = 0.16$, $p > .1$. However, depression interacted significantly with endorsement, $F(1, 94) = 3.79$, $p = .054$, desirability, $F(5, 470) = 2.35$, $p = .040$, and the endorsement by desirability interaction, $F(5, 470) = 4.27$, $p = .001$. Overall, the self-ascriptions of nondysphoric subjects were slightly more likely to correspond to their desirability ratings, but this was especially apparent for traits very low in desirability. The difference in the ratings of endorsed and nonendorsed traits by nondysphoric subjects was greater at the ''very low'' level (mean difference = 1.13) than at any other level; conversely, the difference in the ratings of endorsed and nonendorsed traits by dysphoric subjects was smaller at the ''very low'' level (mean difference = −0.07) than at any other level.

To summarize, traits classified as neutral in group norms are only self-endorsed more often by those subjects who regard those traits to be socially desirable. Thus, the self-enhancement hypothesis continues to be supported over the multifaceted self hypothesis.

STUDY 2

Sande *et al.* (1988, Experiment 4) also had subjects describe themselves, as well as liked and disliked well-known others and acquaintances, on the task described above. They found that more traits were ascribed to liked well-known others than to liked acquaintances, leading them to conclude that familiarity helps people to appreciate more behavioral potentials in (liked) others. They also found that more traits were ascribed to liked others than to disliked others, leading them to conclude the following: ''The more positive one's feelings about an individual, the greater the number of traits that will be attributed to that person'' (p. 19).

Comparing responses to traits above or below the median in desirability, they further stated: ''We should point out again that this positivity effect does not mean that more desirable traits are ascribed to a liked person, but simply that *more* traits and, in particular, more *opposing* traits, will be ascribed to that individual. As we mentioned earlier, this implies a richness and depth of personality that allows one to behave as the situation requires. This increases one's feelings of control over one's environment'' (p. 19).

However, as we have noted, both the traits above and the traits below the median in desirability in those studies were generally positive traits, making such strong conclusions premature. In order to test more carefully the effects of trait desirability on descriptions of target others varying in liking and familiarity, the following study replicated the procedure of Sande *et al.* (1988, Experiment 4) using trait pairs spanning the full range of social desirability.

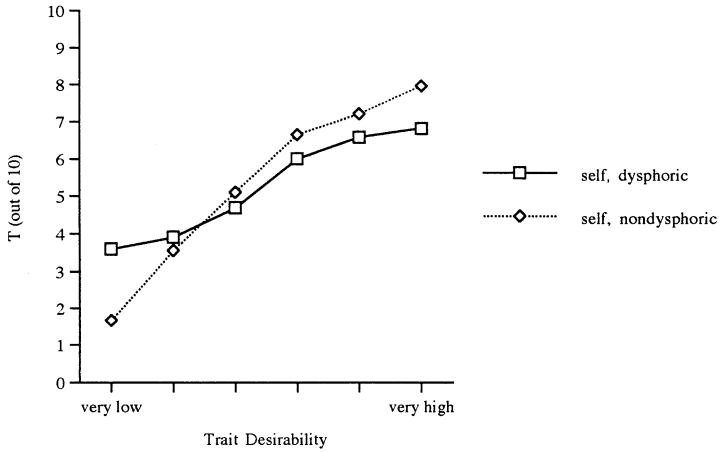

FIG. 3. Mean T for self-ratings as a function of subject dysphoria and trait desirability (Study 2).

Method

Subjects. The subjects were 100 undergraduates in introductory psychology at San Jose State University who participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement. Three questionnaires were either not completed or not returned, leaving 97 usable questionnaires. Forty-five subjects were dysphoric (BDIs > 9) and 52 were nondysphoric.

Procedure. Each subject was given a questionnaire containing the Beck Depression Inventory and five sets of 30 trait pairs (the same as in the previous study). The subjects used these traits to describe the following targets: (1) themselves, (2) a liked well-known other, (3) a disliked well-known other, (4) a liked acquaintance, and (5) a disliked acquaintance on each of the trait pairs. (Ten different random orderings were used).

Results and Discussion

The total number of traits ascribed (T) was subjected to a $2 \times 5 \times 6$ (Depression $\times$ Target $\times$ Social Desirability) ANOVA, with target and trait desirability as repeated factors. The mean values of T for each cell in the design are shown in Figs. 3–5.

First, there was a significant effect of trait desirability, $F(5, 475) = 146.19$, $p < .001$: The frequency of endorsement increased with increasing desirability. Second, the results showed a significant effect of target, $F(4, 380) = 21.06$, $p < .001$: More traits were ascribed to the self than to others. This result replicates the corresponding result of Sande *et al.* (1988). Most important, however, there was a strong target by desirability interaction, $F(20,$

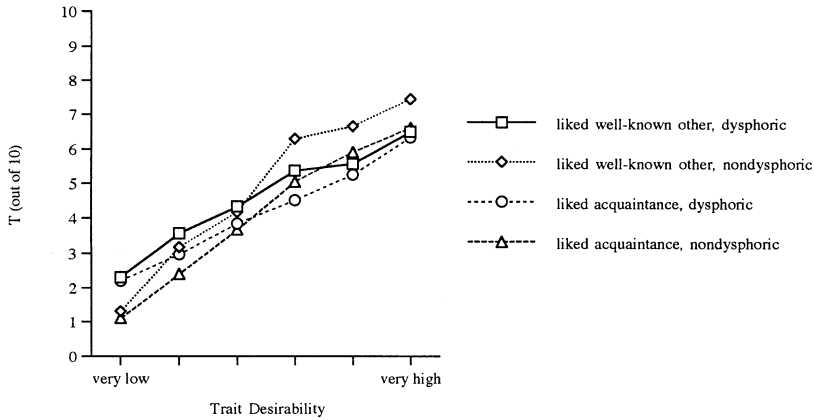

FIG. 4. Mean T for ratings of liked others as a function of subject dysphoria and trait desirability (Study 2).

1900) = 46.73, $p < .001$. The nature of this interaction can be seen in Fig. 3 (describing the self), Fig. 4 (describing liked others), and Fig. 5 (describing disliked others). For judgment of the self (Fig. 3), the value of T increased monotonically with increases in trait desirability. Judgments of liked others (Fig. 4) showed a similar pattern. However, for judgments of disliked others (Fig. 5), T was not related to social desirability.

Depression interacted with social desirability [$F(5, 475) = 4.04$, $p = .001$] and with the social desirability by target interaction, producing a significant

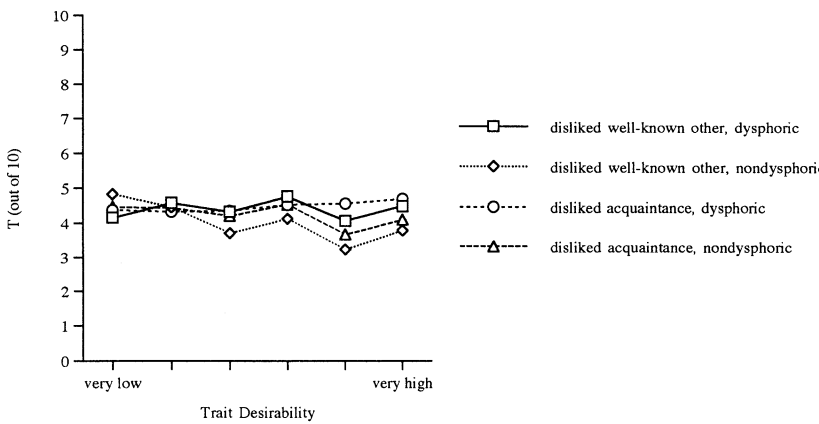

FIG. 5. Mean T ratings of disliked others as a function of subject dysphoria and trait desirability (Study 2).

triple interaction [$F(20, 1900) = 5.48$, $p < .001$]. To clarify the nature of this triple interaction, again consider Figs. 3–5. Figure 3 shows a clear crossover in the graphs. In describing the self, nondysphoric subjects used significantly more socially desirable traits and significantly fewer undesirable traits than did dysphoric subjects. Figure 4 shows a similar but attenuated pattern for liked others (stronger for well-known others than for acquaintances). Figure 5, in contrast, shows no such pattern.

We also performed an analysis of variance on just the judgments of targets other than the self. That is, T was subjected to a 2 (Dysphoric versus Nondysphoric) × 2 (Liked versus Disliked) × 2 (Well-Known Other versus Acquaintance) × 6 (Levels of Social Desirability) ANOVA, with the last three variables as repeated factors. There were two significant main effects, trait desirability [$F(5, 475) = 78.15$, $p < .001$] and target familiarity [$F(1, 95) = 6.04$, $p < .001$]. Overall, desirable traits were endorsed more frequently, and more traits were ascribed to familiar targets than to unfamiliar targets. Although liking itself did not produce a significant main effect, liking did interact with familiarity [$F(1, 95) = 17.62$, $p < .001$]: More traits were ascribed to liked well-known others than to any of the other targets [$ts(96) > 2.5$, $ps < .02$]. Liking also interacted with trait desirability [$F(5, 475) = 96.61$, $p < .001$]: Liked others were judged to have more desirable traits [$t(96) = 9.49$, $p < .001$], slightly more neutral traits [$t(96) = 2.35$, $p < .05$], and fewer undesirable traits [$t(96) = -10.80$, $p < .001$]. These result strongly resemble those of Study 1.

Finally, there was a significant triple interaction of depression, liking, and desirability, $F(5, 475) = 8.59$, $p < .001$. Compared to nondysphoric subjects, dysphoric subjects judged liked others to have fewer desirable traits [$t(95) = 2.16$, $p < .05$] and more undesirable traits [$t(95) = -2.75$, $p < .01$]. Dysphoric subjects also judged disliked others to have more desirable traits [$t(95) = -2.33$, $p < .05$].

As in Study 1, we also analyzed the effects of depression as a continuous variable (BDI score.) First, we correlated the BDI scores with the T scores for each target. In accord with the ANOVA results and the results of Study 1, none of the correlations was significant, indicating that a person's level of depression does not predict the overall number of traits that the person will use to describe the self or other people. We then determined whether BDI score would predict the strength of the relationship between trait endorsement and trait desirability. For each subject we computed the correlation between (a) the number of traits they endorsed for each target at each level of social desirability and (b) the normative social desirability of traits at that level (2.5, 3.5, 4.5, 5.5, 6.5, 7.5.) For ratings of the self the mean (and standard deviation) of the Pearson r was .77 ($SD = .27$); for liked known others it was .74 (.36); for liked acquaintances it was .71 (.43); for disliked known others it was −.17 (.63); and for disliked acquaintances it was −.07

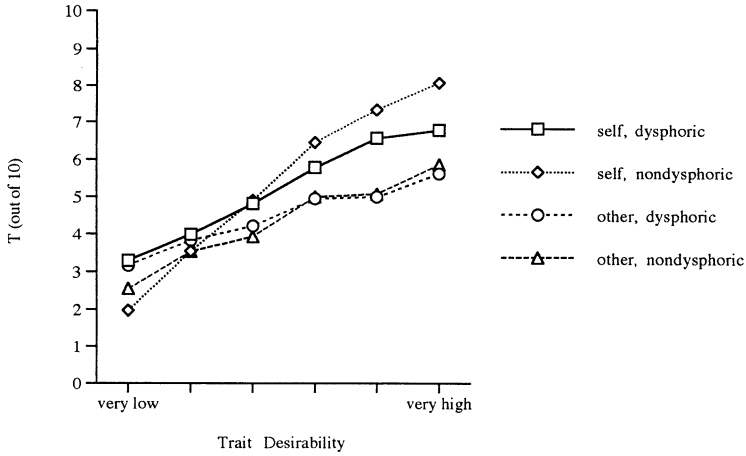

FIG. 6. Mean T for as a function of subject dysphoria, target, and trait desirability (Studies 1 and 2).

(.67). For ratings of the self, liked known others, and liked acquaintances, the correlation between trait desirability and trait endorsement was negatively correlated with BDI score; the *r*s ranged from −.33 to −.49, all *p*s < .001. For ratings of disliked known others and disliked acquaintances, the strength of the relationship between trait desirability and trait endorsement was not significantly related to the person's BDI score. Thus, the lower the level of depression, the greater the tendency to endorse positive and deny negative traits when judging the self and liked others, but not when judging disliked others.

Studies 1 and 2 Combined

The only difference between Studies 1 and 2 was that Study 2 asked subjects to describe four ''others'' rather than a single other. Therefore, in order to see the overall trends more clearly, we combined the data from the two studies, using the mean of the four ''others'' rated in Study 2. The total combined sample included 86 dysphoric and 107 nondysphoric subjects.

A 2 × 2 × 6 (Depression × Target × Social Desirability) ANOVA on T, with target and trait desirability as repeated factors, revealed large effects for desirability [$F(5, 955) = 317.75$, $p < .001$], target [$F(1, 191) = 82.86$, $p < .001$], and the desirability by target interaction [$F(5, 955) = 31.14$, $p < .001$]. Figure 6 shows that the number of traits endorsed increased with trait desirability, but more so for self-ratings than for other ratings. Depression interacted with desirability [$F(5, 955) = 10.44$, $p < .001$], and the triple interaction of depression, desirability, and target was also significant [$F(5, 955) = 4.21$, $p = .001$]. Compared to nondysphoric subjects, dysphoric sub-

jects self-ascribed fewer desirable traits [$t(191) = -3.94$, $p < .001$], a similar number of neutral traits [$t(191) = -1.34$, $p > .1$], and a greater number of undesirable traits [$t(191) = 3.23$, $p = .001$]. They also ascribed a greater number of undesirable traits to others than did nondysphoric subjects, $t(191) = 2.09$, $p < .05$.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Two studies explored the effects of trait desirability and subject dysphoria on the number of adjectives ascribed to the self and others. The results showed that the willingness of people to describe themselves and others as multifaceted depended on their attitudes toward the target and the desirability of the characteristics. The findings can be organized in terms of four questions concerning a multifaceted self.

(1) Do people describe themselves as multifaceted? The data indicate that people's self-descriptions are only ''multifaceted'' with respect to socially desirable traits. Whereas people judged themselves to have 75% of the traits very high in desirability (hence, endorsed ''both'' quite often) they judged themselves to have only 25% of the traits very low in desirability (hence, endorsed ''both'' quite seldom). Apparently, people see themselves as multifaceted with respect to positive traits (e.g., endorsing the statement ''I am both humble and bold''), but not with respect to negative traits. If they do endorse one negative trait, they are not apt to endorse its contrast (''I am argumentative but not submissive'').

The contrasting pairs used in the present study [and in the study by Sande *et al.* (1988)] were not opposite in meaning; being humble, for example, does not preclude being bold. Therefore, respondents did not have to contradict themselves when they selected both self-enhancing traits to describe the self. If the paired terms were truly contradictory, the pressure for consistency might reduce the tendency to endorse both of two self-enhancing traits. However, it would be difficult to find true opposites that are also comparable in social desirability.

Sande *et al.* (1988) concluded that people view themselves as having personalities stocked with a multitude of contrasting traits. Our results support this conclusion only for contrasting traits that are socially desirable. Sande *et al.* (1988) further suggest that ''the possession of traits is seen as increasing one's freedom by increasing the behavioral repertoire one may call upon in response to various situations'' (p. 19). If so, people are willing to forego some of this apparent freedom in exchange for the boost in self-esteem that comes from having primarily desirable traits.

An alternative explanation of our results is that situationality is confounded with desirability. That is, the multifaceted self effect may hold for desirable traits because desirable traits alone are perceived to vary with the situation; negative and neutral traits are perceived to be more dispositional,

and thus inconsistent with a flexible self. However, that is not the case. Using direct ratings of how much a trait used to describe the self would depend on the situation, Goldberg (1981) showed the relationship between trait desirability and situationality was negative. The only positive relationship we know of between trait desirability and trait situationality was found for descriptions of disliked others (Goldberg, 1981), who in our studies were the only targets for whom there was *not* a positive correlation between desirability and multifacetedness. Thus, the evidence suggests that endorsement of traits—including endorsement of two contrasting traits—is not an indicator of viewing the self as more responsive to the situation.

(2) Do people describe themselves as more multifaceted than they describe others? The answer again appears to depend on the desirability of the facets. People judge themselves to have more desirable traits, slightly more neutral traits (i.e., ones that they personally consider desirable), and the same number of undesirable traits as they judge others to have. Thus, people describe themselves as more multifaceted than others only to the extent that it enhances their self-image.

Dysphoric people also showed a tendency to enhance themselves relative to others, but to a much lesser extent than did nondysphoric people. This result fits with a growing body of literature which indicates that nondysphoric people show self-enhancing biases in evaluating themselves relative to others, whereas dysphoric people describe themselves and others in similar ways (Ackermann & DeRubeis, 1991, for a review). For example, nondysphoric students judge themselves more likely to succeed and less likely to fail than other students, whereas dysphoric students judge themselves and others similarly (Alloy & Ahrens, 1987).

(3) Do people describe liked and familiar others as more multifaceted than disliked or unfamiliar others? Again, the answer depends on the desirability of the facets. Compared to disliked others, people judge liked others to have more desirable traits, slightly more neutral traits, and fewer undesirable traits. Thus, people regard liked others as more multifaceted than disliked others, but not with regard to undesirable traits.

The number of traits ascribed to disliked others did not depend on the desirability of the traits or the familiarity of the other. However, among liked others, familiarity did lead to more trait ascriptions. Because this effect was independent of trait desirability, it may indicate that liked known others were viewed as more multifaceted than liked acquaintances. However, an assumption behind this inference may not be valid. When a person fails to endorse a particular trait as describing some target, the nonendorsement has two possible meanings: (1) The person may feel that the trait clearly fails to describe the target; or (2) the person may lack enough information to make a judgment one way or the other. Only the first interpretation would allow us to equate ''more traits endorsed'' with a more multifaceted view of the target. If the

endorsement of few traits has the second interpretation, subjects may perceive an unfamiliar target to be just as complex and multifaceted as anybody else, but they may feel that they lack the information to endorse any more traits.

Relative to nondysphoric subjects, dysphoric subjects judged liked others to have fewer desirable traits and more undesirable traits, and judged disliked others to have more desirable traits. In a sense, relative to nondysphoric subjects, dysphoric subjects were less charitable to themselves and to liked others and more charitable to disliked others.

(4) Compared to nondysphoric people, do dysphoric people describe themselves as less multifaceted? Averaging across desirable and undesirable traits, dysphoric and nondysphoric subjects did not differ in the number of traits they ascribed to themselves. Moreover, both dysphoric and nondysphoric subjects ascribed to themselves more positive than negative traits. However, the tendency was more extreme in nondysphoric subjects. Nondysphoric subjects endorsed 81% of the very desirable traits, dysphoric subjects endorsed only 68%. Conversely, dysphoric subjects endorsed 36% of the very undesirable traits, nondysphoric subjects endorsed only 20%. Thus, dysphoric subjects were ''less multifaceted'' with respect to desirable potentials, but ''more multifaceted'' with respect to undesirable potentials.

Why should dysphoric people, compared to nondysphoric people, be more likely to endorse negative characteristics, and less likely to endorse positive characteristics? A dysphoric mood may cause negative information about the self to be more available in memory (Forgas & Bower, 1988) or cause people to adopt negative beliefs about themselves in order to explain their dysphoric mood (Keltner, Locke & Audrain, 1993; Schwarz & Clore, 1988). Conversely, existing negative self-beliefs may contribute to a dysphoric mood (Beck, 1967). Finally, a third variable may cause both the negative mood and the negative self-image. In particular, people who engage in less self-enhancement (for example, people who make more trait attributions for failures) may be prone both to feeling dysphoric and to developing negative self-beliefs (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

Because each of these explanations is consistent with the findings, it may be more useful to conceptualize depression as a syndrome composed of a variety of mutually reinforcing elements—perceptions, feelings, thoughts, expectancies, and so on. People who are vulnerable to depression have frequently experienced the cooccurrence of these elements, making the aggregate of interassociated elements (the depression ''schema'') highly available. As a result, sad feelings (one subset of the schema) can activate the full schema, producing negative thoughts about the self, or negative thoughts about the self (another subset of the schema) can activate the full schema, producing sad feelings. Since negative self-descriptions are so numerous in

a dysphoric person's schema, negative self-descriptions occur whenever the full schema is activated, no matter how the activation is induced.

Conclusions. The present results do not support the hypothesis that the self is more ''multifaceted.'' While subjects do endorse more socially desirable characteristics to describe themselves and liked known others, the results can be explained most parsimoniously in terms of the enhancement of the self and one's friends. No ''multifaceted'' tendencies appear for negative attributes.

Furthermore, in many cultures self-enhancement is less acceptable than it is in American culture. For example, Markus and Kitayama (1991) provide evidence that Japanese subjects (with relatively ''interdependent selves'') do not show the same patterns of self-enhancing attribution and social comparison shown by American subjects (with relatively ''independent selves''). Although our American university student subjects made more flattering descriptions of themselves than others, subjects with more interdependent selves may not show the same patterns. It would be interesting to examine whether the multifaceted self effect would hold for Japanese subjects, even for socially desirable attributes. In any case, the present findings suggest that caution is in order in making generalizations about the multifacetedness of the self.

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