SYMBOLIC
SELF-COMPLETION

Robert A. Wicklund and Peter M. Gollwitzer
University of Texas at Austin

Technische Hochschule Darmstadt
Fachbereich 3
Institut für Psychologie
Steubenplatz 12, 6100 Darmstadt

Inv.-Nr. 9108482

LAWRENCE ERLBAUM ASSOCIATES, PUBLISHERS
1982
Hillsdale, New Jersey London
Contents

Preface ix

PART I: EXTENDING LEWINIAN THEORY

1. A Special Part of Human Nature 3
   A Sketch of the Self-Defining Human 4
   Reflections of Self-Completion in Society 10

2. Theoretical Beginnings: Task Interruption, Resumption, and Substitution 19

3. Symbolic Self-Completion 31
   The Elements of the Theory 31
   The Implementation of the Theory 38
   Three Central Postulates 46

PART II: SELF-SYMBOLIZING AND SOCIAL REALITY

4. The Necessity of Social Reality 51
   Society and the Self-Definition 51
   Disruption, a Chance for Social Reality, and Self-Symbolizing 58
   Summary 64
5. The Constructive Effects of Self-Symbolizing 66
   Relentless Symbolizing Versus Registering on Others 66
   The Impact of Actual and Expected Social Reality on Later Self-Symbolizing 69
   The Registering Potential of the Audience 78
   Audiences as Active Sources of Incompleteness 81
   Durability and Breadth: Magnifying the Impact of Registering 82
   Summary 85

6. The Decay of Interpersonal Relations 87
   The Self-Symbolizer Disregarding the Other’s Needs 91
   Self-Descriptions and Socially-Appropriate Cues 98
   Self-Symbolizing Versus Strategic Self-Presentation 100
   Summary 105

PART III: VARIOUS FORMS OF SELF-SYMBOLIZING

7. The Refusal to Admit to Failure 109
   A Preliminary Study Relating Educational Level to the Readiness to Self-Deprecate 112
   Further Evidence for Admitting to Failure: Experimenting with Teacher Salience 113
   Admitting to Actual Blunders: Returning to the Methodological Scene of Ovsiankina 116
   Admission of Faults as the Independent Variable: Making the Picture Complete 120
   Summary 123

8. The Attempt to Influence Others 124
   Social Influence: A Symbol of Completeness 128
   Education and Persuading 129
   Experience and Persuading: Advising in a Dormitory 134
   The Interruption Paradigm and Intended Influence 139
   Attempted Influence in Self-Symbolizing: Some Considerations 141
   Summary 142
9. The Display of Enduring Symbols 144
   The Enduring Symbol: A Case for a Special Methodology 150
   A Self-Definition in the Business World 152
   The Quality Vintner 156
   The Religious Self-Definition 159
   Summary 163

PART IV: CONCEPTUAL ISSUES UNDERLYING THE THEORY

10. The Community Reacts to Self-Symbolizing 167
    Potential Audience Reactions 167
    The Inference of Completeness as a Cultural Necessity 169
    Inferring Education from Attempts to Influence 171
    Inferring Aptitude from Self-Descriptions 174
    Inferring Self-Descriptions from a Personality Profile 176
    The Dependence of the Credulity Issue on Specific Theoretical Paradigms 178
    The Readiness to Infer Completeness 180
    Summary 181

11. Commitment and the Rise of the Self-Definition 183
    Commitment and Self-Report Validity 185
    The Origin of Commitment to a Self-Definition 190
    Other Views on Commitment 199
    Summary 207

12. The Psychology of Compensation 208
    Compensation According to Adler 208
    Compensation by Personal Association 210
    Compensation in Self-Presentation 214
    Compensation as Dissonance Reduction 218
    Symbolic Self-Completion in Perspective 220
    Summary 226

References 227

Author Index 235

Subject Index 239