

STRONGER TOGETHER? SOCIAL GROUPS, SELF- COMPLEXITY AND RESILIENCE

Adrienne May
Daniel Skorich
Alex Haslam



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BACKGROUND

Resilience: the ability to adapt to physical or psychological stress (Bonanno, 2004; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2015; Leipold & Greve, 2009).

Self-complexity: A method of conceptualising the self-structure in terms of relative complexity, where complexity is determined by the number of self-aspects, and their distinctiveness. Self-aspects are the various parts of the self, including roles, traits, abilities and category memberships (Linville, 1985).

- Self-complexity is associated with resilience through the buffering hypothesis, where having high self-complexity provides a buffer against negative life events, through having a less of the self affected by the negative event than people with low self-complexity

Social group memberships: Merely making salient multiple group memberships has been shown to enhance resilience on a cold pressor task (Jones & Jetten, 2011). This is part of a broader body of research from the social identity approach that provides support for the role of group memberships in enhancing resilience.

BACKGROUND

This study is a result of recognising the overlap in these two factors that have been implicated. Specifically, that self-complexity theory includes self-aspects that are both social and personal, but does not distinguish between them, and that group memberships are social self-aspects.

- Jones and Jettern (2011) did acknowledge this overlap, and addressed it in their paper, finding that personal preferences did not confer the same resilience benefits as groups.

We are taking a different approach to personal identity than Jones and Jetten, conceptualising personal identity instead as who you are across occasions, situations or roles, seeing personal identity as having sub-categorical entities in the same way as social identity does (Skorich & Mavor, 2013).

THE CURRENT STUDY

We created a measure where social and personal identity are equivalent, so we can further explore resilience, and try and determine which of the two factors is underlying the effects observed in the previous literature.

Manipulation: think about either two or five group aspects, personal aspects, or control stimuli.

We then used two resilience measures, and also included a measure for sense of belongingness as a potential mediator (McLaren & Challis, 2009).

HYPOTHESES

If social group membership is uniquely affecting resilience, then there would be increased resilience for participants in the group-aspect conditions, with this being greatest for those in the five entity condition.

If self-complexity is uniquely affecting resilience, we hypothesised that there would be increased resilience for participants in the group- and personal-aspects conditions compared to the control, with this being highest for both five entity conditions.

METHOD

3 (aspect type: control/personal/group) x 2 (number of entities: two/five) design, where participants were asked to think about and describe each of the stimuli in their condition.

Resilience measures:

- Word generation task (DeWall, Baumeister, Mead, & Vohs, 2011)
- Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988)

We assessed belongingness as a potential mediator using a subset of items the General Belongingness Scale (GBS; Malone, Pillow, & Osman, 2012).

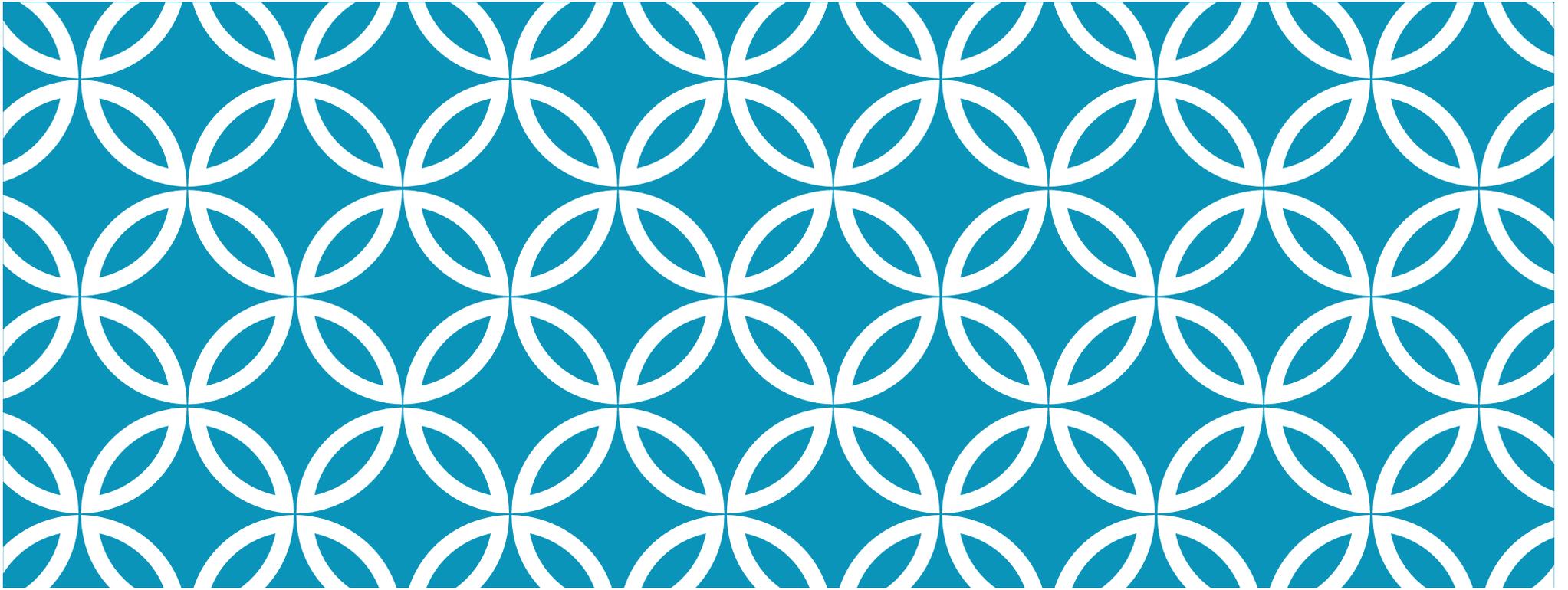
FINDINGS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The results supported the hypothesis that group membership uniquely influences resilience. The results for both the word generation task and the positive affect scale on the PANAS suggested that group membership specifically enhanced resilience on those two measures.

- Sense of belongingness was found to mediate the relationship between aspect type and positive affect.

These results have implications for health, and our understanding of resilience. In particular, the results suggest that looking at a single group across time can enhance resilience in a similar way to completely distinct groups. This could play an important role in health and clinical interventions, for those with few social groups.

Given this study has explored personal identity across occasions, we are now conducting two additional studies, that will look at personal identity across situations and roles.



QUESTIONS? |