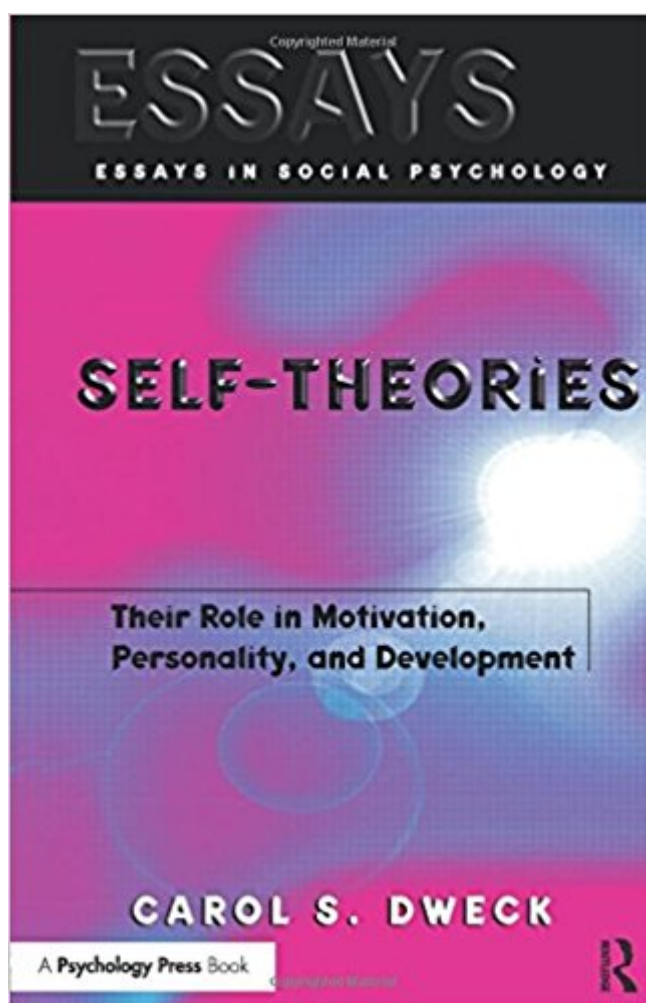


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# Self-theories: Their Role In Motivation, Personality, And Development (Essays In Social Psychology)



## Synopsis

This innovative text sheds light on how people work -- why they sometimes function well and, at other times, behave in ways that are self-defeating or destructive. The author presents her groundbreaking research on adaptive and maladaptive cognitive-motivational patterns and shows:\*

- How these patterns originate in people's self-theories\*
- Their consequences for the person -- for achievement, social relationships, and emotional well-being\*
- Their consequences for society, from issues of human potential to stereotyping and intergroup relations\*
- The experiences that create them

This outstanding text is a must-read for researchers in social psychology, child development, and education, and is appropriate for both graduate and senior undergraduate students in these areas.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Based on extensive research with children and young adults, this book examines adaptive and maladaptive cognitive-motivational patterns and shows how these patterns originate in people's self theories; their consequences for one's achievement, social relationships, and emotional well-being; their consequences for society; and the experiences that create these cognitive-motivational patterns."

"Resources in Education "What we have here is no ordinary scholarly psychology volume. Ever so rarely, we are offered a psychology book that is so beautifully written, lucidly organized, and elegant in its description of ideas.... I see many uses for this wonderful volume.

Instead of having to put together a rather large stack of reprints to introduce students to her groundbreaking work, I now can refer them to something far better -- the author's view of how her work has developed over the years."-*Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* "[This book] describes pathbreaking research in a style that is accessible to many audiences. It calls into question some of the most widely-held beliefs . . . about effective practices for maximizing children's self-confidence and learning."-Deborah Stipek, "UCLA "The book is central to basic issues in social, personality, and developmental psychology. Indeed, it is like a guided tour through the scenic terrain of Carol's fascinating program of research. The writing is lively and engaging and the organization is unusually clear. The examples are well-chosen and intuitively compelling; they are easy to relate to our own lives and to the people that we know."-Diane N. Ruble, "New York University "[This book] is simply among the best book in psychology I've read during the past year or two. It's superb. . . I could hardly put [it] down."-Robert J. Sternberg, "Yale University

I found myself in the first 15 pages of this book and never looked back. If you like Mindset you will love Self-theories. It gives you a lot to ponder when you read about the studies that Carol performed and what the ramifications are in your life to make it better. The growth mindset helps you look at your thoughts and emotions in a mature manor that ultimately helps you keep a better perspective no matter what you experience during your day and most importantly keeps you moving forward!

This book was an easy read (easier than my other textbooks) that I looked forward to in my graduate studies. It helped me identify what motivates me and how to change the way I perceive intelligence about myself and others. This is a great text to read for teachers, mentors, or anyone working with children. Carol Dweck's YouTube videos explaining her other studies were also extremely interesting and have assisted me in changing the way I interact with myself, others and importantly my students.

interesting. could all have been said in 20 pps. it's amazing that an entire academic career can be built on so little.

This book provides a great overview of Dweck's work on growth mindset. I bought the hard copy and kindle version. There are good references to all of the academic papers of you want more info, but generally the text provides enough to background/contextualization. I am conducting a mindset study and have referenced this book several times.

Carol Dweck's SELF-THEORIES is a work in the tradition of cognitive psychology. It is the academic counterpart to MINDSETS -- a later work intended for a more general readership, in which she applies her conceptual innovations to a broader range of domains: business, interpersonal relationships, etc. I've read both. In Self-Theories Dweck's target are academic or educational contexts in which she argues that the difference in academic performance can plausibly be explained by distinguishing between two conceptions of ability, the entity theory and the incremental theory. According to the **\*\*entity theory\*\***, the abilities you possess are of a fixed quantity (for all time) and therefore unalterable; which is to say your abilities cannot really be altered or changed; they are not really responsive to EFFORT. On the **\*\*incremental view\*\***, abilities you possess are not FIXED and ARE RESPONSIVE TO EFFORT over time. Dweck's book yields genuine insights which are psychologically-actionable. One huge payoff, which Dweck points out frequently, is that in voluntarily adopting an incremental view of ability, you put yourself in a position to be FAR less vulnerable to self-blame, helplessness patterns, and self-despair in the event of failure, which can further undermine your ability to execute your abilities. People of a more perfectionistic turn of mind have MUCH to gain by adopting an incremental spin on ability for the reasons just mentioned. "An ability is only as good as its execution."--Bandura. Dweck's an exceptionally lucid writer, and even her more academic work, "Self-Theories" is not written in academese but in language so clear and informal, you almost begin to wonder whether this is a professor in psychology at Columbia University. She's that good, at least I think so. (Bandura's prose is also clear, and conceptually rigorous, but his prose bears an elegant conciseness or compactness of insight, which would not incline me to describe as informal. But I digress. Dweck's work bears some relation to Bandura's. Dweck draws three key distinctions: a) between learning goals and performance goals, b) between helplessness pattern and task-orientedness, c) between incremental and entity theory of ability. Dweck's claim is this: People who hold an entity view of their abilities TEND to also to be people who adopt performance goals over learning goals. A performance goal is one which is more concerned about "looking or appearing smart" than in taking steps to insure greater informedness at the cost of looking stupid or uninformed. Thus, adopting a performance goal is AT CROSS PURPOSES with a learning goal. Second, entity theorists, when persuaded of their own failure, have MUCH REASON TO DESPAIR over their failed performances because performance failure (for them) JUST IS a demonstration of the fact that they do not possess (and what's more NEVER can possess) the capacities required to succeed; for they believe that their abilities are FIXED structures inhering in them which are not alterable by effort. Knowing this, you'd expect that,

prior to performance, entity theorists should feel GREAT anxiety about their future performances and about the THREAT OF FAILURE and what it is DIAGNOSTIC OF. Failure MEANS a PERMANENT DIAGNOSIS for which there is NO COURT OF APPEAL. If you fail at math once, twice, then you're a math idiot. End of story. If you fail at a relationship (personal or professional); you're no good with people. End of story. The awareness of these potentially devastating prospects diverts attention, adversely affecting your skill-execution and performance. (In other words, you choke.) Consequently, this mindset steers you away from any activities that pose a risk to the sure-thing, even those activities that could improve your game. Instead of risking open failure and being (in your own eyes and those of others) PERMANENTLY DIAGNOSED as such, you confine yourself to a "narrow stable" (to lift a term from Adler) and de-select any environments that might challenge you. Here's a personal example. When I was a community college student, I was terribly intimidated by logic and by critical thinking. Growing up as a young person who was lauded for his talents as a visual artist, I internalized this self-theory that artist or humanities types are NOT mathematical or particularly "logical." (Nevermind how some of the greatest visual artists were also geniuses in other fields such as engineering or inventing, which required a mathematical mind.) Anyway, I avoided logic like the plague. I didn't take the introductory courses at the community college level, so that by the time I was taking upper-division philosophy courses at UCLA, I was handicapped relative to my peers, most of whom had taken logic. Just as you can't perform well academically in literature papers without a strong working understanding of English grammar, so also one cannot perform well in philosophy courses without a strong grasp of argument structures (validity/invalidity; soundness, etc.). Avoiding the logic course was a direct consequence of my being an **\*\*entity theorist\*\*** -- although I did not have the benefit of Prof. Dweck's work at this formative time in my life. [Beware, many of your Professors, parents, coaches may be, however well-meaning, operating under the FIXED MINDSET!] Had I understood how my fixed mindset was actually self-undermining, I would not have been ruled by the mistaken belief that an initial substandard performance in symbolic logic (or in any activity worth getting good at) diagnosed me, or my cerebrum, permanently without a "logic" gene. (In the parlance of Bill and Ted -- "Whoa.") Since I knew (at the get-go) that I wanted to be a Philosophy Prof, that conclusion would have been, well, fairly devastating to me. But -- and this is key -- the conclusion that a less-than-spectacular performance diagnoses you with low ability is an inference that ONLY those in the FIXED mindset draw. It is not a conclusion that one MUST draw from one's substandard performances. That 'must' has a life only **\*\*in\*\*** the fixed mindset. According to Prof. Dweck, the situation is very much otherwise for those people who hold an incremental theory about ability. It really is,

phenomenologically speaking, like being in another world, one in which what counts as **\*\*you\*\*** (in your own eyes, which is what matters) is that you no longer have this invisible ceiling of ability, one that affects how you compare yourself with other performers and what life-prospects you think are open to you. You are enlarged. The issue of the SIZE of your ability doesn't get REFUTED; it just ceases to have any functional relevance. The anxiety over not having 'the right stuff' gets REPLACED by ANTICIPATION. Of what? In a word, success. And this frees you up to start thinking like this: THE GROWTH MINDSET: THE VIEW FROM INSIDE You think: "So, since I'm not inherently an idiot and since I can grow my abilities with guided effort (with training of other experts, taking the relevant preparatory courses, etc.), then the ONLY thing I need to think about is how, in terms of the logistics of an action plan, how am I going to make this happen." Notice that the concern isn't 'whether' but HOW I am going to succeed, and this key shift in your psychology comes with territory when you shift from the FIXED to the GROWTH mindset. You aren't given tool to fight anxiety over failure; no, that anxiety is replaced by a totally different attitude, namely, real anticipation of success. And it is within this context that failure is re-conceptualized, assigned at TOTALLY DIFFERENT MEANING. That failure is NOT YOUR ENEMY. IT can help you determine where you need to improve your game. Think of an instrument panel of a DC-10, or your Honda Hatchback's oil light. Failure merely provides you with data for making the necessary adjustments in effort by designating where to direct it! More about Dweck's research. For incremental theorists, failure is not diagnostic of something -- a wanted capability to produce desired effects in a cared-about domain of human life - which they can't EVER possess; no, failure doesn't MEAN (for them) that whatever it is in people that allows them to produce exceptional EFFECTS in the world, in any cared-about domain of performance -- that thing, call it an "ability" -- is something whose possess and "size" or quantity or magnitude is something over which you can exercise some control over and the way you can do this is through EFFORT. The entity theorist does not see personal exertion as diagnostic of LOW ability; she sees it as the MEANS to ACQUIRE greater capabilities, a means to enhance her personal causation. By contrast, the entity theorist views exertion as diagnostic of Low ability; like a doctor who sees a patient and says "Those spots mean measles," the entity theorist views exceptional effort to mean "low ability." APPENDIX: DWECK AND BANDURA COMPARED Bandura's view (in SE) is, similar to Dweck's, in that he thinks that it is functionally optimal to view abilities as developmentally responsive to effort. Abilities ARE things one possesses - powers one can personally exercise to produce desired effects in the environment - but for learners it is self-limiting to think of abilities as innate or in-born capabilities rather than as things which can be obtained through "acquireable means" and guided mastery. [For those interested in a

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF POWER, you see Peter Moriss's **\*\*Power: A Philosophical Analysis.\*\***] Bandura's general approach to learning seems to be that complex or difficult performances can be decomposed into simpler tasks; learners can learn and gain competence at the simpler tasks (increasing perceived self-efficacy incrementally as they go), then, once actually in possession of those simpler skills, move on to tackle more difficult tasks, and so on until they actually possess the skills to perform the complex performances. This is what goes on in med schools, trade schools, most all graduate schools. On B's view, abilities are entities you possess, but the trick is to incrementalize your ACQUISITION OF THEM, using your skills acquired at lower and medium levels to boot yourself up to higher levels. But of course, this means your conception of your ability has to be adequate to get you to the highest level of performance, or you have to locate the means and strategies which will elevate your performances to higher levels, and once these are identified you have to acquire them. And acquiring competency in the simpler tasks, lower skills, are, so far as I can tell from SE, the means to acquiring the skills to perform at higher levels; which is as much to say they are the means to acquiring greater abilities.

As a parent and teacher this gave me some insight into some of the struggles I am facing with my students and teenage son. Several ideas were shared how to improve self esteem and encourage effort towards learning.

Carol Dweck's work speaks to me on several levels: I recognize myself, and I recognize a number of my students. I was super engaged in reading *Self Theories* for about 2/3 of the book, but honestly, it began to feel quite repetitive. That's because she very systematically (and responsibly) extends the application of the core concept in micro-steps - trying not to assume. After all, it is a compilation of research findings that build on each other. So it's good science, just not totally scintillating after awhile....even though the directions she takes her research are fascinating. All that said, her thoughts and discoveries have really stayed with me. I've begun to orient my own inquiry into any number of domains with this basic question: Are we (am I) operating as if we're fixed things or works in progress? And the addendum is, of course, What is a human being? Huge question; powerful inquiry! I would love to have heard more about INTERVENTIONS for older learners (college students/adults) who have adopted fixed and unmalleable identities, but even with a few flaws, this is a book that all educators should read!

Very informative for the scholar and lay reader. Highly recommend on understanding mindset.

Based a lot of my dissertation on Dr. Dweck's concepts.

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