

Self-Reference Effect

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Self-Reference Effect (SRE). A term coined by Rogers, Kuiper, and Kirker (1977) referring to the advantage in recall or recognition enjoyed by material encoded with respect to the self, compared to material analyzed for its orthographic, phonemic, or semantic properties. Within the framework of a “depth of processing” view of memory, the SRE was interpreted as indicating that the self was a highly, perhaps uniquely, elaborate knowledge structure (Symons & Johnson, 1997). The SRE procedure has also been employed in neuroimaging studies that sought to locate the neural substrates of the self and self-referent processing (Gillihan & Farah, 2005). Unfortunately, subsequent research revealed a similar advantage was obtained for material encoded with respect to other people (Bower & Gilligan, 1979; Keenan & Baillet, 1980). More critically, the SRE proved to be an artifact of organizational activity incidental to self-referent processing (Klein & Kihlstrom, 1986). The self may be a highly elaborate cognitive structure, but this is not demonstrated by the SRE.

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