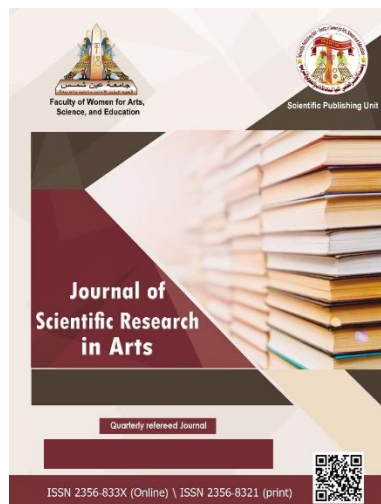




Self-Motivation in Language and Thought: A Case Study of David Goggins' Memoir *Can't Hurt Me* (2018)

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Abstract

The present study explores how the conceptualization of the Self shapes and reflects David Goggins' philosophy of self-motivation in his inspirational memoir *Can't Hurt Me: Master Your Mind and Defy the Odds*. As a form of self-narration, an inspirational memoir allows authors to share personal experiences in ways that positively inspire readers. This study draws on the SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation metaphor system, which views the Self as divided between a Subject and one or more Selves. It examines how Goggins' understanding of his 'Self' both structures and reveals his internal strategies for self-motivation, defined as the internal process that drives individuals toward success, goal pursuit, resilience, and mental toughness. The analysis identifies several SUBJECT-SELF metaphors in Goggins' narrative, including MENTOR-PROTÉGÉ, DRIVER-PASSENGER, and WARRIOR-WEAPON. These metaphors not only illustrate how Goggins conceptualizes himself but also reveal eight key strategies for self-motivation: (1) confrontation, (2) setting goals, (3) mindset reprogramming, (4) self-directed speech, (5) preparation and equipment, (6) taking souls, (7) recalling past victories, and (8) the 40% rule. A major finding is that Goggins' motivational strategies align with established psychological practices that target the internal drive for change. The study concludes that SUBJECT-SELF metaphors are crucial in expressing the conceptual patterns underlying motivational discourse. They offer insight into how metaphor shapes self-perception, motivation, and identity in memoir writing, highlighting the powerful role of internal dialogue in achieving personal transformation.

Keywords: Self-motivation; SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation metaphor system; inspirational memoir writing; conceptual metaphor

Introduction

Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) offers a compelling framework for analyzing self-motivation, particularly through the lens of the SUBJECT–SELF bifurcation system. This model posits an internal division wherein the self is both the experiencing subject—who endures fatigue, fear, or pain—and the directing agent—who commands, disciplines, and regulates behavior (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Such a structure underlies motivational metaphors that externalize psychological effort as an internal conflict. These metaphors allow individuals to perceive adversity not simply as suffering, but as an opportunity for self-overcoming. More importantly, conceptual metaphors function as cognitive tools that shape how individuals interpret internal states. Emotions and sensations—such as pain, self-doubt, or exhaustion—when conceptualized as enemies or obstacles, are reinterpreted as challenges to be met rather than avoided. This reframing has a direct influence on motivation and decision-making, encouraging persistence and grit (Dweck, 2006). In this way, conceptual metaphors, more specifically those based on the divided Self, operate both linguistically and psychologically to construct a motivational framework that sustains goal-directed behavior under adversity.

Memoir writing is a powerful genre through which individuals narrate their personal past experiences, aiming to communicate to readers a sense of change and identity transformation. A memoir is a kind of self-narration. It is defined as “a narrative composed from personal experience” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). It is thus a kind of autobiographical narration of the Self. Accordingly, memoir writing is closely tied to the notion of the Self. It represents a way authors conceptualize and represent the Self in relation to internal struggles, goals, and change. One promising approach to understanding the relationship between what memoir writers intend to communicate and their view of the Self is through the lens of the SUBJECT-SELF metaphor system, a framework within cognitive linguistics that examines how metaphorical language reflects and shapes how people think about themselves. This system includes metaphors that position the Self as divided and is represented in language in the most conventional ways, revealing deeper psychological patterns.

The contemporary concept of the Self, apart from the traditional view that sees it as being unified or indivisible, is based on the view of being fragmented and multiple. Lu (2019, p. 1) claims that with the shift that occurred in social sciences in defining the Self, it has been agreed within different disciplines such as sociology, social psychology, and linguistics that the Self is “constructed and sustained in the linguistic activities of the individual.” This implies that the Self is treated as a constructed entity composed of different elements and is preserved

through language. In memoirs, this constructed Self becomes especially visible, as authors engage in deep self-reflection and reconstruction of their identity through narrative.

Additionally, there has been a growing interest within cognitive linguistics in studying the Self. Some scholars focus on how the Self is conceptualized and represented in language through conceptual metaphors and image schemas (Lakoff, 1992; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 1999), while others study it in relation to embodied cognition. Johnson (2007), for instance, examines how the sense of the Self emerges from bodily experiences and argues that it is not a detached, rational observer but is shaped through patterns of movement, perception, emotion, and engagement with others and the environment. The notion of multiple Selves is also studied through the lens of conceptual blending theory. Fauconnier and Turner (2002) explore how multiple self-representations can be blended creatively, such as imagining future versions of the Self or hypothetical identities.

Closely tied to the construction of the Self is the concept of motivation. Motivation is a dynamic process that directs behavior and influences individuals to pursue goals. Moreover, according to the American Psychological Association (n.d.), motivation can be extrinsic, driven by external rewards or punishments, or intrinsic, stemming from genuine interest and enjoyment in an activity. Kaplan et al. (2019) describe motivation as shaped by four interconnected components: beliefs about the world, personal goals, self-perceptions, and perceived action possibilities. This view emphasizes that motivation evolves continuously as individuals interact with their environment and reshape their identity. Self-motivation, in particular, is defined as “the quality of being capable of hard work and effort without the need for pressure from others” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, n.d.). It is thus a dynamic, internally driven process rooted within the individual.

The present study explores the relationship between the SUBJECT-SELF metaphor system and self-motivation in memoir writing, with a particular focus on David Goggins’s *Can’t Hurt Me* (2018). David Goggins is a retired Navy SEAL, ultra-endurance athlete, motivational speaker, and author. He is widely known for his extreme mental toughness and intense physical challenges. He is also a social media influencer who posts videos where he communicates his mindset. *Can’t Hurt Me* is the first of Goggins’ two memoirs. It is an inspirational, self-motivating book in which he narrates how, through self-motivation, he overcame failure and became a “U.S. Armed Forces icon and one of the world’s top endurance athletes” (www.davidgoggins.com). In 2022, Goggins published his second memoir entitled *Never Finished*, continuing his self-motivating, unending journey of greatness. These texts provide rich material

for investigating how metaphor and self-motivation interact in the construction of a fragmented yet resilient Self.

Can't Hurt Me (2018) is a memoir and self-improvement book that explores the themes of self-concept and motivation through the personal journey of overcoming adversity. Goggins, a former Navy SEAL and ultra-endurance athlete, presents a philosophy of extreme mental toughness and self-discipline as the key to transcending limitations. Goggins conceptualizes the self as highly malleable, shaped by intentional suffering and relentless self-improvement. He believes that people can continuously redefine themselves by hard work and challenges to the Self. His philosophy is rooted in the belief that the mind constructs artificial barriers to protect itself from pain, but these barriers can be broken through disciplined action. He also believes that the repeated exposure to difficulty strengthens mental resilience. Goggins' own transformation, from an abused child and overweight pest exterminator to an elite soldier and endurance athlete, serves as proof that one's self-concept is not predetermined but forged through struggle. Additionally, Goggins introduces his readers to what he calls "The 40% Rule." Through it, Goggins is able to explain the core of his philosophy. He suggests that people normally stop at only 40% of their true potential and that 60% of it is hidden. The reason for that, according to Goggins, is that our minds drive us to quit before feeling any pain or exhaustion. However, by overriding the mind's instinct to quit, individuals can tap into hidden reserves of strength. Ultimately, in *Can't Hurt Me*, Goggins narrates his own experience of success, transformation, and personal growth only through hard work, struggle, and endurance of pain.

By analyzing the conceptualization of the Self in *Can't Hurt Me* as an inspirational memoir, the research aims to uncover how the author uses language to express internal motivational processes through his conceptualization of the Self. Drawing on the realm of cognitive linguistics, this study offers a rich understanding of how language and metaphor shape self-concept and self-motivation. Furthermore, the findings may have practical applications in educational and therapeutic contexts, especially in writing workshops or self-development programs where metaphorical awareness can foster deeper self-understanding and personal growth.

Literature review

As proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), conceptual metaphors play a crucial role in shaping how individuals understand and experience abstract concepts, including self-motivation and the Self, in terms of more concrete ones. This literature review presents studies that relate the study of conceptual metaphors to motivation-related processes across different domains, including

motivational psychology, education, consumer behavior, and the study of the Self.

Conceptual metaphors and conceptualizing motivation

A number of studies explore the influence of conceptual metaphors on motivation across various domains. Weiner (1991) examines the metaphorical underpinnings of motivational theories. He concludes that different motivational theories depend on different conceptualizations of individuals based on their theoretical aims. For example, the metaphor THE PERSON IS A MACHINE is identified in theories that emphasize automatic or reflexive behaviors, in which individuals are conceptualized as systems driven by internal energies and external stimuli. In contrast, argues Weiner (1991), theories that focus on the cognitive processes in motivation use the metaphor THE PERSON IS GOD-LIKE, in which individuals are conceptualized as rational beings capable of intentionality and judgment.

Other researchers focus on the role of embodied metaphors on self-perception and motivation. For example, Landau et al. (2011) explore how metaphors shape self-concept and motivation. They focus on two primary metaphors: self-expansion and self-protection. The expansion metaphor encourages individuals to embrace growth and change, leading to greater intrinsic motivation. In contrast, the protection metaphor fosters a cautious approach to new experiences, potentially limiting motivation. This study highlights the role of embodied cognition, showing how physical and spatial metaphors influence psychological and motivational processes. Similarly, Dyllick et al. (2021) discuss conceptual metaphors as the foundation of motto-goals, arguing that motto-goals function as individually created metaphors that shape motivation and perception of tasks. For example, by framing an obligation metaphorically, as in “*Like the wolf, I have my target in sight, trusting my knowledge and instincts,*” individuals can transform how they experience the task, making it feel more engaging and energizing and less exhausting.

Other studies focus on how metaphors affect consumer behavior. Landau et al. (2018) investigate the impact of conceptual metaphors on consumer psychology. Their study highlights the strategic use of metaphors in marketing to influence consumer motivation and behavior. They propose that marketers frequently employ metaphors to make abstract product attributes more tangible to consumers. For instance, the tagline “*Supercharge your day*” compares energy to electricity. Through such messages, marketers are able to change consumer attitudes and behavior, affecting their motivation to purchase by making the product's benefits more relatable.

Additionally, metaphors are studied in the context of enhancing learners' motivation and academic progress. For instance, Landau et al. (2017) explore how metaphors can enhance motivation among disadvantaged middle-school students. Their study examines how students who conceptualize their academic progress as a journey are more likely to persist through challenges. The "road" metaphor provides a clear framework for understanding setbacks as temporary obstacles rather than failures. By reinforcing the idea that effort and perseverance lead to progress, this study supports the broader view that metaphors help students build resilience and sustain motivation. Likewise, Landau et al. (2014) investigate how metaphorical thinking influences student motivation in higher education. They find that students who perceive their academic experience as A JOURNEY demonstrate higher engagement and persistence. The journey metaphor provides a sense of structure, making challenges feel like natural parts of progress rather than barriers to success. Moreover, Nagel et al. (2011) study metaphors as a motivational tool for e-learners. They conclude that well-chosen metaphors can enhance motivation in e-learning by fostering engagement, emotional connection, and a sense of competence. Metaphors can also reveal hidden challenges students face, making them useful for assessing motivation levels. However, poorly chosen metaphors (e.g., culturally unfamiliar or overly competitive themes) can have negative effects on engagement.

Motivational-related metaphors are also studied in religious motivational speech. For example, Malik and Mohamad (2021) investigate metaphor in the Islamic motivational speech corpus. Their findings indicate that conceptual metaphors provide structured ways of thinking that inspire and guide listeners. Islamic motivational speeches frequently use metaphors to frame personal struggles, success, and faith in ways that encourage perseverance and self-improvement. Malik and Mohamad (2021) also conclude that metaphors function as motivational tools. For example, metaphors drawn from Islamic teachings (e.g., LIFE IS A TEST, FAITH IS A JOURNEY, and STRUGGLES ARE PURIFICATION) help individuals perceive challenges positively, reinforcing resilience and spiritual endurance.

Metaphors and the study of the Self

In their book *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) discuss the concept of the Self, which is related to the structures of our 'inner lives' and who we truly are. They argue that the Self is deeply tied to our embodied cognition. This means that our sense of self is shaped by our bodily experiences. Thus, our self-conceptualization results from living in a social world with the kinds of brains and bodies that we have. Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) view of the Self challenges long-standing philosophical traditions that assume a kind of rational,

disembodied mind, ignoring how human cognition actually works—through neural structures, sensory-motor experiences, and embodied metaphors. They also highlight that selfhood is not purely individual but socially and culturally shaped.

Lakoff (1992) argues that Western philosophical and religious traditions conceptualize a person as having two components: the Subject (an independent, conscious intelligence) and the Self (a separate entity that can transcend the body). Similarly, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) view the Subject as the core of consciousness, reason, and personal identity, while the Self encompasses the body, social roles, and personal history. Building on this Subject-Self distinction, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) propose a system of metaphorical conceptions of the Self using a few key source domains: space, possession, force, and social relationships. They identify five universal experiences that shape our understanding of the Self: bodily control, internal value conflicts, discrepancies between self-perception and others' perceptions, perspective-taking, and inner dialogue.

Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) metaphorical system conceptualizes the Subject as a distinct person, with a metaphorical existence independent of the body, and the Self as either a person, an object, or a location. The overarching metaphor, A PERSON IS SPLIT INTO A SUBJECT AND ONE OR MORE SELVES, branches into specific metaphors such as SELF CONTROL IS OBJECT CONTROL, which suggests that controlling oneself is akin to manipulating a physical object. This metaphor extends into sub-metaphors like SELF CONTROL IS FORCED MOVEMENT (e.g., "*I have to push myself*"), SELF CONTROL IS OBJECT POSSESSION (e.g., "*I have control over myself*"), and SELF CONTROL IS BEING IN ONE'S NORMAL LOCATION (e.g., "*He's grounded*"). Another key metaphor, THE SOCIAL SELF, frames the Subject-Self relationship through social roles, such as the Self as a servant or child under the Subject's control.

However, Ahrens (2008) critiques Lakoff and Johnson's model for its inconsistencies. For example, in the SELF AS A CONTAINER metaphor, being outside the Self sometimes implies loss of control (e.g., "*He's spaced out*"), but in other cases, it implies objectivity (e.g., "*Step outside yourself*"). Similarly, contradictions arise in the SOCIAL SELF metaphor, where the Subject is sometimes depicted as setting behavioral standards but at other times as being obligated to meet the Self's standards. Ahrens argues that these contradictions stem from the rigid Subject-Self dichotomy and proposes an alternative model that expands the notion of the Self into three domains: INNER VOICE, SOCIAL BEING, and PHYSICAL BODY. This framework, she suggests, better captures the complexity of human experiences and their metaphorical representations.

Recent studies reveal how metaphors shape the understanding of the Self in various contexts. Ananieva (2023) examines the DIVIDED SELF metaphor in suicide notes, showing how individuals express internal conflict by splitting their identity into the rational Subject and the emotional Self, with common metaphors like LOSS-OF-SELF and SPLIT SELF reflecting this struggle. Krawczak (2025) investigates how negative self-evaluative emotions, such as shame and embarrassment, are metaphorically conceptualized in American English across different genres. The study finds that shame is often framed through metaphors of burden and disease, while embarrassment is linked to danger and confinement, highlighting how emotions shape self-perception. Together, these studies emphasize the powerful role of metaphors in structuring self-concept and emotional experiences.

Overall, the literature presents studies that focus on the relationship between metaphors and motivation. It also reveals that conceptual metaphors serve as powerful cognitive tools that shape individuals' understanding of motivation and self-perception across diverse domains. Likewise, the literature shows that the studies that tackle the metaphors of the Self reveal how the conceptualization of the Self affects the structuring of emotional experiences and internal conflicts.

Theoretical framework

SUBJECT-SELF metaphor system

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) present a SUBJECT-SELF hierarchical structure metaphor system. This system comprises three levels. As illustrated in Figure 1 below, at the highest level, there is the general SUBJECT-SELF metaphor in which a person is conceptualized as bifurcated. At the second level, there are five special cases of the basic SUBJECT-SELF metaphor. Such cases are grounded in four types of everyday experiences: (1) manipulating objects, (2) being located in space, (3) entering into social relations, and (4) empathic projection—conceptually projecting yourself onto someone else. The fifth metaphor is based on the philosophical assumption of having an essence that is part of the Subject; it is when one of the person's selves is compatible with that essence. At the third level of the system, each of these five special cases (SCs) has further special cases.

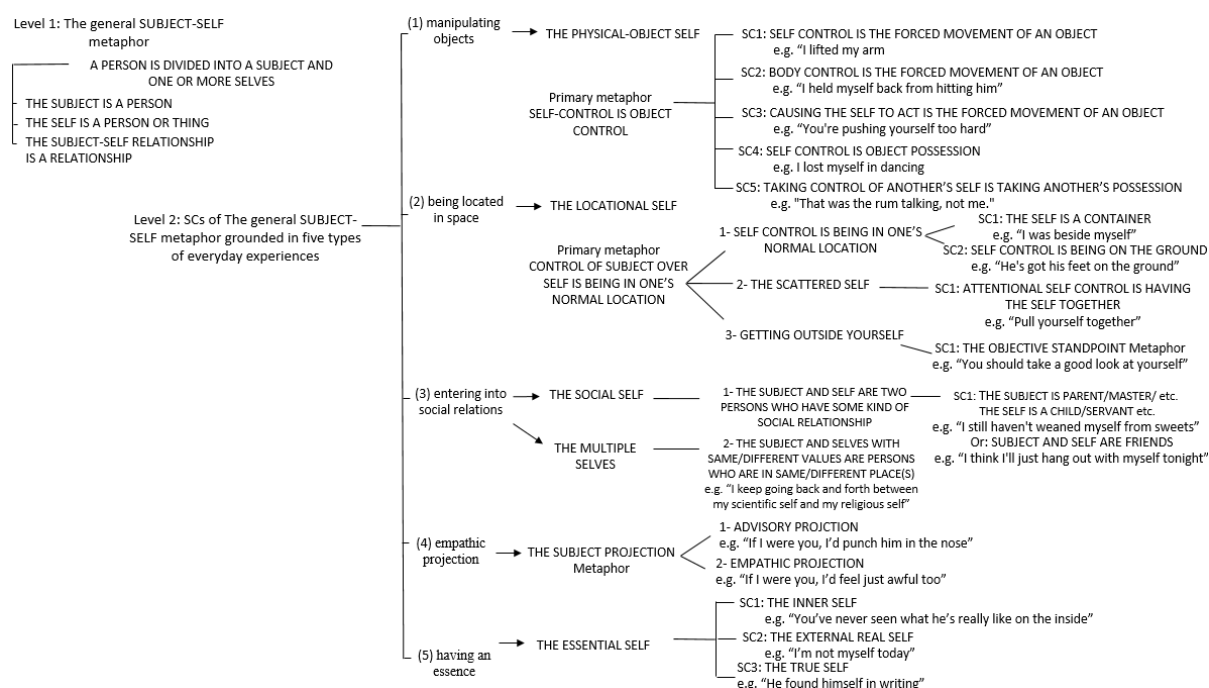


Figure 1: A summary of Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) SUBJECT-SELF metaphor system

As presented in Figure 1 above, the first second-level SUBJECT-SELF metaphor is the PHYSICAL-OBJECT SELF. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), object control and manipulation is the basis of the metaphors for our inner life. To them, object control and self-control are inseparable experiences of our early childhood. Thus, as a primary metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) suggest the SELF CONTROL IS OBJECT CONTROL metaphor, in which it has several other SCs. The first SC includes forced movement to get SELF CONTROL IS THE FORCED MOVEMENT OF AN OBJECT. The second SC includes the human body as one aspect of the SELF; hence, BODY CONTROL IS THE FORCED MOVEMENT OF AN OBJECT. The third SC adds the primary metaphors CAUSES ARE FORCES and ACTION IS MOVEMENT to the metaphor SELF CONTROL IS THE FORCED MOVEMENT OF AN OBJECT to get CAUSING THE SELF TO ACT IS THE FORCED MOVEMENT OF AN OBJECT. Another metaphor that is entailed from SELF CONTROL IS OBJECT CONTROL is SELF CONTROL IS OBJECT POSSESSION. Such SC, argue Lakoff and Johnson (1999), characterizes the notion of losing yourself, whether positively (e.g., when someone loses himself in dancing) or negatively (e.g., when someone loses control because of negative emotions). It also includes as SCs the metaphors SELF CONTROL IS OBJECT POSSESSION and TAKING CONTROL OF ANOTHER'S SELF IS TAKING ANOTHER'S POSSESSION.

Another second-level metaphor in the system is the LOCATIONAL SELF. As shown in figure 1 above, there are three main LOCATIONAL SELF

metaphors, each of which entails an SC. They all depend on the idea that we typically feel in control in our normal surroundings and less control in strange places. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) suggest that the LOCATIONAL SELF metaphors have one primary metaphor in which THE CONTROL OF SUBJECT OVER SELF is conceptualized in terms of BEING IN A NORMAL LOCATION. This suggests the following SCs: (1) THE SELF IS A CONTAINER in which (OUT OF) CONTROL OF SUBJECT BY SELF IS (NOT) BEING LOCATED IN CONTAINER, (2) SELF CONTROL IS BEING LOCATED ON THE GROUND, (3) THE SCATTERED SELF, and (4) GETTING OUTSIDE YOURSELF.

Moreover, the everyday experience of entering into social relations provides our conceptual system with the basis for two metaphors: the SOCIAL SELF and MULTIPLE SELVES metaphors. The conceptual mapping of the SOCIAL-SELF metaphor includes the PERSON being conceptualized in terms of TWO DIFFERENT PERSONS WHO HAVE SOME KIND OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP. More specifically, the individual is bifurcated into the SUBJECT, who is conceptualized as a person, and the SELF, who is conceptualized in terms of ANOTHER PERSON. Moreover, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that the general character of this metaphor is that the source domain is about the rich social relationships that we experience from as early as our childhood. Thus, the SUBJECT-SELF relationship can be conceptualized as MASTER-SERVANT, PARENT-CHILD, FRIENDS, LOVERS, ADVERSARIES, INTERLOCUTORS, and the like. In the MULTIPLE SELVES metaphor, there is an important difference between a conflict of values and indecisiveness over values, in which MULTIPLE VALUES are conceptualized as MULTIPLE SELVES, with each Self instantiating the social role associated with that value. Indecisiveness over values is metaphorized as the Subject's indecisiveness about which Self to associate with.

The fourth metaphor in Lakoff and Johnson's system is the SUBJECT PROJECTION metaphor, which refers to the common human experience of imagining oneself in another person's situation and then responding as if one's own thoughts, feelings, or actions would apply in that context. It involves projecting one's own perspective onto someone else, essentially substituting oneself for the other person. This metaphor has two main variations: advisory projection, where one imagines what they would do in the other's place and offers advice or a course of action (e.g., "*If I were you, I'd punch him*"), and empathic projection, where one imagines how they would feel in the same situation, expressing understanding or sympathy (e.g., "*If I were you, I'd feel awful too*"). Both forms highlight how people use their own internal experiences as a lens to interpret and respond to others' circumstances.

The fifth second-level metaphor in the system is the ESSENTIAL SELF metaphor. Based on the folk theory of essences, it suggests that every person has an essence that makes them unique. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), the Self is divided into a SUBJECT, SELF 1, and SELF 2. THE SUBJECT WITH THE ESSENCE is conceptualized as PERSON 1. The ESSENTIAL SELF metaphor has three special cases. The first is the INNER SELF, which is hidden inside SELF2, the OUTER SELF. The second is the EXTERNAL REAL SELF, in which SELF 2 is hidden inside SELF 1. Third, there is the TRUE SELF, in which the Subject has been inhabiting SELF 2, which is incompatible with the Subject's essence.

As for the present study, the main aim is to examine self-motivation conceptual metaphors based on the SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation metaphor system as proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1999). The study also aims at exposing how the process of self-motivation is entrenched in human experience and in our conceptual system and how it is reflected in language in the most conventional way. Accordingly, the research questions can be formulated as follows:

1. What are the Self-motivation-related metaphors in David Goggins' *Can't Hurt Me* (2018)?
2. How does Goggins' conceptualization of THE SELF convey his own philosophy of self-motivation?
3. To what extent does THE SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation metaphor system conventionally entrenched in humans' self-motivation language?

Methodology and procedures

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive design grounded in conceptual metaphor analysis. It explores how the Subject–Self bifurcation system structures motivational discourse in *Can't Hurt Me* by David Goggins. The analysis focuses on identifying metaphorical language that reflects internal division between the experiencing self and the controlling self, with particular attention to how these metaphors shape psychological self-regulation and motivation. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to interpret subjective meanings embedded in linguistic patterns rather than to quantify variables.

The primary data source is the memoir *Can't Hurt Me* (2018), authored by David Goggins. It is divided into 11 chapters preceded by an introduction. Each chapter focuses on certain segments of Goggins' self-motivational anecdotes. After each chapter, except for the last one, there is a one-page numbered section that is entitled *Challenge*. It is where Goggins sets aside his own story and directly addresses his readers, motivating them to overcome adversity and showing them how to achieve self-discipline and resilience. The analysis of data is only focused

on SUBJECT-SELF motivation-related metaphors as part of Goggins' autobiographical narration.

The analytical framework of this study is informed by Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 1999), which posits that abstract concepts are structured through metaphorical mappings from more concrete domains. In particular, the analysis centers on the SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation system, in which the self is metaphorically divided into two interacting entities: a controlling agent (the "Self") and an experiencing subject (the "Subject"). Metaphors are analyzed to determine how this internal division supports narratives of mental toughness, self-discipline, and motivational resilience.

Adopting a qualitative approach, the procedure for data analysis of the present study can be summarized in the following steps. First, passages are read closely and coded for metaphorical expressions of the SUBJECT-SELF bifurcated metaphor system related to self-motivation. For each example identified in the analysis section, the name of the mapping is written in capital letters, whereas the metaphorical expressions are italicized. Second, each instance of metaphor is classified according to the second level of the SUBJECT-SELF bifurcated metaphor system as introduced in Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) seminal work *Philosophy in the Flesh*. The reason is that the second level of the SUBJECT-SELF metaphors directly correspond to and are grounded in four types of everyday experience (as discussed in the theoretical framework section). In so doing, relating such metaphors to self-motivation and interpreting them as conventionally tied in language and thought would be more plausible. Third, the metaphorical expressions of the metaphors identified are highlighted in an attempt to explain how self-motivation metaphors are conventionally entrenched in language and in conception. Finally, the interpretation of the metaphors identified is examined in order to grasp a whole, unified picture of David Goggins' own strategies of self-motivation.

However, this study is limited by its focus on a single autobiographical text and one metaphor system. While it provides rich insight into the linguistic and conceptual construction of motivation, its findings may not be generalizable to all motivational discourse or autobiographical narratives. Future research may expand this framework to a broader corpus or explore variation across genres or cultures.

Analysis and findings

The analysis reveals that Goggins's self-motivation metaphors identified in the data depend mainly on two second-level SUBJECT-SELF metaphors: the SOCIAL SELF and the PHYSICAL-OBJECT metaphors. As shown in Figure 2 below, there are four SOCIAL SELF metaphors that are identified in the data. In

the SOCIAL SELF metaphors, the SUBJECT is conceptualized in terms of A MENTOR/ADVISOR, A PARENT, A DRIVER, and A PERSON WHO IS OBLIGATED TO BE REAL AND TRUTHFUL TO THE SELF, whereas the SELF is conceptualized as A MENTEE/PROTÉGÉ, A CHILD, A PASSENGER, and A PERSON WHO TRUSTS THE SUBJECT TO ACT REAL AND TRUTHFULLY. Additionally, the PHYSICAL-OBJECT metaphors identified in the data conceptualize the SUBJECT as A PLAYER, A PERSON WHO USES FORCE, A PERSON WHO UNDERGOES HARDSHIP, AN EXPERIENCING, OBSERVING, AND THINKING PERSON, A WARRIOR/FIGHTER, and A CONSCIOUS AGENT, while the SELF is conceptualized as A GAME FIELD, AN OBJECT, THE MIND, A TOOL/WEAPON, and A CONTAINER.

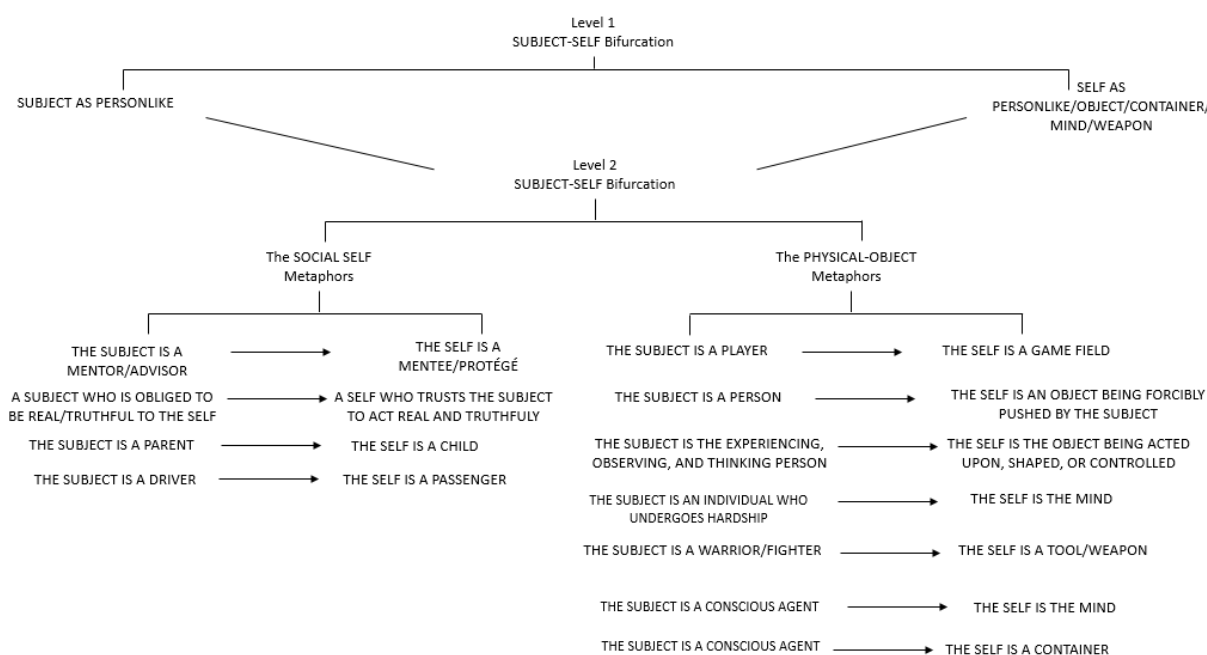


Figure 2: A summary of the SUBJECT-SELF metaphors of self-motivation in David Goggins' *Can't Hurt Me*

The SOCIAL SELF metaphor

Drawing on the theoretical framework of conceptual metaphor theory and the SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation metaphor system (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 1999), the analysis demonstrates how Goggins uses a number of SOCIAL SELF metaphors such as MENTOR-PROTÉGÉ, DRIVER-PASSENGER, and PARENT-CHILD to depict his internal dialogue and strategies of self-discipline, motivation, and transformation. These metaphors illustrate how Goggins constructs a relationship between an authoritative, truth-telling SUBJECT and a receptive, evolving SELF, emphasizing the role of inner confrontation, accountability, and guidance in personal growth and resilience.

On one occasion, Goggins recalls his mother calling him at Johnny's, his best friend whom he was staying with, to inform him about a letter from school. The letter says that he's missed over a quarter of the year due to unexcused absences, and unless he shows significant improvements in his GPA and attendance during his senior year, he will not graduate. Goggins goes to his mother's house to get the letter. After showing up on his mother's doorstep, he reads the letter and then takes a shower. He, for the first time, is evaluating the Self when he confronts himself in the mirror:

1. "... I wiped the steam away from our corroded bathroom mirror and took a good look. *I didn't like who I saw staring back. I was a low-budget thug with no purpose and no future. I felt so disgusted I wanted to punch that motherfucker in the face and shatter glass. Instead, I lectured him. It was time to get real.*" (p. 51)

In this example, Goggins, through THE SOCIAL SELF metaphor, conceptualizes himself as bifurcated, composed of A SUBJECT and A SELF. Goggins is evaluating himself through conceptualizing THE SUBJECT-SELF RELATIONSHIP in terms of A MENTOR/ADVISOR-MENTEE/PROTÉGÉ RELATIONSHIP. In other words, Goggins recalls being his own advisor, a truth-teller who is lecturing the Self and pointing out his own weaknesses with an intention of prompting growth and self-awareness. THE SELF is conceptualized as someone under the guidance of a more experienced person. This other experienced person is THE SUBJECT who feels disgusted towards THE PROTÉGÉ for being "*a low-budget thug with no purpose and no future.*"

Moreover, in the following example, Goggins reflects on how self-evaluation and transformation are based on the SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation in which THE SUBJECT holds THE SELF responsible for achieving goals, reflecting on Goggins' strategies of self-discipline and self-reflection:

2. "By the time I was done talking, I was shaved clean. Water pearled on my scalp, streamed from my forehead, and dripped down the bridge of my nose. I looked different, and for the first time, *I'd held myself accountable...* I set goals, wrote them on Post-It notes, and tagged them to what I now call the Accountability Mirror, because each day *I'd hold myself accountable to the goals I'd set.*" (p. 52)

Here, the metaphor THE SUBJECT IS A MENTOR, THE SELF IS THE PROTÉGÉ is evident. Goggins is reflecting on his intention to change, to become successful through changing the way he looks. Shaving his head and looking different mirror setting different standards and goals for him to follow. In so doing, Goggins conceptualizes himself as bifurcated into THE SUBJECT AS PERSON/MENTOR, who is monitoring and evaluating the actions of THE SELF

AS A PROTÉGÉ. In this metaphor, THE SELF is assigned the role of achieving goals set by THE SUBJECT.

The SOCIAL SELF metaphor manifests itself also in the metaphor THE SUBJECT IS OBLIGATED TO MEET THE STANDARDS OF THE SELF. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), it is one special case of the SOCIAL SELF metaphor in which there is a split between the SUBJECT that has an obligation to the SELF and the SELF, which has no choice but to trust the SUBJECT to carry out those obligations. In the following example, Goggins' motivational tone arises when he conceptualizes himself as bifurcated: A SUBJECT WHO IS OBLIGED TO BE REAL/TRUTHFUL TO THE SELF and A SELF WHO TRUSTS THE SUBJECT TO ACT REAL AND TRUTHFULLY:

3. "I didn't dance around and say, 'Geez, David, you are not taking your education very seriously.' No, I had to own it in the raw because the only way we can change *is to be real with ourselves*. If you don't know shit and have never taken school seriously, then say, 'I'm dumb!' Tell yourself that you need to get your ass to work because you're falling behind in life! ... *why are you still lying to yourself?*" (p. 53)

According to Goggins, self-motivation begins when THE SUBJECT has an obligation to the SELF, which is to be honest with yourself and to be courageous enough to confront yourself with your true essence. Here, THE SUBJECT represents the active, decision-making aspect of an individual, while THE SELF embodies one's internalized ideals and values. This metaphor suggests an internal dynamic where one's actions strive to align with personal standards, promoting self-consistency. Goggins, through this metaphor, encourages individuals to align their actions and decisions with their authentic values, beliefs, and desires, highlighting self-reflection and personal growth and fostering a deeper connection with one's true self.

Moreover, one of the main self-motivation strategies adopted by Goggins is reflected by the MENTOR-PROTÉGÉ metaphor. In the following example, one of the ways in which THE SUBJECT AS A MENTOR disciplines and controls THE SELF AS THE PROTÉGÉ is through manipulating 'it' by reprogramming 'its' mindset:

4. "From then on, *I brainwashed myself into craving discomfort*. If it was raining, I would go run. Whenever it started snowing, my mind would say, *Get your fucking running shoes on* [italicized by the author]. Sometimes I wussed out and had to deal with it at the Accountability Mirror. *But facing that mirror, facing myself, motivated me to fight through uncomfortable experiences, and, as*

a result, I became tougher. And being tough and resilient helped me meet my goals.” (p. 55)

The metaphorical expression “*I brainwashed myself into craving discomfort*” that is used by Goggins in this quote highlights the manipulative upper hand of the mentor in controlling the protégé. According to Goggins, in order to achieve goals, one has to intentionally reprogram one’s mindset to seek out and embrace difficult situations. Thus, Goggins’ conceptual metaphor reveals an important strategy of self-motivation: transforming one’s relationship with pain and hardship into opportunities for growth. Additionally, Goggins continues by saying that he sometimes gets weak again or afraid. Nevertheless, he argues that he deals with this setback at the “Accountability Mirror.” Through facing ‘himself’ in the mirror, Goggins again conceptualizes himself as bifurcated and split between THE SUBJECT that faces THE SELF and confronts him with his moments of weakness in order to always remind him of the “*fight*” he has with past difficult situations. Thus, THE SUBJECT is in an ADVISOR position who urges THE SELF to fight a war with past uncomfortable experiences.

Another interesting instance of the MENTOR-PROTÉGÉ metaphor is when Goggins conceptualizes THE SUBJECT in terms of A MENTOR who motivates THE SELF to keep going. The conceptual metaphor in the following quote revolves around the idea that personal growth and achievement are a hard, continuous journey, not a destination reached through shortcuts. THE SUBJECT uses yet another metaphor in which ACHIEVING GOALS AND PERSONAL GROWTH are conceptualized in terms of another source domain: A JOURNEY:

5. “I knew I wouldn’t sleep that night unless I did something about it, so I grabbed my keys. ‘You cut corners and you are not gonna fucking make it,’ I said, out loud, as I drove back to the gym. ‘*There are no shortcuts for you, Goggins!*’” (p. 79)

In this quote, when Goggins talks to himself, saying, “*There are no shortcuts for you, Goggins!*” he is engaging in self-directed speech, a powerful tool for self-motivation. This internal dialogue reflects the metaphor of “the inner coach” or “the mental drill sergeant” guiding him through the tough journey of self-improvement. By acknowledging that “cutting corners” won’t lead to success, he reinforces the idea that progress requires relentless effort and discipline, much like an obstacle-filled journey. In this metaphorical journey, each challenge faced is like a milestone on a long road. Talking to himself serves as a means of keeping himself accountable, staying on the path, and avoiding deviation that could undermine his growth. This self-talk becomes a way to push through pain and self-doubt, much like a traveler motivating themselves to keep going despite fatigue or a rough road.

Yet, in another occasion, Goggins uses the domain of GAMING/PLAYING, in which the SUBJECT is conceptualized in terms of a PLAYER, and the SELF is conceptualized in terms of ANOTHER PERSON who is 'played on' and misled to do or achieve what the SUBJECT wants:

6. This is a tactic for you to be your best when duty calls. *It's a mind game you're playing on yourself.*" (pp. 98-99)

This metaphor reflects the manipulative hand of the SUBJECT over the SELF, entailing SELF-MOTIVATION OR SELF-MASTERY IS A MIND GAME BETWEEN THE SUBJECT AND THE SELF metaphor and the social metaphor THE SUBJECT IS A MENTOR, THE SELF IS THE PROTÉGÉ.

Additionally, THE SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation metaphor is included in the following quote, in which the relationship between both entities is conceptualized in terms of A DRIVER-PASSENGER RELATIONSHIP:

7. *The sympathetic nervous system is your fight or flight reflex. It's bubbling just below the surface, and when you are lost, stressed out, or struggling ... that's the part of your mind that's driving the bus.* We've all tasted this feeling before. Those mornings when going on a run is the last thing you want to do, but then *twenty minutes into it you feel energized*, that's the work of the sympathetic nervous system. What I've found is that you can *tap into it on-call* as long as you know how to manage your own mind." (p. 114)

Goggins presents two options for achieving self-mastery. The first option is when a person leaves the "sympathetic nervous system" in charge of making decisions. In such cases, Goggins argues that THE SELF (the body) will choose either to "fight" and overcome fatigue or withdraw from the field. Thus, Goggins conceptualizes THE BODY AS A VEHICLE and THE SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM AS THE DRIVER. Thus, "*that's the part of your mind that's driving the bus*" suggests that in moments of stress, fatigue, or struggle, the body's autonomic responses take control. This implies that when left unchecked, THE SELF (the body) will operate on instinct, choosing fight-or-flight reactions over rational decision-making. The second option that Goggins suggests is when a trained, conscious SUBJECT can recognize this process and take the wheel, overriding the body's automatic responses to push forward with intentional effort rather than instinctive retreat; hence, avoiding the possibility of choosing "flight" over "fight." According to Goggins, either the SELF or the SUBJECT is the driver. This metaphor reinforces the idea that mental toughness is about becoming the driver of your own mind and body rather than remaining a passive passenger to emotions, pain, and instinctive reactions.

Another SOCIAL SELF metaphor in the data is exemplified in a PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP metaphor. Just like a parent encourages a child by giving her/him confidence that s/he is doing well and is capable of doing anything, the SUBJECT encourages the SELF in times of doubt and uncertainties. In the following quote, Goggins suggests another strategy for self-mastery and self-motivation. Sharing his experience with ultra-endurance racing, particularly the challenges he faced during the Badwater 135, Goggins introduces to the readers his strategy of 'the cookie jar.'

8. "These weren't mere flashbacks. I wasn't just floating through my memory files. I actually tapped into the emotional state I felt during those victories, and in so doing *accessed my sympathetic nervous system once again. My adrenaline took over*, the pain started to fade just enough, and my pace picked up. I began swinging my arms and lengthening my stride. My fractured feet were still a bloody mess, full of blisters, the toenails peeling off almost every toe. But I kept pounding, and soon it was me who was slaloming runners with pained expressions as I raced the clock. From then on, the cookie jar became a concept I've employed whenever I need a reminder of who I am and what I'm capable of." (pp. 154-155)

In this example, Goggins explains how he motivated himself to keep running and overcome all the hard conditions and physical injuries during the race. Based on the SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation, the metaphor THE SUBJECT MAKES THE SELF IN CHARGE OF THE SITUATION is evident. Goggins, through recalling past victorious memories, activated his '*sympathetic nervous system*' and the adrenaline levels (aspects of the body, hence of the SELF) to 'take over' as an encouraging treat to keep going. In other words, the SUBJECT holds the SELF to be in charge so as to regain self-confidence.

The PHYSICAL-OBJECT SELF metaphor

Another SUBJECT-SELF metaphor identified in the data is the PHYSICAL-OBJECT metaphor. This category of metaphor draws on conceptualizing the SUBJECT AS PERSONLIKE and the SELF AS BEING A GAME FIELD, A CONTAINER, AN OBJECT, THE MIND, and A TOOL/WEAPON. These metaphors mainly reflect Goggins' mindset of self-motivation, self-mastery, and resilience. This section of the analysis examines how Goggins' strategies like "Taking Souls," the "calloused mind," and the "40% Rule" are underpinned by these metaphors, revealing a powerful internal dialogue where the Subject must regulate, shape, or even overpower the Self to break through mental and physical limitations.

One of the self-motivation strategies that is deployed by Goggins is the tactic of 'Taking Souls.' According to Goggins, the Taking Souls concept is

9. "a ticket to finding your own reserve power and riding a second wind. It's the tool you can call upon to win any competition or overcome every life obstacle. You can utilize it to win a chess match, or conquer an adversary in a game of office politics. It can help you rock a job interview or excel at school. And yes, it can be used to conquer all manner of physical challenges, *but remember, this is a game you are playing within yourself...* (pp.98-99)

Here, the above quote comprises two SUBJECT-SELF metaphors as Goggins introduces his readers to the 'Taking Souls' self-motivation strategy. In the first metaphor, he conceptualizes THE SUBJECT AS A PLAYER and THE SELF AS A GAME FIELD OR A CONTAINER. Goggins uses the domain of GAMING/PLAYING to talk about SELF-MASTERY. However, in "this is a game you are playing within yourself," the word "within" suggests that the game is played inside THE SELF rather than against THE SELF as a separate opponent. This implies an internal struggle happening inside a unified self. The "game" is not necessarily a battle against a separate inner enemy but rather an ongoing process of self-regulation, mental conditioning, and resilience-building. This struggle or battle is evident in the choice of some phrases, such as "win," "competition," "obstacle," "adversary," and "conquer."

As another example that supports the 'Taking Souls' strategy, the following quote comprises the metaphor SELF CONTROL IS THE FORCED MOVEMENT OF AN OBJECT. Goggins' quote is suggesting that in order to win over whatever is "impossible," he would expose himself to the danger of being dead:

10. "I also knew that it would take every ounce of courage and toughness I could muster to pull off the impossible. I was staring at hours, days, and weeks of non-stop suffering. *I would have to push myself to the very edge of my mortality.*" (p. 76)

Here, Goggins' conceptualizes himself as bifurcated into a SUBJECT and a SELF, in which the SUBJECT IS A PERSON WHO FORCIBLY PUSHES THE SELF and the SELF IS AN OBJECT BEING PUSHED TOWARDS A DANGEROUS EDGE. This metaphor implies that in order for Goggins to have control over the Self, he is willing to endure extreme stress, pain, and discomfort—hallmarks of mental toughness; hence, overriding physical limits. This also supports Goggins' powerful drive toward control over his own fate. The risk-taking and the search for control implied in this metaphor mirror Goggins' mindset of self-mastery.

Additionally, the following quote comprises two SUBJECT-SELF metaphors, in which THE SUBJECT is conceptualized as an entity whose existence is independent of THE SELF. In both metaphors identified in this quote, the metaphor THE SUBJECT IS THE EXPERIENCING, OBSERVING, AND THINKING PERSON, THE SELF IS THE OBJECT BEING ACTED UPON, SHAPED, OR CONTROLLED is evident. In the first metaphor, Goggins is speaking about his tactic for achieving self-mastery, resilience, and self-control through “*the calloused mind*”:

11. “Similar to using an opponent's energy to gain an advantage, *leaning on your calloused mind in the heat of battle can shift your thinking as well*. Remembering what you've been through and how that has strengthened your mindset can *lift you out of a negative brain loop* and help you bypass those weak, one-second impulses to give in so you can power through obstacles. And *when you leverage a calloused mind like I did around the pool that day and keep fighting through pain, it can help you push your limits*, because if you accept the pain as a natural process and refuse to give in and give up, you will engage the sympathetic nervous system, which shifts your hormonal flow.” (p. 114)

In this metaphor, THE CALLOUSED MIND follows the SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation by conceptualizing THE MIND in terms of AN OBJECT that can be shaped and hardened. In this metaphor, THE SUBJECT represents the individual who undergoes hardship, reflects on their experiences, and actively works to develop resilience. THE SELF is conceptualized as THE MIND, which is metaphorically likened to skin that becomes calloused through repeated stress. Just as friction and pressure cause the skin to toughen, challenges and adversity condition the mind, making it more resistant to pain and weakness. The Subject, through conscious effort, trains and strengthens the Self, demonstrating that mental toughness is something that can be altered over time. Moreover, from the domain of WAR, the metaphors THE SELF IS A TOOL/WEAPON, THE SUBJECT IS A WARRIOR/FIGHTER (e.g., “*when you leverage a calloused mind*,” “*it can help you push your limits*”), and PERSEVERANCE IS THE BATTLE (e.g., “*keep fighting through pain*”) are evident. Here, the SUBJECT is the individual who actively leverages a calloused mind and learns to control their responses to pain. At the same time, the SELF is conceptualized as THE MIND, which can be consciously harnessed to engage the sympathetic nervous system and push through limits. This metaphor presents mental toughness as something you actively engage with instead of just something you endure. It highlights that with discipline, a person can harness their mind like a tool to push through weakness and fatigue.

In the second metaphor, the phrase "*lift you out of a negative brain loop*" follows a similar SUBJECT-SELF structure by depicting negative thought patterns as a trap or hole. Here, THE SUBJECT is conceptualized in terms of A THINKING PERSON or THE CONSCIOUS AGENT that recognizes destructive mental loops and seeks a way out. Again, THE SELF is conceptualized as THE MIND, which is stuck in an automatic, repetitive cycle of negativity. This metaphor implies that without active intervention, THE SELF remains trapped, unable to break free on its own. THE SUBJECT must take deliberate action to "*lift*" THE SELF out of this cycle, suggesting that overcoming negativity requires effort, awareness, and a proactive approach to mental discipline.

Another important tactic of self-motivation introduced by Goggins is the 40% Rule. It suggests that when you feel mentally or physically exhausted, you're only at 40% of your true potential — with 60% still left to give. It highlights how the mind tricks us into quitting early to avoid discomfort, even though the body can endure much more. Goggins believes anyone can break past this mental barrier by embracing discomfort, pushing through pain, and building mental toughness. The rule teaches that most limitations are self-imposed, and true growth happens when you push beyond what your mind tells you is possible.

In the following example, there is another PHYSICAL-OBJECT SELF metaphor that supports the concept of the 40% Rule. Goggins is conceptualizing the SELF in terms of A CONTAINER. Inside this container is a device 'software' that processes our "*whole life story*," "*personalized feedback*," and "*fear and insecurity*" to encourage us to quit out of pain and exhaustion. This device is likened to a governor engine of a car:

12. "The human body is like a stock car... We may look different on the outside, but under the hood we all have ... a governor impeding us from reaching our maximum velocity ... *Our governor is buried deep in our minds*, intertwined with our very identity. It knows what and who we love and hate; it's read our whole life story and forms the way we see ourselves and how we'd like to be seen. *It's the software that delivers personalized feedback—in the form of pain and exhaustion, but also fear and insecurity, and it uses all of that to encourage us to stop before we risk it all.* But, here's the thing, it doesn't have absolute control. Unlike the governor in an engine, *ours can't stop us unless we buy into its bullshit and agree to quit.*" (pp. 172-173)

In this quote, THE SELF (MIND) is conceptualized as a CONTAINER that holds thoughts, emotions, and limitations. Inside this CONTAINER is A GOVERNOR that is "*buried deep*" in the SELF. Just like a car governor that controls the speed of an engine by regulating the supply of fuel either to limit

the maximum speed or to maintain a constant speed, THE GOVERNOR INSIDE THE SELF is responsible for our personal limits and for deciding when we stop pushing ourselves before getting hurt. According to Goggins, that would be true unless “we” as SUBJECTS believe it and “agree to quit.” The SUBJECT-SELF distinction in this metaphor is obvious: THE SUBJECT IS A PERSON, THE SELF IS AN OBJECT CONTAINER. Inside the container is THE GOVERNOR: a software device that can limit what THE SUBJECT is capable of doing or can endure. To Goggins, the SUBJECT IS A CONSCIOUS PERSON who has the will not to trust THE GOVERNOR to quit. Thus, it is the role of the SUBJECT to decide whether to quit or push limits.

Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that the self-motivation metaphors identified in *Can't Hurt Me* largely stem from two second-level SUBJECT-SELF metaphors: the SOCIAL SELF and the PHYSICAL-OBJECT metaphors. Addressing the first research question, the data reveal four core SOCIAL SELF metaphors, in which the SUBJECT is conceptualized as A MENTOR/ADVISOR, PARENT, DRIVER, or A FIGURE OBLIGATED TO ACT TRUTHFULLY, while the SELF is framed as A MENTEE/PROTÉGÉ, CHILD, PASSENGER, OR A PERSON WHO TRUSTS THE SUBJECT TO ACT TRUTHFULLY. These pairings reflect the way we interact with ourselves, which ties in perfectly with Goggins' emphasis on internal dialogues and the importance of self-discipline. Additionally, the PHYSICAL-OBJECT metaphors depict the SUBJECT as A PLAYER, A FORCEFUL AGENT, A SUFFERER, AN OBSERVER-THINKER, A WARRIOR/FIGHTER, and A CONSCIOUS AGENT, while the SELF is represented as A GAME FIELD, AN OBJECT, THE MIND, A TOOL/WEAPON, or A CONTAINER. These metaphors further illustrate Goggins' philosophy of self-motivation, where the SELF is something to be shaped, trained, or even battled. The presence of these deeply entrenched metaphorical bifurcations between SUBJECT and SELF supports the argument that such metaphors are not unique to Goggins but are reflective of broader, conventional patterns in self-motivation discourse.

As for the second research question, the data analysis shows that in *Can't Hurt Me*, David Goggins employs a variety of self-motivation techniques that revolve around a distinct SUBJECT-SELF dichotomy. The adopted approach for analysis highlights how Goggins tackles his inner battles to build remarkable mental and physical toughness. Each of the techniques elicited aligns to well-established psychological strategies that may affect self-motivation. These strategies include 1) confrontation, 2) setting goals, 3) mindset reprogramming, 4) self-directed speech, 5) preparation and equipment, 6) ‘Taking Souls’, 7) remembering past victorious moments, and 8) ‘The 40% Rule’:

1- Confrontation: 'The Accountability Mirror'

Goggins' 'Accountability Mirror' aligns with the principles of exposure therapy in psychology and cognitive dissonance theory, in which the [R]epeated and prolonged exposure to feared stimuli without the anticipated negative consequences results in the extinction of fear responses" (Foa & Kozak, 1986, p. 21). According to Festinger (1968), cognitive dissonance is mental discomfort that happens when a person is confronted with his/her own conflicting thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors. Such psychological tension may lead to the need for a change. Here, in the case of Goggins' 'Accountability Mirror,' his 'Self' conceptualization as two differing entities creates this psychological tension through self-confrontation. Goggins' self-confrontation through perceiving who he has become via the use of a mirror functions as a trigger for a change.

At the very first step in the process of self-motivation, Goggins engages in a critical strategy he would later define as the 'Accountability Mirror'—a raw, no-excuses confrontation with the truth of who he is. Standing in front of the corroded bathroom mirror, he does more than just see himself; he evaluates and interrogates himself. The mirror becomes a symbolic space where Goggins separates into two identities: the SUBJECT—a hardened, brutally honest advisor—and the SELF—a struggling, aimless protégé (see example 1). Through this bifurcation, Goggins steps outside of his own mindset to assume the role of a mentor figure, someone capable of delivering hard truths without sugarcoating.

Goggins' self-conceptualization activates his self-motivation philosophy. The SUBJECT represents the part of him that refuses mediocrity and insists on taking responsibility. The SELF is the one being challenged to rise up, to stop making excuses, and to own his failures. This dynamic is at the heart of Goggins' approach of personal growth: self-transformation through radical honesty. The 'Accountability Mirror' is a symbol of mental discipline where the SUBJECT calls out the SELF in order to trigger action, growth, and ultimately, a new identity built through pain, accountability, and harsh self-examination.

2- Setting goals

The second self-motivation strategy revealed by Goggins' self-conceptualization is the act of setting clear, achievable goals. This strategy conforms to Locke and Latham's (2002) goal-setting theory. Its core principle is that specific and challenging goals lead to higher performance than vague or easy goals. The data analysis reveals that Goggins' 'Self' conceptualization as bifurcated reveals that through a MENTOR-PROTÉGÉ RELATIONSHIP, Goggins assigns the goals for himself to follow as a result of the need for change. The data analysis (see examples 2 & 3) shows how he not only changes his appearance by shaving his head but also shifts his mindset. This physical change

represents a deeper internal transformation: the rise of the SUBJECT, the part of him that takes charge, establishes standards, and pushes for change. By writing goals on Post-It notes and confronting them daily, Goggins engages in a deliberate process of transformation, where the SUBJECT acts as a mentor figure, while the SELF takes the role of the protégé, tasked with executing the plan and rising to meet those expectations.

This SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation reflects a core element of Goggins' self-motivation strategy. The SUBJECT creates and enforces the rules; the SELF follows and learns. Yet this dynamic goes deeper. In addition to the MENTOR-PROTÉGÉ RELATIONSHIP THAT HOLDS BETWEEN THE SUBJECT AND THE SELF (as in example 2), Goggins embodies a unique twist: the SUBJECT is not just a rule-maker but is also morally obligated to be truthful with the SELF. This obligation is to be brutally honest with oneself and to confront oneself with one's setbacks and failures. Such SUBJECT-SELF relationship forms the foundation of Goggins' motivational voice. In telling himself hard truths like "I'm dumb" or "You're falling behind in life," he embraces honesty as a necessary step toward transformation (see example 3). The SELF, in turn, trusts the SUBJECT to uphold this honesty. This relationship fosters integrity, alignment, and consistency between who one is and who one wants to become. For Goggins, goal setting is not just about ambition—it's about being real with oneself and creating a structure in which actions align with inner values and aspirations. Through this bifurcated self-dialogue, he crafts a blueprint for personal growth: start with truth, set clear goals, and hold yourself accountable—every single day.

3- 'Mindset reprogramming'

One of the most powerful self-motivation strategies Goggins employs is what he describes as 'Mindset Reprogramming'—a deliberate, almost aggressive mental restructuring that allows him to embrace discomfort as a tool for growth. Goggins' strategy aligns with one technique within cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT is "a form of psychological treatment ... usually involves efforts to change thinking patterns" (American Psychological Association, 2025). According to the American Psychological Association (2025), facing one's fears instead of avoiding them is one of the most effective techniques within CBT to change behavioral patterns. For Goggins, this is one of his self-motivation tactics that leads to his transformation. As presented in example 4 above, Goggins reveals the inner mechanics of this process. Here, the metaphor of the SUBJECT AS MENTOR and the SELF AS PROTÉGÉ becomes central. The SUBJECT—the rational, disciplined, higher-functioning aspect of his psyche—takes control over the SELF, not by offering comfort or leniency, but by conditioning it to desire the very things it once feared: pain, cold, hardship, and fatigue. This act of

“brainwashing” isn’t accidental or passive—it’s intentional mental manipulation. Goggins trains the SELF to rewrite its emotional response to adversity. When it rains, the SUBJECT commands, “*Get your fucking running shoes on,*” reframing adversity not as a threat but as a challenge. This dynamic positions the SUBJECT as A RELENTLESS COACH, one who pushes the SELF to adopt a mindset where suffering is no longer a barrier, but a gateway to resilience and achievement.

Even when the SELF stumbles—when weakness or fear creeps back in—Goggins turns to the ‘Accountability Mirror,’ a space where the SUBJECT reasserts control by confronting the SELF with its shortcomings. This repeated act of self-confrontation is not about shame but about realignment. It reinforces the internal contract between the two parts of the self: the SUBJECT must be honest, and the SELF must answer to that honesty. Through this bifurcation, Goggins’ philosophy of self-motivation becomes clear: true growth stems from internal discipline, from reshaping one’s mental responses, and from maintaining a constant, often uncomfortable dialogue between who you are and who you are becoming. The SUBJECT drives the transformation by demanding more from the SELF—not through kindness, but through conviction and clarity of purpose. ‘Mindset Reprogramming’, thus, is not just about toughness; it’s about forging a relationship with oneself that is rooted in truth and resilience.

4- Self-directed speech

Besides, Goggins exemplifies one of his most powerful tools of self-motivation: ‘Self-directed speech’—the act of consciously talking to oneself as a way to reinforce discipline, direction, and resolve. This strategy aligns with Hardy’s (2006) views on the functions of self-talk, especially in athletics. According to Hardy (2006), a primary function of self-talk is motivational, which is divided into arousal regulation (psyching up, relaxation), mastery (building mental toughness, focus, confidence), and drive (sustaining effort toward goals). Relating to Goggins, in example 5 above, when he declares, “*There are no shortcuts for you, Goggins!*” he is not simply venting frustration; he’s activating the internal voice of the SUBJECT, the relentless inner coach who steps in to confront the SELF—the part of him tempted by fatigue or exhaustion. This example reveals a clear SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation: the SUBJECT, embodying the role of a mentor or mental drill sergeant, uses direct, motivational language to guide, correct, and push the SELF forward. The SELF, conceptualized as the PROTÉGÉ, is expected to listen, absorb, and act.

5- Preparation and equipment: ‘The Calloused Mind’

Another self-motivation strategy deployed by Goggins is the ‘Calloused Mind.’ Through a SOCIAL SELF metaphor, Goggins conceptualizes his internal

struggle between conscious control and automatic reaction in terms of a kind of social relationship between a driver and a passenger. For example, in example 7, the DRIVER-PASSENGER metaphor in “*that’s the part of your mind that’s driving the bus*” reflects on the sympathetic nervous system—the body’s instinctive, fight-or-flight mechanism. Left unchecked, this system often acts as the SELF—reactive, emotional, and survival-oriented—taking over in stressful or painful situations and dictating whether we retreat or push forward. But for Goggins, true mental toughness comes from not letting that reactive SELF stay behind the wheel. Instead, he calls for the emergence of the SUBJECT—the consciously trained, hardened part of the mind that has been “calloused” through repeated exposure to discomfort, discipline, and struggle. In this bifurcated model, the SUBJECT becomes the DRIVER, who chooses action over avoidance and composure over panic. The SELF, in contrast, becomes the PASSENGER—capable of fear, fatigue, and doubt, but ultimately under the direction of the SUBJECT when mental mastery is in place. This dynamic reflects Goggins’ philosophy behind ‘The Calloused Mind’: to reach your potential, you must take control of your own mental bus, override the body’s instinctual response to quit, and drive yourself forward with purpose. The mind becomes tough not by avoiding stress, but by repeatedly confronting it, learning to override the primitive impulses that say ‘stop’ or ‘that is enough’ (see example 11). Again, reflecting on the functions of the sympathetic nervous system, Goggins, through his ‘Self’ conceptualization, argues that for self-motivation, we must psychologically equip ourselves with a calloused mind to achieve self-resilience and mental toughness in achieving goals.

6- ‘Taking souls’

One of David Goggins’ most distinct self-motivation strategies is what he calls “*Taking Souls*.” It is a tactic that pushes us beyond our limits, not just to dominate others, but to assert power over our own perceived boundaries. ‘Taking souls’ relates to the term “comparison concerns” within the psychology of competition theory discussed by Garcia et al. (2013). Garcia et al. (2013, p. 635) define it as “the desire to achieve or maintain a superior relative position” in order to increase the individual’s sense of competitiveness. Nonetheless, to Goggins, the desire to achieve superiority stems from his bifurcated ‘Self’ conceptualization. Goggins defines the strategy of ‘Taking souls’ as “*a mind game you’re playing on yourself*,” a form of internal competition that helps you access a deep, inner strength. Through this framing, the strategy rests heavily on the metaphorical split between the SUBJECT and the SELF, each playing a critical role in the psychology of endurance and performance. For instance, in example 9, Goggins conceptualizes himself as bifurcated in terms of A SUBJECT AS A PLAYER and THE SELF AS A GAME FIELD. The internal struggle is happening “*within*” the Self—a psychological battlefield between the SUBJECT

and the SELF. The SELF, here, becomes the space in which this mind game unfolds—a field where doubt, fear, and fatigue reside. Again, through the metaphor SELF-CONTROL IS THE FORCED MOVEMENT OF AN OBJECT (see example 10), Goggins is depicting the SELF as a passive object—one that must be pushed, forced, and driven by the SUBJECT to extreme thresholds. Here, the SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation captures the essence of Goggins' 'Taking Souls' mindset: the SUBJECT is the fearless warrior who demands total control over the SELF, pushing it to perform even when it is ready to collapse.

7- Remembering past victorious moments: 'The Cookie Jar' strategy

Goggins' 'Cookie Jar' strategy reveals another dimension of his self-motivation philosophy: the power of remembering past victories to overcome present struggles. In moments of extreme physical and mental pain—such as during the grueling Badwater 135—Goggins consciously calls upon past achievements, not as fleeting memories but as emotional and physiological fuel (see example 8). This process reflects a clear SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation. The Subject—the conscious, reflective agent—acts as both a PARENT and a COACH, offering encouragement, confidence, and perspective in moments of doubt. Just as a parent reassures a child of their strength and potential, the SUBJECT reassures the SELF—the emotional and physical aspect of Goggins—by drawing from the “cookie jar” of past successes. These memories serve as affirmations: “You’ve done this before. You can do it again.”

8- 'The 40% Rule'

Goggins' *40% Rule* is one of his most defining self-motivation strategies. Goggins argues that when we feel that we have done all that we can, we have only used about 40% of our actual potential. The remaining 60% of our capacity is hidden unless we have the mental toughness to overcome the inner voice that tells us to stop each time we feel exhausted. This idea is reflected in a powerful metaphorical framework, where the SELF is conceptualized as a CONTAINER—a physical object that holds within it a governor. In example 12, the SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation is central to Goggins' motivational philosophy. The SELF is conceptualized in terms of a CONTAINER that holds inside it an individual's thoughts and emotions, which in turn are conceptualized in terms of an ENGINE GOVERNOR. This GOVERNOR is what holds us back from performing only 40% of what we are actually capable of performing. Goggins then assigns the SUBJECT the role of a PERSON who is capable of removing the governor from the engine, allowing for full performance. Goggins' '40% Rule' reflects on Dweck's (2006) notion of “growth mindset.” According to Dweck (2006), a growth mindset is the belief that abilities can be developed through effort, learning, and persistence. It encourages people to see challenges

as chances to improve rather than signs of limitation. Unlike a fixed mindset, it focuses on progress and adaptability rather than relying solely on natural talent.

Addressing the third research question concerning the extent to which the SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation metaphor system is conventionally entrenched in human self-motivation language, the data analysis demonstrates that self-motivation is deeply rooted in both experience and metaphor. This metaphorical structure is not only reflected in the way individuals like David Goggins talk about internal struggle, growth, and discipline but is also a fundamental part of our conceptual system. The pervasive use of metaphors such as MENTOR-PROTÉGÉ, DRIVER-PASSENGER, PLAYER-FIELD GAME, or WARRIOR-TOOL in Goggins' language suggests that our conception of the Self is not unitary but bifurcated into a DECISION-MAKING SUBJECT and a REACTIVE, SHAPED SELF. This conceptual split reflects how individuals navigate challenges, regulate behavior, and push beyond limitations. In Goggins' case, his self-motivation and self-mastery strategies rely heavily on this bifurcation, as it allows him to externalize internal resistance and assume control over it. Thus, the conceptualization of INNER LIFE in terms of A DYNAMIC INTERACTION BETWEEN THE SUBJECT AND THE SELF forms the cognitive foundation of his strategies, highlighting how entrenched metaphor is in both thought and action when it comes to achieving personal growth and transformation.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. As a single-case, text-centered analysis focused exclusively on *Can't Hurt Me*, the conclusions drawn about the entrenchment of the SUBJECT-SELF metaphor system cannot be generalized without caution. While the patterns observed in Goggins' discourse align with established conceptual metaphor structures in cognitive linguistics (e.g., Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), further research is needed across a broader corpus of motivational texts and across cultural contexts to determine the extent and variability of this metaphor system. Thus, this study should be viewed as an in-depth exploration of one compelling instantiation of a widespread cognitive pattern, offering insight into how metaphor facilitates self-motivation within a particular narrative framework.

Conclusion

This study sets out to investigate the metaphorical structure underpinning David Goggins' self-motivation discourse in *Can't Hurt Me*, with particular attention to the SUBJECT-SELF bifurcation and how it shapes his strategies for self-mastery. Through an in-depth metaphor analysis of selected excerpts, the findings demonstrate that Goggins consistently draws upon entrenched metaphor systems that frame the internal self not as a singular entity, but as a dynamic relationship between two distinct roles: the SUBJECT, representing conscious

agency, control, and resilience; and the SELF, representing the reactive, emotionally driven, and often resistant part of the individual.

Addressing the first research question, the data reveals that Goggins' language is structured around two second-level metaphor systems: SOCIAL SELF metaphors and PHYSICAL-OBJECT metaphors. These include conceptual pairings such as MENTOR-PROTÉGÉ, DRIVER-PASSENGER, WARRIOR-TOOL, and CONTAINER-GOVERNOR, all of which are used to externalize internal struggles and frame motivation as a process of self-discipline, coaching, and control. These metaphors not only reflect personal experience but are grounded in widely shared conceptual patterns that resonate across motivational discourse more broadly.

In relation to the second research question, the analysis uncovers eight distinct self-motivation strategies that Goggins uses—ranging from the 'Accountability Mirror' to the '40% Rule'—all of which rely on the SUBJECT-SELF split. Whether the SUBJECT acts as a coach, a fighter, a parent, or a driver, it is always positioned as the initiator of change, guiding or even forcing the SELF to push beyond its perceived limits. The SELF, in turn, is portrayed as either trainable or resistant, but never unchangeable. This internal dialogue of confrontation, goal-setting, reprogramming, encouragement, and resilience reflects Goggins' larger philosophy: that true transformation begins when we consciously choose to override our emotional and physical defaults through sustained effort and self-awareness.

Finally, addressing the third research question, the findings suggest that the SUBJECT-SELF metaphor system is not unique to Goggins but reflects a deeper conceptual entrenchment in the human understanding of motivation and inner life. Our cognitive and linguistic systems appear to rely heavily on metaphorical bifurcation to make sense of self-discipline, effort, and change. Goggins' self-mastery strategies exemplify how this bifurcation can be operationalized into a structured philosophy for personal growth—one where the Subject leads and the Self follows, resists, transforms, and ultimately evolves. However, it must be emphasized that this is a single-case study, focused solely on *Can't Hurt Me*, and as such, its generalizability is inherently limited. While the patterns observed align with well-established metaphor systems in cognitive linguistics, broader empirical research across diverse motivational texts, genres, and cultural contexts is required to determine the full extent and variability of the SUBJECT-SELF metaphor system. Thus, this study contributes a detailed account of how one individual's motivational framework operates metaphorically, while also opening the door to further comparative studies on the metaphorical architecture of self-discipline, agency, and inner transformation.

In sum, this research highlights the central role of metaphor in shaping not only the language of self-motivation but the very experience of internal struggle and resilience. By analyzing the SUBJECT-SELF metaphor system in *Can't Hurt Me*, we gain insight into the cognitive models that underpin modern narratives of endurance and self-improvement, as sampled in the selected data, offering broader implications for the study of metaphor in psychology, discourse, and personal development.

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التحفيز الذاتي في اللغة والفكر: دراسة حالة لمذكرات ديفيد غوغينز لا يمكن إيذائي (2018)

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المستخلص:

تكشف هذه الدراسة كيف يشكّل تصور الذات ويعكس فلسفة ديفيد غوغينز في التحفيز الذاتي كما يعرضها في مذكراته التحفيزية لا يمكن إيذائي: سيطر على عقلك وتحدي الصعاب. باعتبارها شكلاً من أشكال السرد الذاتي، تتيح المذكرات التحفيزية للمؤلفين مشاركة تجاربهم الشخصية بطرق تلهم القراء بشكل إيجابي. تعتمد هذه الدراسة على نظام الاستعارة "الذات كفاعل والذات ككائن"، الذي ينظر إلى الذات على أنها منقسمة بين الفاعل وذوات أخرى. وتتناول كيف أن فهم غوغينز لذاته يهيكل ويكشف في الوقت نفسه استراتيجياته الداخلية للتحفيز الذاتي، والتي تُعرّف بأنها العملية الداخلية التي تدفع الأفراد نحو النجاح، والسعي لتحقيق الأهداف، والمرونة، والصلابة الذهنية. تحدد الدراسة عدة استعارات "الذات كفاعل والذات ككائن" في سرد غوغينز، بما في ذلك "المعلم والمتعلم"، و"السائق والراكب"، و"المحارب والصلاح". لا توضح هذه الاستعارات فقط كيفية تصور غوغينز لذاته، بل تكشف أيضاً عن ثماني استراتيجيات رئيسية للتحفيز الذاتي، وهم: المواجهة، تحديد الأهداف، إعادة برمجة طريقة التفكير، الخطاب الذاتي الموجه، الاستعداد والتجهيز، أخذ الأرواح، استدعاء الانتصارات السابقة، وقاعدة الأربعين بالمئة. وتتمثل النتيجة الرئيسية في أن استراتيجيات غوغينز التحفيزية تتماشى مع الممارسات النفسية المعروفة التي تستهدف الدافع الداخلي للتغيير. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن استعارات "الذات كفاعل والذات ككائن" تلعب دوراً جوهرياً في التعبير عن الأنماط المفهومية التي تقوم عليها خطابات التحفيز. كما تقدم هذه الاستعارات رؤى حول كيفية تشكيل الاستعارة لتصور الذات والدافعية والهوية في كتابة المذكرات، مما يبرز الدور القوي للحوار الداخلي في تحقيق التحول الشخصي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحفيز الذاتي، نظام الاستعارة لتفكيك الذات، كتابة المذكرات الملهمة، الاستعارة المفهومية