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THE IMPACT OF COLLECTIVE SELF-ESTEEM ON INTERGROUP EVALUATION: SELF-PROTECTION AND SELF-ENHANCEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines the impact of personal success or failure feedback on collective self-esteem and bias. The second corollary of the self-esteem hypothesis - that low or threatened self-esteem will motivate intergroup discrimination and Crocker and Luhtanen's (1990) self-enhancement hypothesis were examined. Collective self-esteem was affected by status, and, contrary to the second corollary of the self-esteem hypothesis, participants with high collective self-esteem were found to show more ingroup bias (c.f. Abrams and Hogg 1988). However, status and self-esteem had interactive effects on evaluations of the ingroup and outgroup. High self-esteem was associated with more positive ingroup evaluations only when the ingroup had high status, whereas low self-esteem was associated with more positive outgroup evaluations only when the ingroup had low status. Results are discussed in terms of Crocker and Luhtanen's (1990) self-enhancement hypothesis.

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INTRODUCTION

According to social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986), one important reason why people display ingroup bias is that this enhances social identity, thereby elevating the self-esteem of group members. This prediction of social identity theory has become known as the self-esteem hypothesis. Abrams and Hogg (1988) identified two corollaries of the self-esteem hypothesis. The first is that successful intergroup discrimination enhances social identity and thus elevates self-esteem, self-esteem is a dependent variable, a product of specific forms of intergroup behavior. The second corollary suggests that, because of a motivational need for positive self-

esteem, low or threatened self-esteem will motivate intergroup discrimination, self-esteem is an independent variable, a motivating force for specific forms of intergroup behavior.

Tajfel (1981, p. 255) defined social identity as "the individuals' knowledge that they belong to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to them of their group membership." According to social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) the self-concept can be divided into aspects of personal and social identity. Personal identity is concerned with one's individual characteristics, whereas social identity concerns the characteristics of the groups to which one belongs. The characteristics of one's groups may or may not also be characteristics of the individual. Deaux (1992) has argued that social identity is not necessarily claimed by all those who fall into a defined category and that the meaning associated with a particular identity category may be subjectively defined. However, it remains the case that some category memberships are more fluid than others are. Certain categories are fixed throughout the lifespan, it is virtually impossible to change age, disability, race or gender. Other categories are defined by one's performance or status and are only changeable by a combination of luck and effort such as socio-economic status, performance in school, or on the sports field. Finally, some categories are chosen and could be changed at will such as the sports team one supports, or the political party one votes for.

Studies of the relationship between self-esteem and ingroup bias have considered widely varying types of group and identity, from those employing a minimal group paradigm (e.g. Lemyre and Smith 1985; Wagner, Lampen and Syllwasschy 1986), to those employing fixed categories such as gender and ethnicity (e.g. Hunter, Stringer and Coleman 1993; Ruttenberg, Zea and Singleman 1996). Similarly some studies have manipulated status of groups by feedback at an individual level (Hogg and Sunderland 1991); others have used group-level feedback (Crocker and Luhtanen 1990).

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Crocker and her colleagues have investigated the impact of self-esteem on reactions to success and failure at both a personal and group level. Crocker, Thompson, McGraw and Ingerman (1987) found that people who are high in personal self-esteem who received success feedback, rated other successful individuals much more positively than those who had failed; those who received failure feedback rated successful individuals no more positively than those who had failed. By contrast, low self-esteem participants consistently rated success individuals higher than failure individuals regardless of their own personal score. Crocker et al., (1987) argued that the high self-esteem participants were enhancing the implications of their success and minimizing the implications of their failure. Crocker and Luhtanen, (1990) extended this work at a group level in a study in which they divided participants into two groups in a manner consistent with the minimal group paradigm.

Participants were then asked to complete a measure of collective self-esteem based on their minimal group membership and then to take part in a test of interpersonal and intellectual competency. They were given feedback on their group's performance on the test with their own score excluded from the calculations of the group average. Feedback was randomly allocated as either group success or failure. Following this, participants rated themselves, above average

scorers, below average scorers, and the minimal groups to which they had been allocated on a series of adjectives. Crocker and Luhtanen found that those with high collective self-esteem varied their ratings of above and below average scorers as a function of their own group performance. Those with high collective self-esteem whose group succeeded rated above average scorers higher than those whose group had failed; those whose group failed gave higher ratings of below average scorers than did those whose group succeeded. Participants low in collective self-esteem did not alter their ratings as a function of group performance. Whilst all participants showed ingroup bias in relation to their minimal group allocations, the ratings of the groups did not vary as a function of collective self-esteem. Crocker and Luhtanen (1990) concluded that people who are high self-esteem are more likely to engage in self-enhancing strategies than those who are low in self-esteem, and that the same process operates at an individual or group level.

Whilst Crocker and Luhtanen's (1990) findings do seem to support the notion of a self-enhancement process there is a lack of external validity in the manner in which group status was manipulated. Participants were allocated to minimal groups and then told of their group's status on a test (above or below average) but with their own score excluded from the scoring process. As participants knew that their own score had been excluded, the true status of their group (with their own score included) remained a mystery. Although groups do receive performance feedback at a group level, in contexts such as sports performance, it is highly unusual to find a real life situation in which one receives feedback about one's group's performance from which one's own performance has been excluded. If a person competes as part of a team they are aware of their own performance, and the comparison between their own performance and that of the overall team. The implications for collective self-esteem and ingroup bias of not knowing whether one is "representative" of one's group, or whether one's group status might change as a result of one's own performance, are unclear.

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Moreover, outside the laboratory it is often the case that the criteria for group membership are based on individual performance or behavior. In particular, within the education system people frequently receive individual feedback which determines their eligibility for membership of educational groups. For example, in the UK individual academic performance can determine which school one is able to attend and which class within the school one will be allocated to (Kerckhoff 1986). At a more advanced level, individual performance will determine whether one continues into higher education and which University one is able to attend. Similar processes continue to operate throughout the lifespan in terms of job and promotion opportunities.

A further issue relates to the effects of collective self-esteem on evaluation. In Crocker and Luhtanen's study the effects of self-esteem on evaluation are not strictly at the group level; ratings of the minimal groups did not vary as a function of collective self-esteem whereas ratings of above and below average scorers did. It could be argued that these ratings focused on individuals rather than people who represent a particular group. Further, the measurement of collective self-esteem was related to the minimal group level not the categories referring to above or below average scorers. Crocker and Luhtanen (1990) discuss these issues in their conclusion and suggest that the role of self-esteem in ingroup bias may be more significant than that demonstrated by research using the minimal group paradigm.

The present study examines the impact of individual success or failure feedback on collective self-esteem and bias. In so doing we aim to compare the second corollary of the self-esteem hypothesis, that low or threatened self-esteem will motivate intergroup discrimination, with Crocker and Luhtanen's (1990) self-enhancement hypothesis. In order to do this we designed a study similar in method to that by Crocker and Luhtanen, but one in which participants were clearly allocated to high and low status groups on the basis of their performance on a test. Participants were told that assignment was on the basis of their score on a test of reasoning style. In fact, group assignment was purely random and the tests remained unmarked. Therefore, the group identity was based on a characteristic with clear evaluative connotations - "superior" and "average" reasoning style. Once participants were assigned to groups they completed a collective self-esteem scale. Following recent developments in the measurement of collective self-esteem (Deaux 1992; Branscombe and Wann 1994; Long and Spears 1997) we focused on collective self-esteem derived from the specific social category implicated in the intergroup situation, rather than in a decontextualized manner. To do this, we adapted Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) collective self-esteem scale to measure collective self-esteem specific to the group to participants are allocated. Finally participants were asked to rate the superior and average group on a series of adjectives. Following social identity theory, we predicted that status would be related to collective self-esteem, such that those in the high status group would have higher collective self-esteem than those in the low status group. We tested SIT's prediction that the low self-esteem should motivate more ingroup bias than high self-esteem. The contrasting predictions are drawn from Crocker and Luhtanen's (1990) findings - that those high in collective self-esteem would be more likely to enhance the ingroup by altering their evaluations of superior and average scorers as a function of status. Further, that those low in collective self-esteem would not show such self-enhancing bias.

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METHOD

Participants

Forty-nine undergraduate students participated in the study, 29 were female, and 20 were male. All received partial course credit for their participation.

Measures

The AH5 Group Test of General Intelligence (Heim 1968). This is a well-established measure of verbal and spatial ability. This test was presented to the participants as a test of reasoning style. It was structured for use in a twenty-minute period. The items that were used were randomly chosen and they remained unmarked.

State Collective Self-Esteem Scale based on Luhtanen and Crocker (1992). This consists of four subscales that assess various aspects of collective self-esteem: private collective self-esteem (assesses one's personal judgements of how good one's social groups are), membership esteem (evaluations of oneself as a group member of the social group that one belongs), public collective self-esteem (assesses one's judgements of how others evaluate one's social groups) and importance to self-concept (assesses the importance of one's social group memberships to one's self-concept). The collective self-esteem scale, and each of its subscales has high internal

consistency (alphas > .83) and acceptable test-retest reliability ($r = .68$ for the total scale) over a six week interval (Luhtanen and Crocker 1992). Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) instructions require participants to consider their "gender, religion, nationality, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class" (p.305) simultaneously while responding to each item. This scale was modified to measure self-esteem derived from the specific identity implicated in the intergroup situation. Participants were required to consider their membership in the average or the superior reasoning style group in relation to each item (e.g. "I am glad to be a member of this group"). Answers were recorded on 7-point Likert scales (1-Agree Strongly, 7-Disagree Strongly). The negative items of the scale were reverse scored. Crocker and Luhtanen (1990) report results pertaining to the private subscale of the collective self-esteem scale. For the purpose of our study we used the total scale as a measure of collective self-esteem. The scale was constructed by computing the mean across the set of items in the scale. Findings from this study relating to the private subscale do not differ significantly from those employing the total scale. The CSE scale showed reliability consistent with that reported by Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) with a Cronbach's alpha of .86.

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Ingroup Evaluation. Following Crocker and Luhtanen (1990) ingroup evaluations were measured using 16 adjectives, half of which were positive and half of which were negative. The adjectives were related to reasoning style because participants were told that they were categorized according to their reasoning style. The adjectives were, bright, uncreative, clever, ineffective, slow, gifted, effective, dull, creative, incompetent, unable, competent, able, intelligent, stupid, ungifted. Subjects rated the ingroup on each adjective, using a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7= extremely). The negative adjectives of the scale were reverse scored. The scale was constructed by computing the mean across the set of items in the scale. The adjectives were presented in the same random order to all subjects. The mean score of the ingroup evaluation scale was 80.60 and the alpha was .90.

Outgroup Evaluation. Following Crocker and Luhtanen (1990) outgroup evaluations were measured using the same 16 adjectives used for ingroup evaluations. Subjects rated the outgroup on each adjective, using a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7= extremely). The negative adjectives of the scale were reverse scored. The adjectives were presented in the same random order to all subjects. The scale was constructed by computing the mean across the set of items in the scale. The mean score of the outgroup evaluation scale was 80.17 and the alpha was .92.

Ingroup Bias. A measure of ingroup bias was calculated by subtracting outgroup evaluation scores from ingroup evaluation scores.

Procedure

Six to ten participants took part in each experimental session. They were told that the purpose of the experiment was to complete the validation of tests designed to measure different styles of reasoning. Participants were told that the tests were designed to categorize people according to their reasoning style. It was explained that University students could be divided into two groups of superior and average reasoning style, according to the types of strategy they employed in problem solving tasks. They were given the test of "reasoning style" and were told that they would be separated into two groups according to their performance on this test. Half of the

participants were informed that they had superior reasoning styles and the other half were told that they had average reasoning style. In fact, group assignment was purely random. The two groups were separated and sat at different tables. Thus, participants believed that they shared category membership with the physical group they were with. Participants then completed the collective self-esteem scale. Finally they were asked to complete ingroup and outgroup evaluation scales. No interaction was permitted throughout the experiment. At the end all participants were debriefed as to the real aim of the experiment and were shown that their assignment to groups had been completely random and that the tests remained unmarked.

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RESULTS

Status Manipulation

In line with our predictions, a t-test revealed that high status participants had higher CSE ($M=64.96$) than low status participants ($M=59.29$, $t(47)= 1.79$, $p < .04$, 1-tailed). To examine the possibility of interactions between status and self-esteem, in line with Crocker and Luhtanen (1990), we divided participants by median split into high versus low collective self-esteem categories. We find the same results when the analyses are conducted using multiple regression with CSE as a continuous variable. For ingroup ratings there was a significant effect of status ($\beta = .29$, $t = 2.01$, $p = .05$), and a significant status x CSE interaction ($\beta = .63$, $t = 2.70$, $p = .01$). For outgroup ratings there was also a significant effect of status ($\beta = -.29$, $t = 2.01$, $p = .05$), and a significant status x CSE interaction ($\beta = .64$, $t = 2.70$, $p = .01$). The analysis for ingroup bias revealed a highly significant main effect of status ($\beta = .60$, $t = 5.83$, $p < .001$) and a marginally significant main effect of CSE ($\beta = .35$, $t = 1.87$, $p = .069$, two-tailed).

Ingroup Bias

An ingroup bias score was computed by subtracting outgroup evaluations from ingroup evaluations. There were significant main effects of both status ($F(1,45) = 21.48$, $p < .001$), and self-esteem ($F(1,45) = 10.62$, $p = .002$). High self-esteem participants showed more bias than low self-esteem participants (means = 6.85, -5.74, respectively). High status participants showed more ingroup bias ($M=7.92$) in comparison to low status participants ($M= -6.33$). The interaction between status x self-esteem was not significant.

Ratings of Ingroup and Outgroup

Because self-esteem may affect ingroup and outgroup ratings differently we analyzed each separately. The means for these analyses are provided in Table 1.

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Table 1. Evaluations of the Ingroup and the Outgroup as a Function of Collective Self-Esteem and Ingroup Status

	High CSE	Low CSE

	High Status	Low Status	High Status	Low Status
Group Evaluated				
Ingroup	86.47	72.14	76.83	79.35
Outgroup	76.58	73.57	75.17	87.71

Following Crocker and Luhtanen (1990) it can be predicted that participants high in CSE would alter their ratings of targets as a function of status in a manner that enhanced their ingroup, whereas low CSE participants would not. For ratings of the ingroup, the main effect of CSE was non-significant, but there was a significant main effect of status ($F(1,45) = 4.20, p=.046$) and a significant CSE x Status interaction ($F(1,45) = 7.01, p=.011$). The simple effect of CSE was significant within the high status condition ($F(1,45) = 4.41, p=.041$), but not within the low status condition ($F(1,45) = 2.68, p = .11$). The simple effect of status was significant amongst high CSE participants ($F(1,45) = 10.92, p = .002$), but not amongst low CSE participants ($F(1,45) = 0.29$).

For ratings of the outgroup, the main effect of status was non-significant ($F(1,45) = 1.63$), but there was a significant main effect of CSE ($F(1,45) = 4.11, p=.049$) and a significant status x CSE interaction ($F(1,45) = 5.54, p = .023$). The simple effect of CSE was significant within the low status condition ($F(1,45) = 9.56, p = .003$), but not within in the high status condition ($F(1,45) = .09$). The simple effect of status was significant amongst low CSE participants ($F(1,45) = 6.73, p = .013$), but not amongst high CSE participants ($F(1,45) = 0.45$).

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Relationships Among the Variables

As shown in Table 2, comparisons of the correlations between different status conditions revealed that the correlation between CSE and ingroup evaluations differed significantly depending on ingroup status ($Z = 2.68, p = .002$), as did the correlation between CSE and outgroup evaluations ($Z = 2.50, p = .001$).

It is informative to compare of the relationships between CSE and ingroup and outgroup ratings within each status condition. This comparison is made after statistically adjusting for the correlation between ingroup and outgroup ratings. When participants were in a high status group CSE was positively correlated with ratings of both groups, but the relationship was significant only for ratings of the ingroup. Moreover, this correlation was significantly larger than the correlation between CSE and outgroup ratings ($t(22) = 2.47, p < .05$). When participants were in a low status group CSE was negatively correlated with ratings of both groups, but this was only significant for outgroup evaluations. The difference in correlations between CSE and ingroup vs. outgroup evaluations was not significant.

Table 2. Correlations Among Variables as a Function of Ingroup Status

	Collective Self-Esteem	Ingroup Evaluation	Outgroup Evaluation	Ingroup Bias
Collective Self-Esteem		.45**	.11*	.42*
Ingroup Evaluation	-.32**		.72***	.30
Outgroup Evaluation	-.57**	.75***		.45*
Ingroup Bias	.39	.28	-.42*	

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Correlations above the diagonal are for the high ingroup status condition, those below the diagonal for low ingroup status condition. For ingroup ratings and outgroup ratings correlations with unique superscripts differ significantly ($p < .05$).

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DISCUSSION

Consistent with both social comparison theory (Festinger 1954) and social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986), collective self-esteem was affected by status. High status participants had higher collective self-esteem scores than low status participants. This effect, and the relationships between collective self-esteem and group evaluations confirm that our status manipulation was meaningful and relevant to the participants.

Both status and collective self-esteem had independent effects on ingroup bias. High status participants showed more ingroup bias in comparison to low status participants. This is consistent with the findings of Finchilescu (1986) and Sachdev and Bourhis (1987). Contrary to the second corollary of the self-esteem hypothesis, but consistent with more recent research (e.g. Rubin and Hewstone 1998; Aberson, Healy and Romero; Abrams and Hogg 2001), participants with high collective self-esteem were found to show more ingroup bias.

The analyses that considered ingroup and outgroup ratings separately provide an informative picture. Those with high collective self-esteem responded to the status manipulation by evaluating the ingroup in line with actual status. By contrast their evaluations of the outgroup did not differ according to status. Those with low collective self-esteem responded by evaluating the outgroup in line with actual status. By contrast their evaluation of the ingroup did not differ according to status. Thus, we find that those who experience high collective self-esteem in the high status group proclaim their group's superiority, whereas those with low collective self-esteem do not acknowledge the superiority of their ingroup. Those who experience high collective self-esteem in the low status group do not recognize the relative superiority of the outgroup, whereas those with low collective self-esteem do.

These findings are in partially consistent with those of Crocker and Luhtanen (1990) who found that high collective self-esteem participants, whose group succeeded, rated above average scorers higher than did those whose group failed. Those with high collective self-esteem whose group failed showed higher ratings of below average scorers than did those whose group succeeded. In contrast to our findings, Crocker and Luhtanen (1990) found that participants who were low in collective self-esteem did not significantly alter their ratings as a function of their own group's performance. They suggest that their findings are consistent with the idea that those high in self-esteem engage in self-enhancing social comparisons following threat. Our findings would support this explanation and also lend further support to the concept of self-protection (Baumeister, Tice and Hutton 1989). Our findings seem to indicate that the self-protection theory used in examining personal self-esteem may be extended to collective self-esteem in contexts where the group has meaningful connotations. Brown,

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Collins and Schmidt (1988) divided participants into four groups on the basis of a dot estimation task – two groups over over-estimators and two of under-estimators. They then divided these groups into two rooms with one group of over-estimators and one group of under-estimators in each. They then asked participants to perform a brainstorming task and evaluate the solutions of all groups. High self-esteem participants showed favoritism when evaluating a task outcome that they had been involved with personally, by over evaluating their own group's performance rather than devaluing the outgroup's performance. Those with low self-esteem did not show favoritism in relation to their own group's performance, but over evaluated the other ingroup relative to the outgroup's performance. Brown et al., argued that people high self-esteem will self-enhance directly whereas those with low self-esteem will self-enhance indirectly. This is consistent with Baumeister, Tice and Hutton (1989) who concluded that high self-esteem individuals are motivated to enhance their public images whereas low self-esteem individuals are primarily concerned with protecting their images. Those low in self-esteem try to appear competent and avoid failure whereas high self-esteem individuals try to appear outstanding.

The findings from the present study are derived from a context of a meaningful group allocation, in which the evaluative dimension has important connotations for its participants, student's academic ability. The findings suggest that those with higher collective self-esteem may concentrate their evaluative activity on the ingroup whereas those with lower collective self-esteem may prefer to leave the ingroup unaffected by status, and instead concentrate their evaluative activity on the outgroup. This seems consistent with the idea that those with high self-esteem engage in self-enhancement, whereas those with lower self-esteem engage in self-protection.

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