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Evaluative group status and implicit attitudes toward the ingroup

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In the days during which we write this essay we are witness to strong Israeli military response toward Palestinian civilians in response to suicide attacks by Palestinians against Israeli citizens (April 2002). Actions on the part of both groups are among the more shocking examples of behaviors that are clearly guided by an interest larger than oneself – by group interest that appears to justify, in such extreme cases, the taking of lives including one’s own. But more ordinary examples of group identity and its consequences fill daily social interaction without drawing much attention -- rooting for one’s college basketball team, supporting a petition to improve the neighborhood, offering financial support to a family member. It is not surprising to find evidence of positive regard for the groups to which one belongs.

Commonsense and psychological theorizing suggest that positive affiliation with one’s social groups is a basic and fundamental fact of human existence. Thirty years of research on social identity theory has demonstrated and provided explanations for the tendency to show positive affect for groups of which one is a member, even when membership is arbitrarily created (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy & Flament, 1971; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Such accounts suggest that the process begins with a positive view of one’s group and leads to actions that promote group interest and thereby self-interest. Recent evidence adds support through the demonstration that mere membership in a group creates positive feelings toward the group even at a nonconscious level (Ashburn-Nardo, Voils & Monteith, 2001; Otten & Wentura, 1999).

Given the seemingly ubiquitous nature of positive evaluations of one’s social groups, it is of interest to look for conditions under which the principle does not operate as expected. We focus here on the dimension of the evaluative hierarchy of social groups. By this we mean the culturally consensual attitude toward the group – is the group generally regarded to be relatively “good” or not? It is undeniable that some groups have higher evaluative status than others, often as a result of historical or structural forces that create differences in the default cultural evaluation of groups.

While evaluative status may be linked to other stratifications (such as those based on class or power), these dimensions do not necessarily go hand-in-hand. For instance, White Americans are generally evaluated more positively than Black Americans and young more positively than elderly, which is consistent with the power differentials between the groups. However, women (typically the subordinate gender) are better-liked than men (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989) and would therefore sit higher in the evaluative social hierarchy.

A simple story of unconditional love for one's ingroup would predict that all groups should be equally well-liked by their members, regardless of a group's evaluative standing within a culture. That is, White and Black Americans should show equal liking for their own group, as should young and elderly participants, etc. Yet evidence and theory suggest that this is not the case. Meta-analyses suggest that members of low-status groups rate their own groups lower than do members of high-status groups (Bettencourt, Dorr, Charlton & Hume, 2001; Mullen, Brown & Smith, 1992), and experimental demonstrations provide behavioral evidence of such phenomena -- women judge themselves as deserving lower pay than equally qualified men (Jost, 1997).

To explain why all groups may not elicit positive attitudes equally from their members, Jost and Banaji (1994) proposed the notion of system justification, or the tendency for lower-status group members to endorse stereotypes that perpetuate group differences and to have depressed liking for their own group (or even greater liking for a higher-status group of which they are not members). The counterintuitive notion is that one may think, feel and act in ways that favor neither oneself nor one's group but rather serve to maintain systems of inequality by providing a rationale for group divisions.

Evidence from research on nonconscious attitudes hints that both self-presentation concerns as well as a lack of introspective knowledge of nonconscious attitudes (e.g., Greenwald & Banaji, 1995) may influence reports of liking for the ingroup. Both these factors may operate in

determining implicit attitude toward the ingroup. A strong demand to report liking for one's own group and lack of awareness of how status modulates affect for the group may mask system-justifying tendencies. In such cases, measures of implicit group attitude may be particularly useful to uncover variation in attitude as a function of ingroup status. Indeed, in demonstrations with large samples on the Internet (Nosek, Greenwald & Banaji, 2002), as well as in undergraduate samples (Banaji, Greenwald & Rosier, 1997), Black-Americans showed a lower level of nonconscious preference for their ethnic group (relative to White-American) than did White-American participants. This diminished ingroup preference was in marked contrast to their self-reported attitudes, on which Black-Americans reported stronger ingroup liking than did White-Americans. Explicit and implicit measures may present quite different views of ingroup versus outgroup attitudes. Specifically, explicit reports may underestimate the extent to which members of less-favored groups show an evaluative implicit preference for the ingroup. If this were so, evaluative status differences should be reflected more on nonconscious measures than conscious, or self-reported, ones. That is, members of evaluatively lower-status groups should show lower implicit liking for their group (or even implicit dislike) for their group than members of evaluatively high-status groups.

In this report, we review research that shows such a pattern (Table 1). Groups with relatively equal status show strong and equal implicit liking for their own group. However, as the evaluative status of groups vary, so do patterns of ingroup attitudes among their members. Members of evaluatively high-status groups do show positive implicit and explicit attitudes toward their ingroup. The story is more complex for members of low-status groups – in all of the work reviewed here, members of evaluatively low-status groups may explicitly report liking (even strong liking) for their group that is not mirrored on the implicit measure of ingroup affect. Occasionally, members of such groups even exhibit outgroup preference.

The work we cover uses the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998) to measure relative group attitudes. In the original report of the IAT, two equal-status groups showed approximately equal ingroup liking. Korean-Americans and Japanese-Americans each associated their own group more rapidly with the concept “pleasant” relative to the other group and the concept “unpleasant.” Such an association indicates a positive implicit attitude toward the ingroup. Similarly, students at two American universities had a strong positive implicit attitude toward their school (Lane, Mitchell & Banaji, 2001; Mitchell 2001), even as early as during the first week.

Among groups with unequal evaluative status, however, the pattern of results differs dramatically. In a separate study (Jost, Pelham & Carvallo, in press), students at a prestigious American university showed strong implicit liking for their school, relative to a less prestigious university. However, students at the lower-status school did not show an equivalent positive evaluation for their own university and were more than twice as likely than students at the prestigious school to actually show implicit out-group preference.

These effects go beyond self-selected groups such as students at a university. Nosek et al. (2002) reported that although explicit attitudes toward the elderly become more positive as one’s own age increases, a strong implicit preference for the young remains constant across age groups. In other words, irrespective of respondent’s age, participants showed a more positive implicit attitude toward the young relative to the old. Once again, the self-reported ingroup preference was on the implicit measure only for the favored (young) group. The phenomenon is not restricted to North America. In two studies, after participants were reminded of their heritage as East or West German, East Germans showed diminished ingroup liking (relative to West Germans), whereas West Germans showed an increase in ingroup liking (Kühen, et al., 2001). Despite German

unification, evaluative group and status differences remain and can apparently be detected on measures of implicit attitude when membership is made salient.

Returning to university samples, Lane et al. (2001) examined nonconscious attitudes toward small living units at an American university. Although students were randomly assigned to their residential colleges (RCs) within the university, there appears to be some consensus as to which of the residential colleges is superior. Even in this setting, stark group differences emerged in the attitudes toward the RCs. In the first study, students in the less favored RC did not show implicit preference for their RC, while students in the RC that was regarded as better-liked showed a strong implicit preference for their college. Remarkably, these differences appeared as early as the first week after arrival, suggesting that students quickly learned and internalized the groups' evaluative status.

The data are particularly revealing about the influence of evaluative group hierarchies on individual attitudes, at least when measured implicitly. Unlike the other groups discussed, the RCs do not differ in stereotypes, access to resources, or overall prestige. That is, they do not possess any of the typical characteristics of a stigmatized group (Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998). Although preliminary, these data suggest that marked power differences are not necessary for hierarchies to develop and to become quickly internalized by people on both sides of the divide.

While the exact contributions of group membership on the one hand and the evaluative status of the group on the other in predicting group liking are unclear, it is apparent that dominant evaluations of social groups are internalized and present at the nonconscious level. In this report we mention several cases in which the simple assumption of strong ingroup liking fails to explain group differences in ingroup evaluations. Members of groups that are evaluatively lower in the hierarchy show less liking for their own groups compared with those who belong to groups that are evaluatively higher in the hierarchy. In some cases, members of both groups show preference

for the more positively-evaluated group. In such instances (race, age) the explicit and implicit measures of liking for one's ingroup tell different and opposing stories and prompt questions about the meaning of disparities between conscious and unconscious modes of thinking and their implications for social and mental life.

Incorporation of the prevailing cultural view of one's group can create the system-justifying effects described by Jost and Banaji (1994), and empirically demonstrated by Jost and his colleagues (Haines & Jost, 2000; Jost, 1997; Jost & Burgess, 2000). Because of the low likelihood of protesting or attempting to change inequities if the source of the inequity is regarded to be legitimate (Tyler & Smith, 1998), the effects of the evaluative social standing of groups on individual nonconscious social cognitions may be particularly insidious.

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Table 1

Examples of group differences in implicit in-group preference

Groups	Implicit	Explicit	
Young/ Old	Both groups prefer Young equally	Preference for Young decreases with age	Nosek et al. (2002)
White/ Black	Whites show stronger ingroup preference than Blacks	Blacks show stronger ingroup preference than Whites	Nosek et al. (2002)
White/ Black	Whites show stronger ingroup preference than Blacks	Blacks show stronger ingroup preference than Whites	Banaji et al. (1997)
Stanford/ San Jose State University (SJSU)	Only Stanford students show significant ingroup preference	N/A	Jost et al. (in press)
West Germans/ East Germans	When identity is made salient, West Germans show stronger ingroup preference	N/A	Kühnen et al. (2001)
Residential Colleges	Members of highly-regarded groups show strong ingroup preference	Members of all groups report strong liking for their group ^a	Lane et al. (2001)
Yale/ Harvard (equal status)	Both show strong ingroup preference	N/A	Lane et al. (2001); Mitchell (2001)
Japanese-/ Korean-American (equal status)	Both show strong ingroup preference	N/A	Greenwald et al. (1998)

^a. Explicit measures were not relative measures -- in-group/ out-group preference cannot be assessed.