The Impact of Ingroup vs Outgroup Performance on Personal Values

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Two experiments explored the effects of ingroup vs outgroup performance on the extent to which individuals value an attribute. Self-appraisals of personal standing on the attribute were examined as a potential mediator of this relationship. In both experiments, members of two groups (either experimentally created or gender groups) took a test of a bogus personality trait and received feedback about the performance of their ingroup relative to an outgroup. Feedback about personal performance was not provided. Results of both studies demonstrated that individuals valued the attribute less when their ingroup scored lower than the outgroup compared to when the ingroup scored higher than the outgroup. Relative ingroup performance also affected participants’ self-appraisals of their own standing on the attribute. These self-appraisals, however, only partially mediated the effects of group performance on personal valuing. The implications for selective devaluing as a self-protective strategy used by stigmatized groups are discussed.

Members of socially stigmatized groups are frequently targets of negative stereotypes, exclusion, prejudice, and discrimination. As a result of these negative attitudes held by society, such individuals often find themselves and their group trapped beneath a glass ceiling (Ogbu, 1991). Clearly visible are the positive outcomes enjoyed by those who are nonstigmatized, yet members of stigmatized groups observe their fellow ingroup members struggle with more negative outcomes, such as poorer school performances, fewer job promotions, inferior

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housing, and lower incomes. Recently, attention has turned to examining how people who are targets of negative stereotypes understand and interpret their experience as members of socially stigmatized groups, how they attempt to cope with this experience, and what consequences these coping strategies have for their self-concepts and self-esteem (see Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998, for a review).

Many theories of self-esteem formation suggest that exposure to social stigma and negative outcomes will result in lower self-esteem among the stigmatized (e.g., Cooley, 1956; Mead, 1934; Darley & Fazio, 1980; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). In their review of the literature on stigma and self-esteem, however, Crocker and Major (1989) found that members of stigmatized groups frequently have levels of self-esteem that are equal to, and sometimes greater than, those of members of nonstigmatized groups. In accounting for this paradoxical finding, Crocker and Major (1989) proposed that several strategies might serve to protect the self-esteem of the stigmatized. One such strategy that may be used by the stigmatized is to selectively devalue, or regard as less central to their self-definition, those dimensions on which they or their group fare poorly and selectively value those dimensions on which they or their group fare well relative to others.

Crocker and Major (1989) argued that by reducing the importance to the self-concept of domains in which the ingroup fares poorly, stigmatized individuals can retain positive feelings toward both themselves and their group. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that the importance, or personal relevance, that people attach to a given domain moderates the impact on self-esteem of successes and failures in that domain. William James (1890/1950) argued this position over a century ago when he asserted that “our self-feeling in this world depends entirely on what we back ourselves to be and do” (p. 45). This proposition has been echoed by more recent self-esteem theorists, such as Rosenberg (1979; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972), Harter (1986), Pelham and Swann (1989), and Tesser (Tesser & Campbell, 1980).

The studies presented here explored this strategy of selective valuing. The primary goal of this research was to test the hypothesis that the mere observation of the relative performance of the ingroup to an outgroup in a given domain will determine the personal importance, or value, that an individual will attach to the domain. A second goal was to test the hypothesis that individuals often use the performances of their fellow ingroup members as indicators of their own ability and that these self-appraisals mediate the effects of relative group performance on selective valuing. Surprisingly, we are aware of no research that has directly examined these hypotheses.

SELECTIVE VALUING IN RESPONSE TO PERSONAL PERFORMANCE

Several lines of evidence suggest that the elements of one’s self-concept are organized in ways that are beneficial to self-esteem (see Taylor & Brown, 1988). In particular, there is evidence that people tend to value the attributes or domains
at which they feel personally successful and devalue the attributes and domains in which they feel personally unsuccessful. For example, Rosenberg (1979) and Harter (1986) demonstrated that children and adolescents rate domains in which they view themselves negatively as less personally important than domains in which they view themselves positively. Likewise, Robinson, Taylor, and Piolat (1990) found that French and English school children in the bottom fifth of their classes in terms of academic competence were less likely than those in the top fifth to report that their performance and behavior at school were important to them. The impact of personal performance on the importance attached to a domain also has been demonstrated experimentally. Tesser and his colleagues (Tesser & Paulhus, 1983; Tesser & Campbell, 1980) demonstrated that individuals who perform worse than a close other are more likely to devalue, or decrease the relevance of, a domain than are individuals who perform better than a close other. From this line of research, we might predict that members of socially devalued or stigmatized groups who experience poor outcomes in a given domain because of prejudice or discrimination will come to regard that domain as less personally important than will individuals who fare better in the domain because of a lack of discrimination. By so doing, they protect their self-esteem.

**SELECTIVE VALUING IN RESPONSE TO GROUP PERFORMANCE**

Crocker and Major (1989) hypothesized that the relative outcomes of one’s social groups can also shape personal values in a manner that is self-protective. This prediction is consistent with substantial evidence that individuals use their groups and other similar others as sources of information about themselves. For example, individuals gain a sense of identity from their social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), are emotionally affected by the performance of their groups—even when they have no direct role in how their groups perform (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976; Major, Schiaccitano, & Crocker, 1993)—and seem to incorporate aspects of their ingroup within their own self-concepts (Smith & Henry, 1996). Turner and his colleagues (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherall, 1987) have proposed that thinking of oneself in terms of a group membership produces a change in one’s perception of the self from the “I” to the “we.” Through this recategorization, the individual comes to perceive him- or herself as an interchangeable member of the group who possesses those attributes belonging to the group as a whole. At least two sets of studies corroborate this theory by showing that when either group identity is made salient in a situation (Brewer & Weber, 1994) or when group membership is chronically important for an individual (McFarland & Buehler, 1995), the performance of fellow group members directly affects how the individual appraises him or herself.

The effect of group outcomes on the individual and his or her attitudes may be most powerful when the individual has little or no experience in that domain. Thus, Bandura (1997) noted that by observing others who are similar to oneself, an individual gains a sense of his or her own efficacy in accomplishing some task.
In addition, however, he argued that individuals will be most sensitive to the effects of vicarious experience on their own feelings of self-efficacy to the extent that they are uncertain of their own abilities. Consistent with this idea, Tindale, Kulik, and Scott (1991) found that when individuals have no evidence of their own performance, the failure of their ingroup leads them to have lower expectations for future personal success. Thus, by merely witnessing other ingroup members fail in a domain, individuals may make inferences about their own personal aptitude in the domain and those self-appraisals may then lead them to preemptively devalue that domain under the assumption that they too would fail. The hypothesis derived from this argument is that self-appraisals of ability mediate the effect of group performance information on selective valuing.

Among many socially stigmatized groups, the knowledge that negative stereotypes of inferiority are applied to their group can raise questions about their own competence in a domain (Steele, 1992, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Furthermore, individual members of such groups often observe their fellow group members struggle to achieve success by society’s standards and fall short. Thus, even in the absence of personal experience with negative outcomes in a domain, members of socially stigmatized groups are frequently exposed to an indirect threat of incompetence resulting from observation of outcomes and performances of ingroup members. In addition to Crocker and Major (1989), several other theorists (Steele, 1992, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Ogbu, 1991) have also noted that members of socially stigmatized groups may cope with these threats by devaluing those positive attributes that their group is thought to lack as a means of maintaining self-esteem or positive attitudes toward one’s group. According to Steele (1992, 1997), knowledge of the negative stereotypes that exist about one’s group can lead an individual to restructure his or her self-concept such that outcomes in domains that are relevant to those stereotypes no longer impact self-esteem.

In addition to protecting personal self-esteem, devaluing a given attribute or domain has also been conceptualized as a strategy used to maintain a positive image of one’s group, as a whole (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Branscomb & Ellemers, 1998). For example, Tajfel and Turner (1986) proposed that one of the ways that individuals “repair” a negative social identity is by altering the value placed on group-related attributes. Thus, individuals may decide that skills that are not possessed by their own group are less important to other members of that group (Wagner, Lampen, & Syllwasschy, 1986). In addition, individuals may come to take pride in the very attribute that defines their stigma, as evidenced by the “Black is Beautiful” slogan that was made popular by the civil rights movement. In some cases, the alteration of group values may even take the form of embracing the very qualities that are thought by the larger society to be negative and eschewing those attributes that society values. Ogbu (1991) uses the term cultural inversion to describe how this process works among African–Americans. African–Americans, he argues, cope with their disadvantaged social status by defining their collective identity in opposition to European American culture. Thus,
behavior, attitudes, and characteristics that are commonly associated with European Americans become inappropriate for African–Americans. In a sense, these majority responses become devalued among African–Americans.

THE PRESENT RESEARCH

The present research examined the impact of group performance outcomes on personal values. We conducted two experiments in which in which individuals were exposed to group feedback indicating that their ingroup scored relatively high or relatively low compared to an outgroup on a novel attribute. In each experiment, members of two groups took a test of a bogus personality trait. Knowing only that the trait is a positive characteristic, participants learned how their own group scored on the test relative to the other group but did not learn any information about their personal performance on the test. The value that participants attached to the trait was measured. Study 1 employed a modified minimal group procedure to create two experimental groups about which participants had no prior knowledge. Study 2 used the same paradigm but employed real groups of differing social status, namely, men and women.

Our first hypothesis was that people would value an attribute less when feedback indicated that their ingroup scored worse on the attribute than when feedback indicated that their group scored better on the attribute. Our second hypothesis was that individuals would use information about their group’s performance to make inferences about their personal standing on the attribute and that these appraisals of personal standing on the attribute would mediate the effect of group feedback on valuing.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were 107 undergraduate students (85 females and 22 males) who received credit toward a requirement for an introductory psychology course in return for their participation. All participants were randomly assigned to receive one of three types of feedback about their ingroup’s level of “surgency,” a bogus personality trait. Participants learned that other members of their ingroup scored either higher than (Ingroup Success), lower than (Ingroup Failure), or about the same as (Equal Groups) did members of the outgroup. Participants received no information about their personal level of surgency. The value placed on surgency was assessed, as well as self-appraisals of surgency.

Procedure

Experimental sessions were conducted with groups of participants ranging in size from 9 to 18. Participants began the session in a large classroom. The experimenter explained that the purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between artistic preference and personality. Specifically, participants
were told the research targeted students’ performance on a “newly identified personality cluster known as surgency.” To insure that participants would have no preconceived notion of how “surgent” they were, they were given no other indication of the nature of surgency but were told only that it is a positive personality attribute.

**Group formation.** During the first part of the experimental session, participants were separated into two groups using a modified minimal groups procedure. Group assignment was supposedly based on participants’ responses to an artistic preference task but was actually random. In this task, participants were shown five pairs of paintings and made four forced-choice preference ratings for each pair (i.e., “Overall, which painting do you prefer?” “Which painting do you see as more visually complex?” “In which painting do you see more color contrast?” and “Which painting has more of an emotional impact on you?”). Five minutes passed during which participants’ responses were supposedly being scored. After this delay, the participants were told that their answers on the artistic preference task indicated that they possessed either a “figure orientation” or a “ground orientation.” The experimenter then read aloud the subject numbers of those participants who had been classified as Figures and those participants who had been classified as Grounds. Thus, participants believed that they shared a similar artistic preference with half of the people in the session and did not share the same preference with the other half.

Several steps were taken to enhance feelings of identification within the groups. First, after learning their group assignment, participants were instructed to wear a badge including their identification number and the name of their group (i.e., Figure or Ground). Second, after group assignment, participants were taken to the testing room where they were seated at one of two large tables with the other members of their artistic preference group. Third, participants worked together on a task with other members of their artistic preference group. This group task occurred after participants had completed the surgency test and will be described below.

**The surgency test.** The surgency test consisted of 50 items covering a broad range attitudes and behaviors that, taken together, provide no coherent impression of what surgency is. Some sample items are: “I doubt whether I would make a good leader,” “I enjoy ‘complicated’ forms of music, such as symphonies and jazz, more than ‘simple’ forms, such as pop,” “Sometimes, I have the same dream over and over,” “I often doodle in my notebook,” “I like to keep people guessing what I’m going to do next,” and “When in a group of people, I have trouble thinking of the right things to talk about.” Participants rated the extent to which they agreed with each item. They were given 10 min to complete the test.

During the time when the surgency tests were supposedly scored, participants performed the group task. Each group was instructed to create a collage of colored construction paper, sponges, and pompons on poster board. Each member of the group selected an item from a bag, pasted it to the poster board, and passed the materials to the next member. The groups worked separately on this task for 5
During the task, a sliding door was drawn between the two groups to increase the feeling of separateness between the groups. When done, the sliding door was opened and participants were given a measure of group identification.

**Group feedback.** Participants next received feedback about their group’s score on the surgency test. It was made explicit to participants that they would not receive an individual score. Participants were told that “due to ethical concerns,” the experimenter could not provide them with information about their personal performance on the test. Rather, they would receive two group scores: one score representing the average score of the individuals in their outgroup and the other score representing the average score of the individuals in their own group *excluding their personal score*. Thus, participants received no indication of their personal level of surgency, only the average level of surgency among members of the two minimal groups.

Participants received their feedback sheets in envelopes and were instructed to look at them quietly and refrain from sharing their feedback with others. All participants were randomly assigned to one of three feedback conditions. Participants were told that higher numbers indicated more surgency and that the highest possible score was a 50. In the Ingroup Success condition, participants saw that the average score for their own group was 39.1, while the average score for the other group was 22.2. In the Ingroup Failure condition, participants saw that the average score for their own group was 22.2, while the average score for the other group was 39.1. Finally, participants in the Equal Groups condition saw that their own group scored either 31.1 or 31.2, and the other group scored either 31.2 or 31.1, respectively.

After receiving group feedback, participants completed manipulation checks and dependent measures of self-appraised ability and valuing. Participants were then thoroughly debriefed and thanked for their participation.

**Measures**

**Group identification.** To assess feelings of identification with other members of their minimal group, participants answered the following six questions: (1) “Which group would you rather be a member of?” (2) “Which group do you feel a sense of membership in?” (3) “Which group would you rather work with on a group project?” (4) “Which group do you have more in common with?” (5) “Which group do you feel less of a sense of belonging to?” and (6) “Which group do you feel more of a bond with?” Participants rated each item on a 7-point scale anchored by Figure and Ground. Responses were scored so that higher scores indicate higher levels of identification with one’s ingroup. Responses on these six items were averaged together to create a composite measure of group identification that was reliable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$).

**Self-appraised ability.** Participants evaluated their personal level of surgency by answering the question, “How high in surgency do you think you are?” Participants rated their surgency on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very low) to 7 (very high).
Valuing. Valuing was assessed with four items: “In general, how much do you value being a person who is high in surgency?” “How personally important is it for you to be high in surgency?” “In general, how valuable is it to be a person who is high in surgency?” and “Is it better to be high or low in surgency?” Participants rated these items on 7-point Likert scales. Their responses were then averaged to form a composite measure of valuing that was reliable ($\alpha = .86$).

Manipulation checks. As a manipulation check of group feedback, participants were asked, “In general, which artistic preference group do you think scores higher on measures of surgency?” This item was assessed on a 7-point scale where 1 indicated that Figures score higher, 4 indicated that the groups are equal, and 7 indicated that Grounds score higher. Responses were coded so that for all participants, higher numbers reflect the belief that one’s own group scored higher than the other group.

Results

Manipulation Checks

Group identification and group membership. Because the group labels used in this study were arbitrary, we did not expect to find differences in group identification between participants assigned to the Figure group and those assigned to the Ground group. A 2 (Group Membership) \(\times\) 3 (Group Feedback) between-subjects analysis of variance indicated, however, that participants assigned to the Figure group ($M = 5.75$) tended to be more identified with their group than were participants assigned to the Ground group ($M = 5.40$), $F(1, 101) = 3.46, p < .10$. The main effect of group feedback, $F(2, 101) = 1.91$, n.s., and the interaction between group feedback and group membership, $F < 1$, were not significant. To remove the effects of the slight difference in level of identification, analyses on dependent variables reported below collapse across group membership and are based on one-way (Group Feedback) analyses of covariance controlling for group membership.\(^1\)

Minimal groups were used in this study to isolate the process by which information about a group shapes personal values. It is assumed, however, that this process requires some feeling of identification with that group. Participants who reject membership in a group would not be expected to use information about that group to infer personal characteristics. Because we used a bipolar scale for participants’ ratings of identification with their group, we could assume that participants who scored on or below the midpoint of the scale did not actually show a preference for their own group over the other group. Only 9 of 107 participants had a group identification score that fell on or below the midpoint. These 9 individuals were excluded from subsequent data analyses.\(^2\)

\(^1\) Including group membership as a variable in our analyses does not affect the results. Group membership had no main effect or interactive effect on valuing or self-appraisals, all $Fs < 1$.

\(^2\) Of these 9 participants, 5 had been assigned to the Figure group (2 Ingroup Success, 1 Ingroup Failure, and 2 Equal Groups) and 4 had been assigned to the Ground group (2 Ingroup Success, 1 Ingroup Failure, and 1 Equal Groups). Results do not change when these 9 participants are included in data analyses.
Group feedback. Analysis of the manipulation check on group feedback revealed that, as expected, participants in the Ingroup Success condition reported that their own group scored higher in surgency than the other group (\(M = 5.97\)), participants in the Ingroup Failure condition reported that their own group scored lower in surgency than the other group (\(M = 2.35\)), and participants in the Equal Groups condition reported that the two groups were more equivalent in surgency (\(M = 4.31\), \(F(2, 92) = 73.26, p < .001\). These means all differed significantly from one another in Newman–Keuls testing. In addition, participants in the Figure group (\(M = 4.40\)) were more likely than participants in the Ground group (\(M = 3.96\)) to report that their own group was higher in surgency, \(F(1, 92) = 4.49, p < .05\). The interaction between group membership and group feedback was not significant, \(F < 1\).

Valuing

Consistent with our first hypothesis, group feedback affected valuing, \(F(2, 95) = 6.44, p < .01\). Student Newman–Keuls comparisons revealed that participants who had learned that their ingroup scored relatively low in surgency placed significantly less personal value on that trait (\(M = 3.53\)) than did participants who learned that their ingroup scored relatively high in surgency (\(M = 4.21\)). Participants who learned that the two groups were equal (\(M = 4.57\)) valued surgency more than did participants in the Ingroup Failure condition and the same as did participants in the Ingroup Success condition.

Self-Appraised Ability

Analysis of participants’ self-appraised ability revealed a significant effect of group feedback, \(F(2, 95) = 19.39, p < .001\). Newman–Keuls comparisons showed that participants who learned that their group scored relatively low in surgency (\(M = 3.82\)) appraised themselves as being lower in that trait than did participants who learned that their group scored relatively high in surgency (\(M = 5.09\)), who did not differ from participants who learned that the two groups were equal (\(M = 4.88\)).

Regression analyses were conducted to test the hypothesis that self-appraisals mediated the relationship between group feedback and valuing, following procedures recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986). Results of these analyses are summarized in the first section of Table 1. In the first analysis, valuing was regressed on group feedback.\(^3\) Examination of the adjusted \(r^2\) showed that group feedback explained 10% of the variance in valuing, \(p < .05\). In the second analysis, self-appraisal of ability was regressed on group feedback. Group feedback was a significant predictor of self-appraisal, adjusted \(r^2 = .28, p < .001\). These two steps mirror results of the ANOVAs reported above. The final analysis

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\(^3\) Because group feedback had three levels, we selected our control condition (Equal Groups) as a comparison group and created two dummy coded vectors (Failure vs Equal and Success vs Equal) to represent group feedback. Hardy (1993) describes this procedure.
tested for mediation by examining what proportion of the effect of group feedback on valuing is explained by self-appraisal. We conducted a hierarchical regression analysis predicting valuing in which self-appraisal was entered on Step 1 followed by group feedback on Step 2. Examination of Step 1 revealed that self-appraisal was a significant predictor of valuing ($r^2 = .07, p < .01$). Examination of the significance of the change in $r^2$ from Step 1 to Step 2 illustrates whether group feedback had a direct effect on valuing that was not mediated by self-appraisal. The change in $r^2$ was significant ($\Delta r^2 = .06, p < .05$). Subtracting .06 (the direct effect of group feedback on valuing that is not accounted for by self-appraisal) from .10 (the total proportion of variance in valuing explained by group feedback), indicates that 40% of the total effect of group feedback on valuing was explained by self-appraisal. Thus, although self-appraisal did not fully mediate the effect of group feedback on valuing, it did partially mediate it.

**Discussion**

Results of Study 1 indicate that, in the absence of information about their personal performance, people use information about their ingroup’s standing on an attribute relative to another group to determine how much importance they
personally place on that attribute. People attached less personal importance to an attribute when their ingroup scored relatively poorly on the attribute compared to when either their ingroup had scored higher than the outgroup or the two groups had scored equally. This pattern is consistent with the idea that relative ingroup failure motivates personal devaluing as a strategy of protecting personal (or collective) self-esteem. The failure to find differences between the equal and ingroup success conditions suggests that relative ingroup success does not motivate selective valuing as a strategy of enhancing personal (or collective) self-esteem. Indeed, the attribute was valued slightly higher when the groups had scored equally than when the ingroup had scored higher than the outgroup.

In addition, we had predicted that the effect of group performance on personal valuing would be mediated through participants’ appraisals of their own ability. As expected, participants appraised their own ability to be consistent with the relative performance of their ingroup. They rated themselves higher in surgency if their ingroup had performed well relative to the outgroup and rated themselves lower in surgency if their ingroup had performed poorly relative to the outgroup. Furthermore, these self-appraisals partially accounted for the relationship between group feedback and selective valuing, suggesting that observing the performance of fellow ingroup members influences the extent to which people value a domain, in part because individuals use the performance of their ingroup as an indicator of their personal ability.

It is important to note that the effects of group feedback on personal values observed in this study were obtained from members of experimentally created groups who had no prior history of interaction and who did not expect to interact again after the conclusion of the session. The influence of such a minimal group experience on personal values suggests the power of real social groups to shape and define individuals’ self-concepts. Study 2 was designed to extend these results to groups that are personally relevant to participants: women and men. We hypothesized that women would personally devalue an attribute on which women fared poorly relative to men, and men would personally devalue an attribute on which men fared poorly relative to women, compared to when their own gender fared better than the other gender on the attribute. Second, we hypothesized that feedback about the relative performance of one’s own gender relative to the other gender would directly affect participants’ appraisals of their own standing on the attribute and that these self-appraisals would mediate the effects of group feedback on valuing.

STUDY 2
Method

Participants

Participants were 98 undergraduate students (52 females and 46 males) who participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement.
Procedure and Design

The study employed a 2 (Sex: Male, Female) × 3 (Group Feedback: Ingroup Success, Equal Groups, Ingroup Failure) between-subjects factorial design. All participants were run in groups consisting of three to five men and three to five women. Approximately equal numbers of male and female participants were randomly assigned to one of three group feedback conditions. The procedures were identical to those of Study 1 in that participants completed a test of “surgency” and received feedback about how other members of their (sex) group performed compared to the other (sex) group. Once again, participants did not learn their personal score. After receiving the group feedback, participants completed measures of self-appraised ability, valuing, and manipulation checks. The procedure used in Study 1 to enhance group identification was not used in this study, and group identification was not assessed.

Dependent Measures

Items used to assess valuing and self-appraised ability were identical to those used in Study 1. The same four valuing items were averaged together to yield a composite measure of valuing with adequate reliability (α = .70). As a check on group feedback, participants were asked which sex tends to be higher in surgency on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (men do better) to 7 (women do better). Responses were coded so that for all participants, higher ratings indicate the perception that members of one’s own sex are higher in surgency than members of the other sex.

Results

Manipulation Checks

All analyses reported below are based on 2 (Sex) × 3 (Group Feedback) analyses of variance. The effectiveness of the group feedback manipulation was confirmed by a significant main effect of group feedback on participants’ ratings of group performance, $F(2, 92) = 74.72, p < .001$. Results of Student Newman–Keuls comparisons showed that participants in the Ingroup Success condition ($M = 6.28$) were significantly more likely than participants in the Equal Groups condition ($M = 4.03$) to report that their own group was higher in surgency, who were in turn significantly more likely than participants in the Ingroup Failure condition ($M = 2.18$) to report that their own group was higher in surgency. There was no main effect of sex on participants’ ratings of group performance, $F < 1$, nor was the interaction between sex and group feedback significant, $F(2, 92) = 1.07$, n.s.

Valuing

Consistent with our first hypothesis, group feedback had a significant main effect on valuing, $F(2, 92) = 4.02, p < .05$. Newman–Keuls comparisons
revealed that participants in the Ingroup Failure condition valued the trait significantly less \((M = 3.77)\) than did participants in the Ingroup Success condition \((M = 4.47)\), but equal to participants in the Equal Groups condition \((M = 4.01)\). Participants in the Ingroup Success condition tended to value surgency more than did those in the Equal Groups condition, \(p < .10\). In addition to this main effect of feedback, women \((M = 4.24)\) tended to place more value on surgency than did men \((M = 3.89)\), \(F(1, 92) = 3.04, p < .10\). The interaction between sex and group feedback was not significant, \(F < 1\).

**Self-Appraised Ability**

Analysis of participants’ appraisals of their own level of surgency yielded a significant main effect of group feedback, \(F(2, 92) = 8.67, p < .001\). Student Newman–Keuls tests indicated that participants in the Ingroup Success condition rated themselves significantly higher in surgency \((M = 5.03)\) than did participants in the Equal Groups condition \((M = 4.48)\), who in turn rated themselves significantly higher in surgency than did participants in the Ingroup Failure condition \((M = 3.97)\). There were no overall differences in self-appraisals made by men and women, \(F(1, 92) = 1.06, \text{n.s.}\), nor was the effect of group feedback on self-appraisals moderated by sex, \(F < 1\).

Following the same procedures used in Study 1, regression analyses were conducted to test the hypothesis that the effect of group feedback on valuing is mediated by self-appraisal. Results of these analyses are summarized in the second section of Table 1. The first analysis, in which valuing was regressed on the block of group feedback variables, revealed that group feedback accounted for 6% of the variance in valuing, adjusted \(r^2 = .06, p < .05\). The second analysis, in which self-appraisal was regressed on the block of group feedback variables, revealed that group feedback had a significant effect on self-appraisal, adjusted \(r^2 = .14, p < .001\). These analyses mirror results of ANOVAs reported above. The third analysis tested for mediation by examining what proportion of the effect of group feedback on valuing is explained by self-appraisal. We conducted a hierarchical regression analysis predicting valuing in which self-appraisal was entered on Step 1 followed by group feedback on Step 2. Examination of Step 1 revealed that self-appraisal was a significant predictor of valuing, \(r^2 = .03, p < .05\). Examination of the change in \(r^2\) from Step 1 to Step 2 revealed that the direct effect of group feedback on valuing that remained when self-appraisal was controlled was only marginally significant, \(\Delta r^2 = .05, p = .10\). Subtracting .05 (the direct effect of group feedback on valuing that is not accounted for by self-appraisal) from .06 (the total proportion of variance in valuing explained by group feedback) indicates that 17% of the total effect of group feedback on valuing was explained by self-appraisal. Thus, as in Study 1, self-appraisals reduced the relationship between group feedback and valuing, but did not fully mediate it.
Discussion

Results of this second study replicated the findings of the first study and extended them to real rather than experimentally created groups. Again, in the absence of information about personal standing on an attribute, individuals used feedback about the performance of their own group relative to another group to shape the extent to which they personally valued that attribute. Furthermore, as in Study 1, appraisals of personal standing on the attribute were affected by observations of the ingroup’s standing relative to an outgroup. People who witnessed members of their own group score more poorly on an attribute than members of an outgroup assumed that they too were relatively lacking in the attribute. Likewise, people who witnessed members of their ingroup score more highly than another group assumed they too were high on the attribute. Finally, as in Study 1, the effects of group performance feedback on personal values were only partially mediated by self-appraisals of ability.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

A decade ago, Crocker and Major (1989) proposed that members of stigmatized groups selectively value or devalue domains not only in response to their personal outcomes, but also in response to the observed outcomes of fellow members of their stigmatized group. The research presented here represents the first experimental test of this hypothesis. In these experiments, we had two major goals. The first was to examine the extent to which individuals who have no knowledge of their own standing in a given domain use information about their ingroup’s performance relative to an outgroup to determine the extent to which they personally value that domain. The second was to test whether the effects of relative group performance on personal values are mediated by self-appraisals of ability.

With respect to our first goal, both experiments convincingly demonstrate that when their ingroup performs poorly relative to an outgroup in a given domain, people regard that domain as less personally important than when their ingroup performs well relative to the outgroup. In both studies, the inclusion of a condition in which the two groups performed equally provided a reference with which to assess the extent to which individuals selectively devalue domains in which their ingroup is inferior to an outgroup or selectively value domains in which their ingroup is superior to an outgroup. In Study 1, participants valued the domain less when their ingroup was inferior to the outgroup than when the two groups had performed equally. Compared to this condition of equality, they did not value the domain more when their ingroup was superior to the outgroup. These results suggest that there is a stronger tendency to devalue a domain as a result of observing ingroup failure than to enhance the value of a domain as a result of observing ingroup success. Thus, Study 1 suggests that individuals altered their personal values in a way that was consistent with a strategy of self-protection against negative group feedback.

A somewhat different pattern emerged in Study 2. Participants in this study valued surgency more when their own sex scored higher than the other sex, but
did not value surgency less when their own sex scored lower than the other sex, in comparison to conditions in which men and women scored equally. Thus, in this study, participants’ values seemed to be shaped by a motivation toward self-enhancement, rather than self-protection. The differences in results between these two studies may reflect the fact that Study 1 examined experimentally created groups that did not differ in social status, whereas Study 2 examined naturally occurring (gender) groups that do differ in social status. Although the interaction between sex and group feedback was not significant, closer examination of the means in Fig. 1 suggests that men both valued surgency more when men scored higher on it than women and valued surgency less when men scored lower on it than women, compared to the equal condition. Women, in contrast, appeared to value surgency more when women scored higher than men, but did not appear to value surgency less when women scored lower than men. This slightly different pattern of results for men and women is intriguing, and suggests that group status may be a potential moderator of the tendency to adopt either a self-protective strategy of devaluing or a self-enhancement strategy of valuing. This possibility will be discussed in greater detail below. At the very least, these studies demonstrate that, as Crocker and Major (1989) suggested, both selective valuing and devaluing processes occur in responses to observations of group performance.

**Why Group Performance Might Affect Selective Valuing**

The second goal of this research was to examine participants’ self-appraisals of ability as one possible mediator of the effect of relative group performance on
personal values. We hypothesized that given their lack of experience in the
domain, participants would use relative group feedback as an indicator of their
own standing in that domain and that the value given to the domain would be
determined by those self-appraisals. Support for this hypothesis was equivocal. In
both studies, relative group feedback had a direct effect on participants’ self-
appraisals and self-appraisals had a direct effect on selective valuing; however,
self-appraisals only partially explained the effect of relative group performance
feedback on selective valuing. Thus, relative group feedback retained a direct
effect on valuing that could not be fully explained by the extent to which
participants saw themselves as personally successful or unsuccessful in the
domain.

One possible explanation for the weak mediational effect of self-appraisals is
that our single item measure of self-appraised ability may have been unreliable
and thus an insensitive indicator of the degree to which participants incorporated
group information into their own self-concept. A second possibility is that there is
another, untested mediator of this relationship. For example, as a way of
socializing oneself into a group, individuals may adjust their values so that they
align with what they perceive to be the values of their ingroup. Thus, when one’s
group is successful in a particular domain, individual members may conclude that
this domain is one that is valued by the group. This process of socialization, in
addition to an appraisal of one’s own ability, may also be important in shaping the
values of the individual. Similarly, matching one’s values to the values of one’s
ingroup is a way to maintain or create one’s social identity with that group (Tajfel
& Turner, 1986) or to enhance collective self-esteem (Luhtanen & Crocker,
1992). Future studies should attempt to determine whether self-appraisals, social-
ization pressures, or both mediate the effects of group performance on selective
valuing.

Future Directions

Consistent with Crocker and Major (1989), this research establishes that the
observation of relative group outcomes in a domain can affect the extent to which
individual group members value a domain and regard it as personally important.
We believe this finding has important implications for the study of self-protective
strategies in response to social stigma. Members of socially stigmatized groups
often witness others who share their stigma receive unpleasant or negative
outcomes as a result of prejudice, discrimination, or other real obstacles to
success. Understanding how these vicarious experiences shape personal invest-
ments in domains sheds light on the processes by which individuals cope with
negative group outcomes that may threaten both their personal and social
well-being. A number of important questions, however, remain for future re-
search. One set of questions concerns potential moderators of the relationship
between group outcomes and personal devaluing and valuing. A second set of
questions concerns the implications of selective valuing and devaluing for
self-esteem. Each of these is discussed briefly below.
Moderators of the impact of group outcomes on personal values. We believe that several factors are likely to moderate the likelihood that individuals will selectively devalue domains in which the ingroup fares poorly or selectively value domains in which the ingroup fares well compared to outgroups. One potential moderator is the status of the ingroup relative to the outgroup. The theoretical perspectives reviewed above suggest that selective devaluing is a strategy used by members of stigmatized or low status groups to protect self-esteem or social identity (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989; Steele, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). There are reasons to expect, however, that members of lower status groups might be less likely to devalue domains in which their group fares poorly relative to high status groups than members of higher status groups are to devalue domains in which their group fares poorly relative to lower status groups. One reason is that the attributes and abilities that are thought to be possessed by high status groups are more likely to be associated with important and valuable rewards in society (e.g., income) than are the attributes and abilities that are thought to be possessed by low status groups. Consequently, it may be far more costly for members of low status groups to devalue those attributes and abilities associated with higher status groups than the reverse. A second reason members of lower status groups might be less likely to devalue domains associated with higher status groups than the reverse is that people show a pervasive tendency to maintain and justify existing status hierarchies, even at the expense of group and self-interests (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Major, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1993). Thus, when members of high status groups observe their own group doing worse than a lower status group in a domain, devaluing that domain may not only maintain their personal and collective self-esteem, but also preserve their higher status and maintain the status hierarchy by justifying existing differences between the groups. In contrast, when members of low status groups observe their own group doing worse than a higher status group in a domain, devaluing the domain in which the higher status group is superior challenges the existing status hierarchy.

Several recent studies provide evidence of an asymmetry between high and low status groups in their tendency to engage in self-protective strategies when those strategies challenge status hierarchies. This asymmetry has been observed with students from universities of differing social status and their tendency to devalue attributes associated with the other university (Spears & Manstead, 1989) and with members of different racial and gender groups and their tendency to blame a negative evaluation received from an outgroup member on discrimination (Ruggiero & Major, 1998). Furthermore, suggestive evidence of this pattern was observed in Study 2 of the current research. In general, men enjoy higher social status than women, as indicated by factors such as economic outcomes, social power, and occupational attainment (Major, 1994; Ridgeway, 1991). Study 2 compared men’s and women’s personal valuing of an attribute in response to learning that men had outscored women or the reverse. Although the interaction between subjects’ sex and group feedback on valuing was not significant, there was a tendency for women to be somewhat less likely to devalue the attribute
when women (a low status group) fared poorly relative to men (a high status group) than for men to devalue the attribute when men (a high status group) fared poorly relative to women (a low status group). In sum, relative group status may be one moderator of the tendency to selectively value a domain in response to group performance. If so, this has important implications for the extent to which this strategy is used by and is self-protective for members of stigmatized groups.

A second potential moderator of the phenomenon observed in these studies is the salience of group membership. As discussed earlier, numerous studies have demonstrated that individuals use their groups as sources of information about themselves (e.g., Smith & Henry, 1996; Brewer & Weber, 1994; McFarland & Buehler, 1995). According to self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), this process of internalizing attributes that are associated with one’s ingroup should occur most strongly whenever one’s membership in a group is made salient in a given situation. Furthermore, membership in a group is likely to be chronically salient for the individual who is highly identified with his or her group (i.e., views their group as an important aspect of themselves). We would expect that when group membership is made salient (either situationally or through one’s chronic level of identification), the performance or outcomes of the ingroup relative to outgroups in a domain will have a stronger impact on the extent to which individual group members value the domain. This stronger impact may occur because the relative performance of the ingroup has a stronger effect on self-appraisals of ability among individuals who are highly identified with their group, perhaps because they regard themselves as more similar to their group. This stronger impact also may occur because identification with a group increases people’s willingness to adjust their values to align with what they perceive to be the values of their ingroup.

A third potential moderator of the relationship between relative group performance in a domain and selective valuing of that domain is whether or not individuals have information about their own personal standing in the domain. In the studies reported here, participants had no knowledge of their own abilities in the domain. To the extent that group performance information affects personal values by generating expectations about personal performance, independent knowledge of personal performance would be expected to attenuate the effects of group performance on personal values. Furthermore, knowledge of personal performance could even override the effects of group performance on selective valuing if ingroup performance is inconsistent with personal performance. Indeed, we have some evidence to suggest that when individuals receive feedback indicating that their own performance is highly inconsistent with the average performance of their ingroup, they will be more likely to devalue the domain if they personally did poorly than if they personally did well (Schmader & Major, 1998). This effect was only observed, however, in a condition in which participants’ were oriented toward being an individual and not in a condition in which they were oriented toward being similar to others. To the extent that an individual is highly motivated to retain his or her membership in and attachment to an
ingroup, information about the performance of the ingroup might outweigh personal performance as a determinant of personal values. As Ellis Cose points out (1994, p. 62), “. . . if we tell a bright African–American kindergartener that blacks do basketball instead of math, we should not be surprised if he begins to question the point of developing his brain. His only alternative may be to decide that he does not really belong to such a non-achieving group.” In other words, even in spite of personal competence, feedback that implies that one’s ingroup is incompetent may lead an individual to selectively devalue that domain, because the alternative may be to renounce one’s group.

Implications for self-esteem. Although results of the current research are consistent with theoretical perspectives that propose that selective devaluing is a self-protective strategy (Crocker & Major, 1989; Rosenberg, 1979; Tesser, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Harter, 1986), these experiments did not directly test this prediction. Like William James (1890/1950), we would expect to find that reducing the importance of domains in which one experiences personal or collective threat would help to protect both personal and collective self-esteem. Moreover, selectively valuing domains in which one personally, or one’s group, fares well may help to boost personal and collective self-esteem. There is some evidence consistent with the proposition that the extent to which individuals value a given performance domain interacts with their self-views of their ability in that domain to predict their global feelings of personal self-worth (e.g., Harter, 1986; Pelham & Swann, 1989; Rosenberg, 1979; but see Marsh, 1986). The extent to which the self-protective properties of selective valuing and devaluing generalize to situations in which values are shaped by group performance, however, remains a topic for future research.

REFERENCES


