

A Model of the Ingroup as a Social Resource

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Drawing on theories of social comparison, realistic group conflict, and social identity, we present an integrative model designed to describe the psychological utility of social groups. We review diverse motivations that group membership may satisfy (e.g., the need for acceptance or ideological consensus) and attempt to link these particular needs to a global concern for self-worth. We then examine several factors hypothesized to influence an ingroup's utility in the eyes of its members. Attempting to unite our understanding of (a) why groups are needed and (b) what kinds of groups are useful in meeting those needs, a proposed model of the ingroup as a social resource (MISR) suggests that the dimensions of perceived value, entitativity, and identification interact to determine the overall psychological utility of an ingroup. We discuss empirical and theoretical support for this model, as well as its implications for intra- and intergroup attitudes.

Now what's going to happen to us without the barbarians?

Those people were a kind of solution.

C. P. Cavafy

The goal of this article is to present a theoretical account of the personal significance of group membership. We are fundamentally concerned with the benefits that can be derived from group membership, even in the absence of outgroups. Valued groups, in and of themselves, may offer the individual a sense of strength, belonging, or merit and so contribute to a sense of personal integrity or worth, whether or not a salient outgroup exists. In some cases, of course, ingroups may compare or compete with one or more outgroups, and appreciation for the ingroup may become confused with antipathy toward an outgroup. Indeed, much of the literature in social psychology has focused on intergroup relations, effectively pitting ingroups against outgroups and conflating ingroup love with intergroup bias. We suggest, though, that this competitive scenario is only a subset of a larger reality,

a reality that also allows for appreciation of the ingroup in less relative terms.

In this article, we consider a number of variables that indicate favorable attitudes toward the ingroup. Marilynn Brewer (1979, 2001) critically distinguished between measures of intergroup bias, ingroup love, and outgroup hate. Intergroup bias represents favoritism, in evaluation or behavior, for a group to which one belongs, relative to one or more outgroups. Ingroup love may be thought of as a particularly positive evaluation of the ingroup, calculated against some standard other than evaluation of an outgroup (Brewer, 2001; Gaertner & Luzzini, 2003). Outgroup hate is an analogous, but negative, evaluation or treatment of an outgroup. As each of these measures reflects a group-based process that enhances the psychological position of the ingroup, we do not differentiate between them, initially, as indexes of ingroup relevance. That is, we treat all three as gauges of the personal importance of the ingroup. Important distinctions do exist between these measures, though, and we attempt to address them in the final section of this article.

We begin by exploring theories that delineate diverse forms of ingroup utility. The first section explores a number of specific functions that groups may serve. Our goal is to cull from this body of work a coherent and relatively inclusive explanation of a group's personal relevance. Based on this theoretical understanding of ingroup functionality, the next section examines three dimensions of the member–ingroup relation thought to render a given group more or less personally meaningful, namely, evaluation of the ingroup, identification with the ingroup, and the

This material is based upon work supported under a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship and National Institute of Mental Health grant F31–MH069017 to the first author. Support for this work also came from NIMH grant R01–45049 to the second author.

We thank Timothy A. Correll, Paul G. Davies, Charles M. Judd, Megan N. Kozak, and Steven J. Spencer for helpful conversations and comments on prior drafts.

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entitativity of the ingroup (i.e., the group's coherence as a meaningful unit). A model of the ingroup as a social resource (MISR), presented in the third section, subsequently strives to integrate our thinking about the functions of ingroups with research on the kinds of groups that are valued, with the goal of understanding how ingroups function as a social psychological resource for the individual. The final section examines the implications of this model for a variety of threats to social identity.

Why the Individual Cares About the Ingroup

Social psychology, as the study of the individual in a social context, has devoted tremendous attention to the study of the relation between member and ingroup. Often focusing on the tensions that exist between groups, research has explored a wide variety of reasons and rationales for conflict. We begin by outlining and briefly exploring some prominent theories.

Theories of Intergroup Conflict

Material interests. Among the attempts to explain why an ingroup matters to the individual, and why an individual will discriminate on behalf of the group, a number of compelling theories suggest that group relevance is related to material resources. Realistic group conflict theory (RCT; LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961) suggests that bias emerges when groups compete, or imagine they compete, with one another. According to RCT, group-based conflicts of interest engender a sense of threat among the group members, promoting hostility toward the outgroup. This hostility both prompts and justifies discrimination against members of the outgroup.

The instrumental model of group conflict (Esses, Jackson, & Armstrong, 1998) builds on RCT by further specifying the conditions under which hostility erupts. This model suggests that *resource stress*, such as scarcity or the desire to redistribute capital, predisposes a group toward competition, but the theory stipulates that intergroup strife will not commence until a relevant competitor has been identified. Salient or distinctive outgroups, or those that seem likely to compete with the ingroup, become targets of hostility once the stage is set by stress.

Evolutionary perspectives. Evolutionary theories about the ingroup's function (Caporael, 1997; Caporael & Baron, 1997; Caporael & Brewer, 1995; Neuberg & Cottrell, 2002) similarly stress the role of material self-interest. Caporael has argued that human

beings evolved in an environment that required cohesive functioning among small groups. In this environment, a lone human being could not effectively stave off threats from weather, disease, and predation, but small groups could take advantage of communication and cooperation, enhancing each individual's potential for survival and procreation. Like RCT, then, an evolutionary account stresses that groups are important because they serve to protect and provide material resources.

But the evolutionary argument goes beyond the realm of the material. Because individuals who could function effectively in groups were more likely to pass on their genes, Caporael (1997) suggested that human evolution selected for group orientation. That is, to cope with the exigencies of prehistoric conditions, the human psyche evolved characteristics that presuppose and facilitate group membership. In the words of Caporael and Baron (1997), groups are "the mind's natural environment" (p. 317). According to this account, an individual's mental and emotional state—the most "personal" aspects of human existence—are fundamentally intertwined with group membership.

Social psychology, of course, has not been blind to the more psychological aspects of group membership. Though RCT was one of the first theories offered to account for intergroup conflict, subsequent work has focused largely on emotional, rather than materialistic, causes and consequences of group processes.

General self-worth. Not surprisingly, William James (1890) deserves much of the credit for articulating the axioms that underlie theories of intergroup bias. James' contribution to the present argument consists of two basic ideas. The self, he suggested, can be understood as including objects and relationships beyond the confines of the body. By virtue of their self-relevance, then, social relationships and group memberships assume personal significance. James also argued that the individual strives for a positive self-evaluation. If ingroups are incorporated into the self, and if a person is motivated to view the self positively, it stands to reason that an individual will be motivated to evaluate the ingroup positively.

Social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) represents the most thorough elaboration of the "selfish" implications of attitudes toward the ingroup. The theory was originally offered to account for the observation of (otherwise irrational) intergroup bias in the absence of both intergroup competition and material self-interest in the ingroup's outcome (Billig & Tajfel, 1973). Members of *minimal groups*, which were based on the most trivial classifications, apparently stood to gain nothing by virtue of ingroup favoritism, but they still showed preferential treatment for ingroup members when allocating money. In some cases, participants were faced with a trade-off between giving the ingroup more money than the outgroup in relative terms (e.g., \$1

for the ingroup and \$0.50 for the outgroup) and maximizing their ingroup's absolute profit but simultaneously giving even more to the outgroup (e.g., \$2 for the ingroup and \$4 for the outgroup). Participants chose to deprive both ingroup and outgroup members, giving both groups less in absolute terms to ensure their ingroup's relative superiority.

Why should anyone deprive both ingroup and outgroup simply to make sure that the apparently meaningless ingroup "won?" Did participants perceive some invisible competition between these hitherto nonexistent groups? SIT's answer ultimately implies that, indeed, a subtle form of competition did exist, because only one of the two groups could be the better one. SIT argues that participants were motivated to construe their ingroups, trivial though they were, in the most favorable terms available. By doing so, Tajfel and Turner (1979, 1986) suggested, participants could enhance their own sense of self-worth (cf. James, 1890). In the context of a minimal group experiment, the only way to assert the ingroup's value was to favor it over the outgroup, and if it were necessary to deprive both groups in an effort to achieve that goal, so be it.

SIT's critical insight was that valued groups confer a sense of self-worth to their members, and subsequent research has provided clear support for this idea. For example, if positively evaluated groups affirm their members' personal sense of worth, people should strive to align themselves with successful groups but distance themselves from failures. "Research on basking in reflected glory" and "cutting off reflected failure" (Boen, Vanbeselaere, & Feys, 2002; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980) demonstrate exactly these effects.

It is important to note that SIT focuses on a very general function through which groups provide a global sense of positive self-evaluation. More recent research has distinguished a number of other, more specific functions of bias, described subsequently. The ingroup, it seems, may serve an important role in buffering the individual from concerns about epistemology, identity, belonging, and even mortality.

Beliefs. In his revolutionary article, "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes," Festinger (1954) provided a compelling description of individuals' strategic use of groups in obtaining validation for their belief systems. He noted the inherently subjective nature of opinion and suggested that relevant ingroups assuage the epistemological doubts of their members by providing a ready source of confirmation: a number of other people who hold similar beliefs. Based on this idea, Festinger derived several important hypotheses. The imposition of group divisions, for example, should minimize the psychological impact of people who hold different beliefs. By splitting "unenlightened" individuals into another social category, the perceiver renders them less meaningful as a basis of social comparison

and, thus, less threatening. Festinger also argued that, to the extent that an individual is forced to compare his or her views with those of a dissonant outgroup, a motivation to derogate that group will emerge (the consequence of a desire to protect the ingroup's validity).

The insights of social comparison theory are far-reaching. They lay the foundation for much of the subsequent work on group attitudes, both theoretical and empirical (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989; Greenberg et al., 1990; Mullin & Hogg, 1998; Pool, Wood, & Leck, 1998; Swann, Milton, & Polzer, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Symbolic racism, for example, suggests that antipathy toward an outgroup derives from the perception that the outgroup violates values that are fundamental to the ingroup (Kinder & Sears, 1981). The particular suggestion is that White prejudice against Black people in the United States emerges because Blacks are thought to reject the Protestant work ethic. This argument implies that one function of an ingroup is to define, acknowledge, and affirm the ideological orientation of the group members. According to symbolic racism, an outgroup that accepts the ingroup's core ideology should be tolerated, but one that deviates will become the target of prejudice (see also Esses, Haddock, & Zanna, 1993).

Theories of uncertainty reduction (Hogg & Abrams, 1993; Mullin & Hogg, 1998) and self-verification theory (Swann et al., 2000) argue even more explicitly that ingroups validate their members' beliefs. Research on theories of uncertainty reduction, for example, suggests that intergroup bias is likely to emerge in an unfamiliar or confusing situation because the individual can strategically identify with the ingroup in an effort to regain a sense of understanding. By psychologically bonding with an ingroup, the individual obtains a clearer picture of his or her role in the present situation. Self-verification theory similarly suggests that the individual, motivated to validate a preexisting self-image, will identify more strongly with an ingroup when the group confirms that image. Together, symbolic racism, uncertainty reduction, and self-verification provide evidence that groups help their members understand themselves and the world in which they live.

Distinctiveness and acceptance. Optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT; Brewer, 1991) suggests that an individual depends on the ingroup for a sense of both assimilation and differentiation—two motivations that are thought to compete with one another. Very large groups, though they offer easy acceptance, provide their members with little in the way of distinctiveness. Very small groups, though distinctive, may fail to satisfy a person's need to assimilate or blend in. ODT suggests that individuals should prefer groups of an optimal size—big enough to feel inclusive but small enough to offer a sense of distinction. The distinctiveness motive of ODT echoes, in part, the drive for

self-knowledge stressed by both the theory of uncertainty reduction and self-verification theory. But, in addition to providing a basis for knowledge, ODT argues that distinctive groups impart a sense that the member is special.

The dual motives of distinctiveness and assimilation should prompt individuals to seek membership in optimal groups or to construe their existing memberships as more optimal. Pickett, Bonner, and Coleman (2002) and Pickett and Brewer (2001) showed that increasing the need for inclusion leads people to view themselves as more prototypical of an ingroup and to see that ingroup as more homogeneous. Increasing the need for distinctiveness creates identical effects, ironically fostering the perception that the individual is typical of the ingroup and that the ingroup is more homogeneous. We discuss this pattern further in the next section when we address the concept of entitativity.

Symbolic immortality. Terror management theory (Greenberg et al., 1990; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski 1991) suggests that an individual, threatened by the looming prospect of death, may strive to affirm his or her cultural world-view—including the beliefs and virtues of his or her ingroups. Support for the terror management theory comes from a series of studies showing that, when an individual is reminded of mortality, he or she tends to show more warmth to members of an ingroup but more antipathy to members of an outgroup (Greenberg et al., 1990; Harmon-Jones, Greenberg, Solomon, & Simon, 1996). Research even suggests that mortality salience prompts an individual to construe the ingroup as a source of symbolic immortality. When reminded of death, participants in one study identified more strongly with an important ingroup and characterized that group as more stable and cohesive (Castano, Yzerbyt, Paladino, & Sacchi, 2002). By strengthening ties to the group and perceiving the group as a permanent entity, an individual may attempt to create a kind of social legacy—a group that will live after the mortal member has passed on.

These theories highlight a number of diverse functions of group membership. Realistic group conflict and evolutionary theories focus on the ingroup as a guardian of material resources. SIT suggests that ingroups bolster general feelings of self-worth. Uncertainty reduction theory, self-verification theory, ODT, and terror management theory suggest that groups address more specific issues: validating beliefs or providing feelings of acceptance, distinctiveness, or existential permanence. Theorists have attempted to distill these functions into a more coherent set of principles or essential motives that govern social behavior. Fiske (2003), for example, enumerating the benefits of personal relationships, proposed that people strive for feelings of belonging, understanding, control, self-enhancement, and trust. Stephan and Stephan (2000), fo-

cus on the roots of prejudice, proposed that intergroup bias stems from threat, including realistic and symbolic threats, the threat of anxiety aroused by intergroup contact, and negative beliefs or stereotypes about the outgroup.

Despite these efforts, however, the obvious diversity of these functions makes it difficult to state in simple terms what the individual gains by virtue of group membership (or by virtue of intergroup bias in the service of that membership). The first goal of our model, then, is to integrate these theories into a common framework. The objective is not to replace or subsume other perspectives, each of which provides valuable insight into one or more functions of group membership. Rather, we wish to develop an integrated understanding that acknowledges the unique contributions of each theory but also explains their common psychological consequences for the individual.

Integrating Theories of Intergroup Bias

Linking the ingroup to the self. Every theory of intergroup bias rests on the assumption that the individual member derives some personal benefit by virtue of group membership. The particular nature of the benefit depends on the theory, but in every case the group offers something of value to the individual (resources, feelings of belonging, and so on). In spite of the diversity of group functions implied by the various theories of intergroup bias, the common element of personal utility suggests a potential for integration. Specifically, we suggest that utility ultimately translates the diverse particular benefits of group membership into feelings of self-worth or self-esteem.

We recognize that claiming a connection between group processes (including intergroup bias) and feelings of self-worth is neither novel nor free from contention. Indeed, this position simply recapitulates SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and, unfortunately, the enormous volume of research that has examined the relation between bias and self-worth yields a rather confusing picture (Brewer & Brown, 1998). We do not make this claim lightly, however, and we invoke several theories to support it. Like Tajfel (who in turn echoed James, 1890), we suggest that the individual perceives group membership as one aspect or facet of the self. Self-Affirmation Theory (SAT; Steele, 1988) represents this relation graphically by proposing that a global self-concept is linked to multiple, more specific domains of identity, including group memberships, social roles, beliefs, and abilities (see Figure 1). Like James and Tajfel and Turner, SAT implies that positive and negative outcomes occurring at the level of the specific group can affect the value or worth of the general self-concept. Accordingly, the “external” consequences of group membership—which may involve

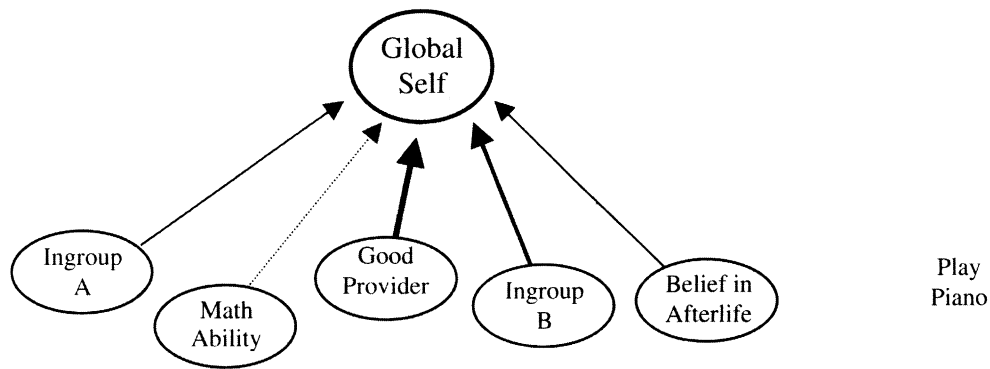


Figure 1. A Self-Affirmation Model of the Self. Subordinate domains are connected to the global self by arrows of varying thickness, which represent magnitude of identification.

material outcomes such as money or land or interpersonal outcomes such as status or belonging—have consequences that are manifestly “internal” in nature, existing only in the mind of the individual.

A crucial question is how and why these external group-based outcomes create internal and subjective effects. This question is largely the focus of sociometer theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Leary and Baumeister proposed that the true purpose of self-esteem is to provide the individual with information about his or her “potential for inclusion in desirable groups and relationships” (p. 24). That is, self-esteem monitors the likelihood that others will want to form and maintain close relationships with the individual. Given the importance of social connectedness for human survival (e.g., Caporael & Baron, 1997), Leary and Baumeister suggested that there is good reason for an individual to care about this relationship potential. High self-esteem is desirable because it implies that other people view the individual as a valuable relationship partner; low self-esteem is unpleasant because it suggests the opposite.

Sociometer theory is relevant for our model because it explains the link between the external social reality (that is defined by an individual’s position in a social network) and an internal or psychological state. The idea that feelings of self-worth or self-esteem serve as a mental gauge of social reality is critical to our efforts to understand the common thread behind the theories of bias we have reviewed. As noted previously, these theories suggest that group membership confers many diverse advantages. But these advantages do not accrue in a social vacuum. By providing status, access to resources, or validation of personal beliefs, groups confer advantages that enhance the social position of their members. As sociometer theory contends, external changes in social position are echoed, subjectively, by shifts in self-esteem. The implication here is that groups are valuable because they help the individual successfully navigate a social world. In so doing, they

enhance feelings of self-esteem (a gauge of the individual’s ability to navigate).

Despite the characterization of self-esteem as a secondary phenomenon, which gauges a more primary social reality, Leary and Baumeister (2000) argued that the desire for self-esteem can become a functionally autonomous drive. That is, the symbol, which indicates a positive state of affairs for the individual, comes to be seen as desirable in and of itself. This self-esteem motive may then prompt individuals to engage in behavior that increases self-esteem, such as affirming social groups (a conclusion in line with SIT and SAT).

Though SIT, SAT, and sociometer theory differ in many of their particular implications, they each make two arguments that are critical for the model we propose. First, they provide a rationale for the translation of external group outcomes to internal, subjective feelings. Group processes that enhance the individual’s social position (as suggested by sociometer theory) or affirm some aspect of the individual’s identity (as suggested by SAT) are expected to promote feelings of self-worth. Each perspective also suggests that the individual is motivated to enhance or protect self-esteem and that ingroups may prove useful in doing so.

The self-esteem hypothesis. The argument that group processes affect self-worth cannot be advanced without addressing the self-esteem hypothesis (SEH; Hogg & Abrams, 1990), its two corollaries, and recent efforts to evaluate them. Derived from SIT, the self-esteem hypothesis proposes that successful intergroup discrimination elevates feelings of self-esteem (Corollary 1) and that threats to self-esteem promote discrimination (Corollary 2). The suggestion is that threatened individuals attempt to improve their psychological state by enhancing the position of their ingroup.

Rubin and Hewstone (1998) conducted an extensive review, examining studies that measured both intergroup bias and self-esteem. With regard to Corollary 1, the authors found support for the hypothesis that bias bolsters self-esteem, but only in certain situations. The

corollary received support most reliably when research assessed state (rather than trait) self-esteem and when the intergroup bias was not prescribed by social norms. As the authors noted, this is a fairly logical pattern. State self-esteem is flexible and responsive, whereas trait self-esteem is relatively inflexible. There is no reason to expect that traits should shift due to transitory experimental manipulations—indeed, such shifts would not be particularly trait-like. Further, only when individuals intentionally choose to express intergroup bias should they experience a boost in self-evaluation. If the expression of bias is a foregone conclusion (i.e., if bias in a situation is normative or expected, as in the established conflict between Palestinians and Israelis), its effects may be trivial. Granting these two caveats, then, research does seem to favor Corollary 1: the expression of bias can boost self-esteem. With regard to Corollary 2, however, the authors reported little empirical support. Self-esteem threats, it seems, do not reliably produce intergroup bias.

To understand the fit between these findings and the expectations of models such as SIT and SAT, it is critical to recognize that a one-to-many relation exists between the lone self-concept and the multiple facets of identity (see Figure 1). Outcomes at the level of an ingroup necessarily impact the self to which they are connected. An ingroup's failure should hurt, and its success should affirm. But outcomes at the level of the self do not necessarily have consequences for any particular group. To repair a global self-threat, the individual typically has several options. He or she may choose to assert the superiority of an ingroup (e.g., the United States of America), of course, but there is no reason that a threatened individual must rely on that particular aspect of identity. Any domain of the self may provide affirmation (Tesser, Crepaz, Beach, Cornell, & Collins, 2000; Tesser, Martin, & Cornell, 1996). For example, the threatened individual may take solace in the strength of his or her academic ability or alma mater, rather than necessarily focusing on nationality. The asymmetry of this one-to-many relation exactly matches Rubin and Hewstone's (1998) conclusions. In line with Corollary 1, it strongly implies a bottom-up process, in which group-specific effects influence the more general self-concept. However, it does not necessarily predict the top-down effects of Corollary 2. Membership in a particular group represents only one of many potential domains of identity, each of which may satisfy the desire to enhance self-worth. Accordingly, self-threat may or may not evoke bias to favor the ingroup in question.

This is not to say that an individual who is motivated to enhance self-esteem will never choose ingroup bias as the means to that end. If certain conditions are satisfied (e.g., if the ingroup is highly salient, if the individual sees ingroup bias as an ethically acceptable alternative; Blanz, Mummendey, & Otten, 1995), a

top-down drive for self-worth may engender intergroup bias (e.g., Fein & Spencer, 1997). We wish to argue only that the individual likely has several options derived from a number of aspects of his or her identity, each of which may be used to enhance self-worth, so the motivation to enhance or maintain self-esteem need not draw on any particular ingroup.

Conclusion

In this section, we have attempted to describe and integrate the selfish implications of group membership. Borrowing heavily from James (1890) and theorists who have elaborated his critical insights, we suggested that the many particular, concrete, external (i.e., material or social) functions of groups exert a common intrapsychic impact on the individual's self-evaluation. Whether an ingroup offers self-verification, symbolic immortality, or power, it has the general capacity to enhance the member's social position and boost feelings of self-worth. Clearly, however, some groups exert a greater impact than others. Groups defined by eye color or hairstyle differ dramatically from those defined by race or religious beliefs. The next section reviews the group literature with a view toward understanding the dimensions that determine a particular group's psychological importance.

Determinants of an Ingroup's Psychological Utility

We now examine factors that distinguish ingroups in terms of their capacity to influence self-evaluation, a capacity we call *psychological utility*. Research offers several insights into the characteristics that render groups more or less psychologically potent. We explore three dimensions in particular: the ingroup's perceived value, its self-relevance, and its entitativity (or the degree to which the group represents a coherent psychological unit). We present these constructs as distinct factors pertinent to the group's overall psychological utility.

Perceived Value of the Ingroup

Our first goal in this section is to understand the characteristics that influence a member's appraisals of an ingroup, or its *perceived value*. We must draw a crucial distinction between the concepts of perceived value and psychological utility. It may seem that a group's utility is, in fact, nothing more than its perceived value: "Good" groups enhance self-worth, and "bad" groups undermine it. But we argue for a distinction. Psychological utility signifies the group's internal, psychological impact on the self-concept (i.e., its ability to affirm or threaten self-worth), whereas the

term *value* is meant to imply an almost distal quality of the group, such that even an unbiased observer might view this group as a valuable resource.

To clarify this distinction, we consider Americans as a group. A large subset of Americans certainly holds this social identity in fairly high regard, but a positive evaluation of the group does not, in and of itself, translate to high psychological utility. In their daily lives, Americans may rarely think of themselves in terms of their national identity. Surrounded by other citizens and possibly unaware of events beyond the borders, nationality may be taken for granted and essentially forgotten. If the group is not particularly salient or self-relevant, it may have little impact on the self-concept, even though it is highly regarded. Further, the label "American" comprises a huge number of people who vary in innumerable ways. Differences in heritage, language, beliefs, and abilities, among others, make the United States a patchwork of loosely connected individuals. So large and diverse a group may seem too vague to serve as an effective basis of personal worth, regardless of how positively its members feel about it. But some precipitating event, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, may suddenly prompt U.S. citizens to consciously classify themselves as Americans and to perceive the nation as a cohesive entity, different from the rest of the world. Though its perceived value may remain constant, the ingroup's newfound self-relevance and unity may suddenly enhance its personal impact (i.e., its psychological utility). Utility is certainly related to perceived value, but it represents something more. In the foregoing discussion, we have touched briefly on the critical concepts of self-relevance and entitativity, which, we suggest, moderate the relation between perceived value and psychological utility. After more fully exploring the idea of value, we return to an examination of these moderators.

As we attempt to distinguish the components that influence evaluation of the ingroup, we do not mean to imply that an appraisal, once made, cannot change. The perceived value of the ingroup presumably waxes and wanes, and we would like to recognize two issues related to these fluctuations. The first is obvious. As a group's fortunes change, its members may reevaluate it. A once-powerful group that has lost influence may become tarnished in the eyes of its members and retain little value. The second source of variation is subtler. Appraisals of the ingroup will likely depend on the individual's changing motivations. If the individual is concerned about a specific issue, groups relevant to that issue may seem especially valuable. Faced with the threat of uncertainty, the individual may find value in a group that instills a clear and uncompromising ideology (e.g., orthodox religious groups). Faced with a threat to material resources, however, such ideologically oriented groups may seem less relevant, and, as a

consequence, their perceived value may decrease. We suggest that the congruence between the particular qualities of the ingroup and the nature of the individual's present psychological needs should influence an individual's appraisal of the ingroup.

Recognizing that appraisals may respond fluidly to a changing situation, we believe it is profitable to identify characteristics of the ingroup that are generally valued by members. After a broad literature review, we have identified five elements of groups that seem particularly relevant. Evaluation of an ingroup, we suggest, should depend on the perception of the group's merit, power, and reputation, as well as its ability to provide a sense of consensus and acceptance. In the following paragraphs, we elaborate on each of these components and provide connections to existing literature. Our argument draws on research examining collective self-esteem (CSE), motivated changes in the perception of the ingroup, and moderators of intergroup bias (again with the understanding that bias can serve as a rough index of the ingroup's value to its members).

Merit. Groups vary in the degree to which they possess desirable characteristics. Virtuous groups (e.g., Doctors Without Borders, the twelve Apostles) are defined largely in positive terms (e.g., capable, intelligent, compassionate), whereas less virtuous groups (e.g., convicted pedophiles) call to mind a much more negative set of attributes. By merit, we refer simply to the overall valence of the attributes stereotypically associated with the group. Of course, the perception of merit necessarily depends on the values of the beholder. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent "war on terror," some in our nation find merit in strength and unity, some in understanding and reconciliation.

A group's merit relates so intuitively to its value that the provision of empirical support for the link may seem unnecessary, but research on status and CSE so nicely formalizes the connection that we feel obligated to provide at least a cursory review. A recent meta-analysis on status and intergroup bias by Bettencourt, Dorr, Charlton, and Hume (2001) showed that high-status groups generally display more intergroup bias and more ingroup love than do low-status groups. The results also show that status differences emerge in both real-world and laboratory settings. It is important to recognize that the laboratory studies included in this meta-analysis manipulated status primarily by virtue of superior performance—a concept closely related to merit. Groups that were (ostensibly) more creative or better able to perform a certain task were defined as high status, and these meritorious groups showed stronger patterns of intergroup bias. Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992; Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990) research on the private subscale of CSE offered

similar results. The private subscale was designed to assess "personal judgments of how good one's social groups are" (p. 305). This construct is essentially identical to merit. The mere existence of this subscale as a distinct factor in perceptions of the ingroup testifies to its importance, but research has also found that higher private CSE, like higher status, predicts greater intergroup bias. Variation in perceived ability or virtue (i.e., merit), due either to manipulation or natural variation, seems to enhance an individual's evaluation of the ingroup.

Power. We generally adopt the definition of power provided by Jones (1972, cited in Brewer & Brown, 1998) suggesting that power constitutes a group's control over its own fate and the fate of outgroups. We would, however, like to extend the implications of group-based power to the level of the individual member. A member of a powerful group may passively await the dividends of the group's collective action, but he or she may also take independent action and exert personal control over a situation by virtue of the group's strength. For example, a U.S. citizen may profit from the power of the nation either through low gas prices that result from U.S. foreign policy, or by reporting an illegal immigrant to the authorities and so eliminating job competition. In both cases, the individual reaps the benefits of membership in a powerful group.

Drawing on materialistic theories of group conflict, like RCT, we suggest that a group's power to control outcomes (including the distribution of resources) should dramatically influence its perceived value. Sachdev and Bourhis (1991) showed that experimentally increasing a group's power can prompt members to evaluate it more favorably, and Bettencourt et al.'s (2001) meta-analysis, though it does not treat the issue of power directly, also offered support. Again, Bettencourt et al. found that members of high-status groups engaged in greater intergroup bias than members of low-status groups—a pattern that was consistent both in and outside the laboratory. In the real world, where status often reflects power (in addition to merit), these findings suggest that an ingroup's power contributes to its value.

Reputation. *Reflected appraisals* refer to beliefs about how other people see the self (Mead, 1934). A person's self-concept may depend, at least in part, on what sort of image peers back from this social mirror. Another person's high regard for the individual, either as a whole or for some specific characteristic, may be taken as an indication of self-worth. Reflected appraisals of an ingroup, construed as one aspect of the self (James, 1890; Steele, 1988), may similarly be expected to either enhance or degrade the individual's own appraisal of that group.

We propose that a third element of perceived value is the member's belief about the group's reputation. Holding other aspects of the group constant, we expect that individuals will evaluate a group more positively if they believe that others see the group as more worthy. As a construct, reputation does not differ from Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) concept of public CSE, which captures an individual's belief that others have a positive attitude toward the group.

(Distinctive) consensus. As noted in the first section, Festinger (1954) postulated the importance of ingroup support for personal beliefs. Similarly, Hogg and Abrams (1993) and Mullin and Hogg (1998) argued that groups reduce unpleasant feelings of uncertainty by providing members with a sense of identity and role, and Swann and colleagues (2000) have suggested that groups can validate a member's self-image. Groups, in essence, are thought to provide their members with important information about how to understand both themselves and their environment. The ingroup may provide confirmation and validation of an individual's existing beliefs, as well as corrective information that helps to improve understanding. In either case, the member can achieve a greater sense of certainty by virtue of the ingroup.

We suggest that the psychological value of a group, from either a social comparison, uncertainty-reduction, or self-verification perspective, depends on the group's unanimity. A group whose members espouse an incoherent set of beliefs and attitudes may provide only weak support and poor epistemological guidance for the individual. A group with a coherent and uniform position, however, should provide strong affirmation for likeminded members and serve as a clear corrective for those who deviate. This consensus represents a kind of similarity—an ideological homogeneity that stems from the uniformity of members' beliefs. Beyond this similarity, the value of consensus may also depend on the distinctiveness of the ingroup's ideological orientation. If a system of beliefs is espoused generally, by ingroup and outgroups alike, consensus should be less gratifying. If every group believes the same thing (e.g., that the sun will rise tomorrow), then the ingroup should gain little value due to its own strict adherence to the view. If, however, the group provides consensual support for a more contentious, more distinctive position (e.g., that the sun will not rise tomorrow, or that the death penalty is wrong), its consensus may contribute meaningfully to the group's value in the eyes of the member. We hasten to note that the idea of distinctive consensus involves both intragroup similarity and intergroup difference and that this pattern foreshadows our discussion of entitativity. The overlap between consensus and entitativity is discussed at the end of this section.

(Meaningful) belonging. The final proposed component of value is the group's capacity to foster a sense of acceptance. People generally want to fit in. In a review of research on interpersonal relations, Baumeister and Leary (1995) concluded that the need to belong is an exceedingly influential, perhaps fundamental, human motive (cf. Caporael, 1997). Isolation can be painful and psychologically damaging (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003), and research suggests that when a group member feels excluded, his or her state self-esteem suffers (Leary et al., 1995). Though people may value independence and eschew membership in welcoming-but-distasteful groups, the desire for acceptance by valued groups may be a key aspect of human existence.

Before elaborating on this component, we must note a slight change in our approach. The previous four components concern attributes of the group per se, but acceptance is probably better characterized as a quality of the relationship between the individual and the group. This change in focus reflects our intuitions about the characteristics of a group that will render it capable of satisfying the desire for acceptance. Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) included a membership subscale in their research on CSE that is designed to gauge the degree to which the individual sees him or herself as a good member of the group. This match seems critical to the question of belonging, but this is not the idea we wish to capture. Regardless of the fit between self and group, large and relatively meaningless groups may fail to satisfy the individual's need to belong. Even the best exemplars of the human species may feel no real sense of belonging to this most superordinate of social groups, because such a membership is effectively meaningless—it precludes social comparison and encompasses a tremendously heterogeneous set of individuals. We suggest that, for acceptance to enhance group value, the match must not only be available but also desirable. It is largely a question of whether the individual wants to fit. The motivation to fit must be seen, therefore, as partly a consequence of the individual's identification with the group. That is, acceptance should be valued only if the individual sees (or wants to see) him or herself as a member. Though a group's self-relevance may partly determine the significance of acceptance, however, we should not conflate cause and effect. The desire to belong (a property of the individual) is conceptually distinct from the value ascribed to the group because it helps to satisfy that motivation.

The value of acceptance clearly concerns ODT (Brewer, 1991; Pickett & Brewer, 2001). As noted in the first section of this article, ODT suggests that a balance between the opposing needs for inclusion and distinctiveness determines a group's desirability. Groups that are large enough to provide a sense of community but small enough to provide a sense of uniqueness are

considered optimal and therefore desirable. Clearly, acceptance in a selective, tightly knit team can be distinguished from membership in a large and indiscriminating assembly.

Combining the five elements. The five elements of perceived value that have been discussed so far (and perhaps others we have overlooked) should combine to offer a sense of the ingroup's overall valence in the eyes of the member. Some groups may offer little in the way of power but assume great value due to their merit or the feeling of belonging they provide. Other groups may be valued almost exclusively for the resources they control. For any given group at any given time, the perceived value should represent the combination of all possible components of value, each weighted by its particular level of personal importance. As with other attitude objects, this weighted combination should reflect overall evaluation (cf. Fishbein, 1967). The calculus of value calls to mind Festinger's (1954) concept of *realms of relevance*, which suggest that the purpose or defining feature of a group determines the elements on which social comparisons are meaningful.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Perceived Value} = & w_1 \times \text{Merit} + w_2 \times \text{Power} \\ & + w_3 \times \text{Reputation} \\ & + w_4 \times \text{Consensus} \\ & + w_5 \times \text{Belonging} \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

Identification With the Ingroup

An individual's identification with an ingroup reflects the group's self-relevance, or the connection between the self-concept and the group as an aspect of identity. It is interesting to note that several recent studies have defined identification by virtue of an individual's liking for the ingroup (e.g., Brewer, 1991; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Mullin & Hogg, 1998; Mummendey, Otten, Berger, & Kessler, 2000). Though liking and identification may often covary, we believe it is important to maintain them as conceptually distinct constructs. An individual may like a group that has little personal relevance (e.g., people who have good driving records)—indeed, an individual may even like an outgroup. Inversely, a disliked ingroup may be painfully relevant to the self-concept (e.g., ex-convicts). We suggest that identification is best conceived as an evaluatively neutral connection, a link that defines the self-relevance of the group rather than its evaluation. In the following, we use the terms *identification* and *self-relevance* interchangeably.

No theory treats the issue of identification as thoroughly as self-categorization theory (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). Turner and colleagues carefully elaborated the links that bind an individual to

a group, and their work suggests that identification depends on the interplay of individual, group, and situational components. *Perceiver readiness* denotes an individual's propensity to identify with the ingroup. This concept captures the individual's recognition of fairly objective constraints, such as visible cues about ethnicity, as well as more subjective motivations, which may reflect either transient or long-standing desires to characterize him or herself as a group member.

Self-categorization theory also introduces the concepts of *normative fit*, or the social and cultural relevance of particular social categories, and *comparative fit*, or the relevance of a classification in a given situation. High normative or comparative fit may cause an individual to identify with a group over and above any propensity to do so (as defined by perceiver readiness). Ethnicity, for example, is a culturally salient classification, and in a large multiethnic gathering, the principle of normative fit suggests that the individual may spontaneously identify with his or her ethnic group. If that gathering, however, is a soccer game between two multiethnic teams, the principle of comparative fit suggests that ethnicity (which is largely irrelevant to the situation at hand) will be less salient, keeping ethnic identification at a relatively low level. If the teams were formed along ethnic lines, of course, both normative and comparative fit would foster high levels of ethnic identification. Personal preference, culture, and situational constraints, then, all influence an individual's identification with an ingroup.

If identification represents the strength of the connection between the self-concept and the ingroup, it should determine the degree to which group successes and failures affect feelings of self-worth (Steele, 1988). For a highly identified individual, the ingroup's evaluative status should have pronounced consequences. Positive evaluation of the group should powerfully affirm the high identifier, and negative evaluation should pose a potent threat. For more moderately identified individuals, the group's positive and negative outcomes may still be palpable but should exert less impact. Identification should essentially function as a multiplier to value in determining the group's psychological consequences for a member. We suggest, then, that identification moderates the relation between a group's perceived value and its psychological utility.

Entitativity of the Ingroup

Unlike many aspects of individual identity, groups vary in the degree to which they constitute coherent entities. The person who identifies with the domain of math may have questions about his or her proficiency in the subject but can generally assume that "ability in math" represents a meaningful concept. Similarly, the individual who identifies as a parent probably has visible, tangible and audible evidence that parenthood is

not a mere figment of imagination. There is no need to wonder if the role exists. Social groups, on the other hand, are not all characterized by this kind of concreteness. Some groups seem solid and coherent (e.g., the Ku Klux Klan or the local fire department), whereas others seem meaningless and diffuse (e.g., a group of people on a bus). Don Campbell (1958; cf. Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; Hamilton, Sherman, & Lickel, 1998) introduced the term *entitativity* to differentiate groups that evoke a sense of continuity and coherence from more amorphous and transient collections of people. Entitative groups, as the name suggests, seem more like entities—more like "real" groups. Campbell originally proposed four components that contribute to a group's entitativity: proximity, similarity, common fate, and good continuation. Following Rothbart and Park (2004), we focus on the latter three components.

Similarity refers to the uniformity of attitudes and traits across members of the group. We expand the concept of *common fate* to include both common fate and common goals. This component refers, essentially, to positive interdependence among group members, such that the success of any one benefits the others and the failure of one constitutes a failure for all. The suggestion is that fate has woven the group together. In combination, then, similarity and common fate describe the internal consistency of the group. These elements bind members together, and internal coherence is thought to make the group more psychologically meaningful. All else being equal, as coherence increases (or intragroup variability drops), the category provides more accurate information about individual members and serves more effectively as a basis for generalization.

To provide meaningful inferences, though, a group must not only cohere but must also provide information that differentiates members from nonmembers. Campbell (1958) proposed that entitativity also depends on *good continuation*. Good continuation refers to the Gestalt principle of perception that permits discrimination of an object (the group) from the field (nonmembers or other groups). When boundaries are clear, constant, and impermeable, a group should be easily distinguished from the social context. For a group with fuzzy, shifting, or permeable boundaries, the process of differentiation becomes more difficult.

Divisions on the basis of ancestry among Latinos offer an example of the role of good continuation. Many people in the United States may not perceive meaningful differences between people from Honduras, Venezuela, and Mexico. Even if these groups seem internally consistent, their boundaries may appear fuzzy and unclear if a perceiver sees little semantic distinction between them. Without differentiation, the groups blend together and offer little in the way of unique inductive potential. Only after learning about differences among the categories can an individual identify contrasts, and only then will the groups stand

out as discrete units. Entitativity, then, requires both the ability to distinguish the characteristics of the group (by virtue of clear and meaningful category boundaries) and the ability to generalize those characteristics to individual members (by virtue of the group's homogeneity and interdependence).

We propose that a group's entitativity should moderate its psychological utility. Highly entitative groups should constitute more significant aspects of personal identity. Because they are both coherent and meaningful, these groups may provide inferences about the individual in much the same way that they provide inferences about other members. That is, entitative groups have self-relevant inductive potential. Because more amorphous groups seem less meaningful (less real) they should offer less information about the individual member. Though any ingroup may appear both valuable and self-relevant, a group's psychological utility—its impact on feelings of self-worth—should be moderated by its entitativity.

Confounding Relations Among Value, Identification, and Entitativity

Though we suggest that entitativity, self-relevance, and value are distinct psychological constructs, there is reason to expect covariance among them. Reciprocal causation among the constructs and overlap between the variables that influence them should create a strong tendency to see more entitative groups as both more valuable and more self-relevant and to find greater self-relevance in more valued groups.

Entitativity and perceived value. Given the framework we have presented, it is probable that entitativity influences value in two distinct ways. Entitativity should increase value by making consensus more distinctive and by making belonging more meaningful. That is, entitative groups, by virtue of their unanimous and distinctive views, should enhance the value of intragroup consensus. Similarly, their cohesive and exclusive membership should increase the satisfaction of belonging.

Nonetheless, we have described entitativity as a moderator of psychological utility in its own right, not as an aspect of group value. Because entitative groups provide more concrete aspects of identity, the value and self-relevance of these groups should have more pronounced consequences for their utility. We suspect, however, that entitativity plays a dual role in determining psychological utility: In its own right, entitativity should moderate the ingroup's utility, and, as a partial determinant of consensus- and acceptance-based value, entitativity should affect the ingroup's perceived value.

Identification and perceived value. We expect reciprocal causation to create a correlation between identification and value. As noted previously, self-categorization theory's concept of perceiver readiness suggests that an individual's desire to belong to a group may prompt greater levels of identification. Because individuals desire membership in groups that they deem valuable, perceived value may be expected to promote identification. Conversely, high identification, which renders the individual more psychologically dependent on the group, should motivate the individual to perceive the group as meritorious, respected, and generally valuable (Kunda, 1990).

Entitativity and identification. Self-categorization theory's principle of comparative fit is one determinant of identification. Comparative fit represents the degree to which a situation is characterized by intergroup differentiation and intragroup similarity. It is interesting to note that the conditions that determine comparative fit (and thus identification) also determine entitativity. Entitativity depends on unity within the group (reflecting the elements of similarity and common fate) and difference between groups (reflecting good continuation). Comparative fit, in essence, may almost be considered a situation-specific version of entitativity. Given this overlap, we suggest that a group's entitativity, in any given situation, will partially determine identification.

Conclusions

In spite of their partial overlap, the three dimensions of value, identification, and entitativity can certainly be distinguished. A group's entitativity is not the same as its value. A coherent group can be seen in either positive or negative terms, and a valued group can be either coherent or diffuse. The implications of this distinction may be seen in the case of highly entitative but negatively valued groups. If entitativity simply increases value, more entitative groups should always seem more valuable. But if a member despises the ingroup, increasing its entitativity will hardly improve the aversive nature of that membership. On the contrary, the more cohesive and real an offensive ingroup seems, the greater the threat it should pose to the reluctant member. In a similar manner, identification can be differentiated from value. Forced identification with a hated group should be abhorrent rather than comforting (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). Finally, identification need not relate to entitativity. An individual may psychologically disavow membership in even a highly coherent group (e.g., a teenager who seeks distance from his or her family) or strongly identify with a fairly diffuse group. Although overlap clearly exists, we believe distinctions among these dimensions are important to maintain in both theoretical and empirical work.

A MISR

Specifications of the Model

The model we propose unites the dimensions of perceived value, identification, and entitativity, presenting them as joint determinants of an ingroup's psychological utility. Together they describe the overall impact of the ingroup as a psychological resource (see Figure 2).

$$\text{Psychological Utility} = \text{Perceived Value} \times \text{Identification} \times \text{Entitativity} \quad (2)$$

where $PV \in [-1, 1]$; $I \geq 0$; $E > 0$

In theory, the variable of psychological utility may assume positive, negative, or neutral values. Groups with positive utility should affirm a member's sense of self-worth, and those with negative values should constitute threats. Groups with levels of psychological utility close to zero should be essentially irrelevant in terms of their immediate psychological impact. As indicated in the formula, psychological utility is represented as the product of perceived value, identification, and entitativity.

We suggest that an ingroup's perceived value can range from negative to positive, according to the weighted combination of its five components (merit, power, reputation, consensus, and belonging). It is the only determinant capable of assuming a negative value. Accordingly, although perceived value should determine, in part, the magnitude of the group's impact (great or small), it is perhaps most important in determining the valence of that impact (positive or negative). Just as positively valued groups constitute a resource, negatively valued groups represent a psychological liability and threat to self-worth. The more positive or more negative

the perceived value of the group, the more dramatic the group's impact should be.

A group's psychological utility also depends on its relevance to the self-concept (identification) and its coherence as a unit (entitativity). We suggest that identification can range from high positive values to zero. In this model, identification with an ingroup cannot assume a negative value, though the process of disidentification might lead to values close to zero. We also suggest that the entitativity of a group must be greater than zero. Any group, by virtue of the fact that it has earned that title, must have some degree of entitativity, or "group-ness."

Empirical Support for a Three-Factor Solution

Research on factors of social identity. We are not aware of another model that deals with value, identification, and entitativity, per se, but recent research on social identity proves informative. A number of researchers have suggested that identification with a group can be decomposed into multiple factors (see Jackson, 2002, for a review). One factor that seems ubiquitous is self-categorization, indicated, for example, by agreement with the statement "My ingroup membership is important to the way I view myself." But beyond this factor, the conclusions of these studies seem to vary considerably. For example, Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999) identified two other factors, Group Self-Esteem, which reflects warmth or positive evaluation of the group (e.g., "I think my group has little to be proud of and I feel good about my group"), and Commitment, reflecting a desire to continue as a member (e.g., "I would like to continue working with my group"). Jackson (2002), on the other

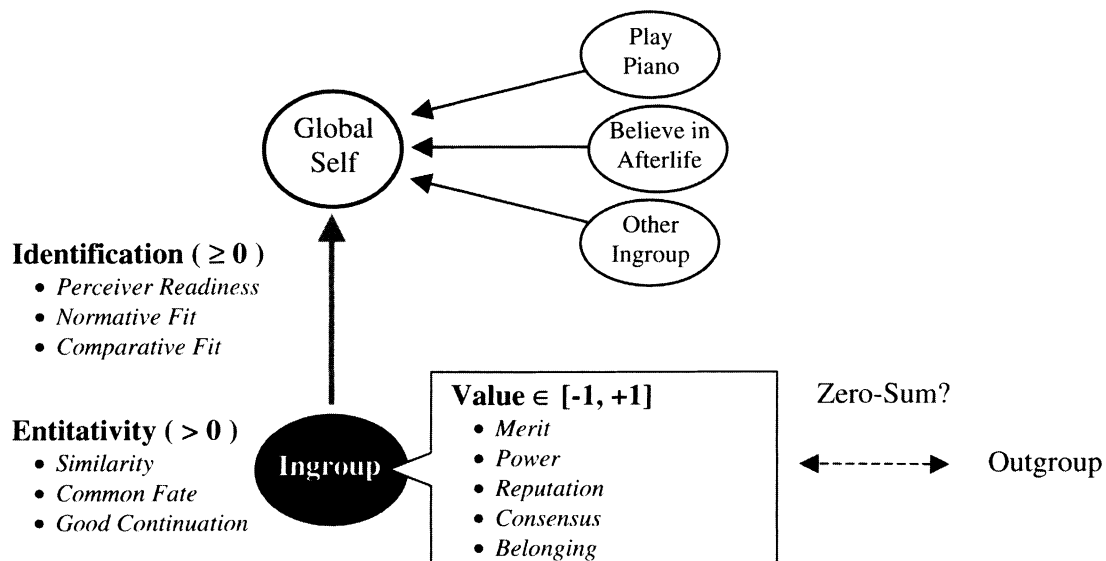


Figure 2. Model of the Ingroup as a Social Resource.

hand, identified additional factors as Affective Ties and Attraction. Affective Ties reflects, principally, group unity and loyalty (e.g., “The ingroup is united” and “When I am with ingroup members, I usually feel like we are one unit”). Attraction reflects evaluation of the ingroup (e.g., “I am glad I am a member of the ingroup” and “I feel the ingroup is not worthwhile”). Others (Deaux, 1996; Jackson & Smith, 1999; Phinney, 1990) also have suggested two dimensions in addition to self-categorization: an evaluative dimension and a dimension of interaction, belonging, or interdependence. In accordance with the MISR, we suggest that these diverse definitions can be simplified by considering the findings in terms of three common dimensions: identification, value, and entitativity.

The Self-Categorization factor, common to work described previously, seems to represent identification. In each case, the items assess the group’s personal relevance. It also seems that each investigation identified a second dimension related to perceptions of the ingroup’s value. Whether the authors characterize this factor as Evaluation, Affection, Attraction, or Group Self-Esteem, the apparent underlying construct is the perception of the ingroup as a desirable asset. The third dimension obtained in most of this research may be seen as a rough proxy for entitativity. Ellemers et al.’s (1999) Commitment factor represents a desire for continuity and interdependence. Jackson’s (2002) factor, Affective Ties, consists of perceived unity and loyalty. Deaux (1996) and Phinney (1990) evoked ideas of common fate and belonging. In each case, this dimension depends on concepts of good continuation, interdependence, or unity—concepts empirically related to entitativity (Lickel et al., 2000). Given that this research has repeatedly identified factors akin to identification, value, and entitativity, it seems the existing literature paints a picture that is largely consistent with the model we propose.

Initial MISR research. We have recently examined the elements of the member–group relation in our own laboratory (Correll & Park, 2004). Participants were randomly assigned to one of nine social categories (e.g., religious group, academic major, political party) and asked to identify an ingroup and rate it on a series of questionnaire items. Many of these questions were drawn from other research (i.e., Ellemers et al., 1999; Jackson, 2002; Lickel et al., 2000; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), and others were created specifically for this project. We included items designed to measure the three primary elements of the MISR: entitativity, value, and identification.

It is important to note at the outset that, according to the theoretical model we have presented, this methodology is fundamentally flawed. We have suggested that the ingroup is a dynamic psychological entity, that the various components of value, identification, and

entitativity are continuously reevaluated and reweighted in the calculation of overall utility. To truly evaluate the utility of the MISR, we hope to ultimately adopt a more sensitive within-participants approach, studying the causes and consequences of fluctuations in these components. We embarked on this initial foray with an awareness of its limitations but also with the hope that even a gross examination might yield certain insights.

Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses yielded the predicted dimensions of value, entitativity, and identification, which were distinct and generally coherent. Though they were highly correlated (as expected), each conceptual component accounted for unique variance in ratings of the member–ingroup relation. Perhaps more interestingly, the three components each predicted perceptions of the group’s psychological utility. In the questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate how the group made them feel about themselves (e.g., worthy vs. unworthy, positive vs. negative, and calm vs. anxious). In a multiple regression, ratings of perceived value, identification, and entitativity all strongly and positively related to the ingroup’s utility. That is, as group ratings indicated greater value, greater identification, and greater entitativity, the group was perceived as more personally useful. Because each component (a) emerges as an independent dimension in factor analyses and (b) predicts unique variance in psychological utility, this research offers initial support for the MISR.

The multiple regression also revealed a significant three-way interaction among the components (see Figure 3). When both value and identification were low, a group’s entitativity made little difference to its psychological utility. However, in line with the model, as either value or identification increased, entitativity began to play a role, such that more entitative groups provided greater utility. If a person strongly identified with a low-value group or weakly identified with a high-value group, entitativity magnified the group’s utility. Interestingly, when both value and identification were high, a group’s entitativity had little effect. This particular aspect of the data deviates from the model’s predictions. According to the multiplicative model proposed previously (Equation 2), higher value and higher identification, in combination, should magnify the effect of entitativity, not reduce it.

The unanticipated decreasing influence of entitativity in such groups may reflect an artifact of our procedure or some more fundamental property of group membership. It may be, for example, that group utility is based on a sufficiency model rather than a simple multiplicative one. For instance, compared to a weak group—one that is low on value, identification, and entitativity—a group that is high on one or two dimensions may provide a substantial benefit to its members. But compared to a group with a moderate degree

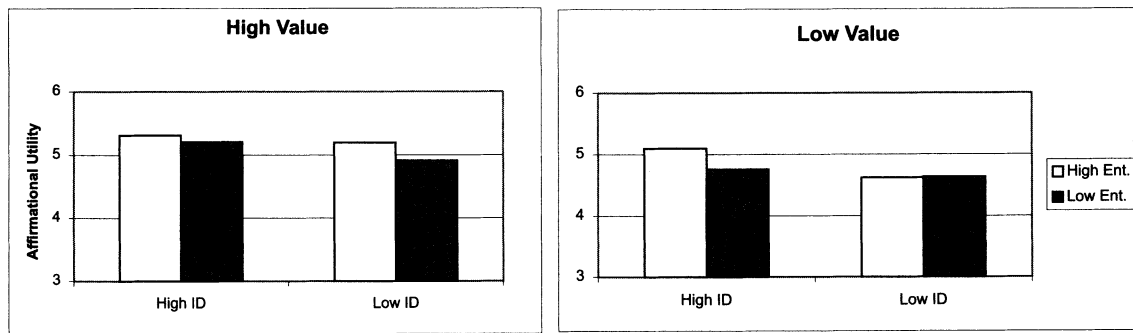


Figure 3. Estimates of Psychological Utility at High (1 standard deviation above the mean) and Low (1 standard deviation below the mean) Levels of Value, Identification and Entitativity.

of utility, additional increases may have little effect. Indeed, a sufficiency model may be seen as consistent with a number of theoretical perspectives. An evolutionary account might suggest that, as long as the ingroup is moderately strong (that is, strong enough to promote the welfare of its members), the individual can take comfort in belonging. Additional increases in utility, though certainly beneficial, may be less important once this satisfactory level of utility is attained. Tesser and colleagues (2000) have similarly suggested that, with regard to self-esteem, people tend to satisfice rather than maximize. They argue for a motivation to achieve and maintain a certain minimum level of self-regard, beyond which further increases have little psychological value.

Based on this initial work, we feel that the MISR has promise as a theoretical framework. The three dimensions each account for variance in ratings of group utility, and their interactive relation with ratings of psychological utility points the way for subsequent research on the personal value of group membership. In addition to these intrapsychic effects of group membership, we hope that the theoretical and empirical approaches presented here may eventually contribute to an understanding of critical interpersonal and intergroup issues, including social identity threat, prejudice, and discrimination, to which we now turn.

Implications of the Model

General Principles

Drawing on James (1890), Tajfel and Turner (1986), Steele (1988), and Leary and Baumeister (2000), we have suggested that groups affect feelings of self-worth. Given a general desire to see the self in a positive light, the individual should strive to obtain and maintain psychologically beneficial social identities—that is, to maximize ingroup utility. Based on our proposed definition of utility (Equation 2), we therefore put forth two basic principles. First, individuals should always desire high ingroup value. Increases in value

should be welcome, and decreases should be aversive. Second, individuals should appreciate high identification and entitativity only to the extent that perceived value is positive. Highly valued groups should prompt the individual to increase identification (cf. perceiver readiness; Turner et al., 1994) and psychologically consolidate the group in an effort to maximize the group's positive impact. Negatively valued groups should prompt disidentification and dispersion in an effort to minimize the negative impact. In the following, we explore the ways in which these principles relate to both intra- and intergroup processes.

Intragroup Processes

Though threats to psychological utility may often come from external sources such as other groups, there is no reason that the ingroup itself cannot constitute a threat. When ingroup value suddenly drops, or when circumstances (such as comparative fit processes or pressure from other ingroup members) temporarily increase identification with a devalued group, the individual may experience a social identity threat. We do not attempt a complete treatment of ingroup-based threats (see Branscombe et al., 1999) but focus on issues that have clear implications for the model we propose.

Ingroup threats to perceived value. Behavior, on the part of other group members, may threaten the ingroup's value. When a member of a religious group abandons the faith, or a teammate engages in pointlessly inflammatory behavior, other members of the group may experience identity threat. According to the model, if an offending member's actions lower the ingroup's perceived value (e.g., via the perception of merit, consensus, reputation, and so on), its utility will be jeopardized. To counteract these threats, the individual may try to repair the group's value (e.g., reaffirming the group's faith in spite of an apostate).

If a threatened group's value cannot be reasserted, however, the individual is faced with a problem. Branscombe et al.'s (1999) concept of categorization

threat captures the sense of this dilemma. The individual is psychologically bound to a devalued group, which threatens general feelings of self-worth. In response, an individual may be motivated to reduce the group's impact by reducing either identification or perceived entitativity. Such a reduction might compromise an important aspect of the member's identity, but, to the extent that the ingroup is negatively valued (chronically or temporarily), the sacrifice should be worthwhile.

Entitativity-based responses to low ingroup value. Faced with membership in a low-value ingroup, members may strategically perceive the group as more diffuse. If the value threat stems from the behavior of a deviant member, for example, the individual may exclude the offender through a process of subtyping (e.g., "Neo-Nazis are not representative of Whites") or vilification (Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988). Recognition of divisions within the group should serve to decrease its entitativity and, therefore, its potential for generalization to the self (Rothbart & Park, 2004). If offensive behavior is rampant on the part of the ingroup, subtyping the problematic members may not be feasible. In such a situation, the individual might even attempt to subtype the self. By declaring allegiance to a subordinate category within the ingroup and redrawing the category boundaries to separate that category from the rest of the membership, an individual may evade the negative consequences of the broader group.

Identification-based responses to low ingroup value. The individual may also attempt to resolve identity threat by disidentifying, or psychologically distancing him or herself from the ingroup. If the group can be seen as less personally relevant, the implications of its low value should be reduced. For example, stereotype threat is a situation in which an unwanted identity becomes salient (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995; see also Croizet, Desert, Dutrevis, & Leyens, 2001). The predicament occurs when an individual worries about confirming negative traits that are stereotypically associated with an ingroup (e.g., because of the stereotype that women are less proficient than men at mathematics, a woman's gender may compromise her performance on a math test). In line with our model, Steele, Spencer, and Aronson (2002) argued that the impact of stereotype threat depends on the individual's identification with the threatened group and suggested that the threat may prompt temporary disidentification from the stigmatized group (Schmader, 2002).

In line with the dynamic nature of the MISR, it is important to note that stereotype threat can occur even though the individual values the ingroup in other circumstances. For example, a woman may usually value

her gender identity, but because a math test creates a situation in which its value is temporarily reduced, high identification may cause distraction and anxiety. (By contrast, an English test may increase the value of this ingroup, because women are stereotypically proficient in that subject.)

Intergroup Processes

Outgroup threats to perceived value. As Brewer (2001) has argued, ingroup love does not necessitate outgroup hate. Motivation to favor "us" can exist without any corresponding motivation to disparage or hurt "them." But such negative motivations clearly exist. Intense conflict often paves the way for extreme brutality, including torture, rape, and genocide—activities that extend well beyond any individual's duty to protect the ingroup. The behavior of groups such as the Serbs and Croats in the Balkans, the Protestants and Catholics in Ireland, or the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda and Burundi (among countless others) have, at times, seemed more focused on the destruction of the outgroup than the preservation of the ingroup.

How are we to understand the differences between a religious or ethnic faction, whose members seethe with hatred for their enemies, and a minimal group, whose members quietly bask in their imagined superiority but balk at the idea of unfairly punishing an outgroup (Blanz et al., 1995)? Naturally, we suggest that the group's psychological utility is a critical element. Religious or ethnic groups may have vastly higher psychological utility than transitory groups, determined by the flip of a coin. But, on its own, psychological utility seems insufficient to produce outgroup hate. Certainly, ingroups that are critical to the individual's global integrity should more likely prompt extreme outgroup antipathy, but even a cherished ingroup can be glorified without hating or hurting nonmembers.

In her insightful chapter, Brewer (2001) argued that ingroup appreciation is born of identification. Ingroup love manifests itself as an overly positive evaluation of the ingroup but originally evokes no enmity toward the outgroup. The desire to derogate an outgroup, Brewer contended, emerges only if the individual compares it with the ingroup on some important dimension. Full-fledged hatred, in turn, results when groups are forced to compete for limited resources (cf. Esses et al., 1998; LeVine & Campbell, 1972). Brewer thus outlined a progression from identification to comparison to competition, beginning with love and culminating with hatred.

Though we feel this progression is both intuitively compelling and well reasoned, we suggest that the two negative processes, comparison and competition, can be seen as dual manifestations of a common principle: Outgroups evoke hatred when they threaten the value (and, therefore, the psychological utility) of an

ingroup. Fundamentally, intergroup comparison and competition both involve a zero-sum situation with regard to an ingroup's perceived value—they simply involve different elements of that value. Comparison entails a zero-sum relation with respect to an ingroup's merit. In a comparative context, the ingroup cannot achieve merit unless the outgroup is seen as less worthy (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). Accordingly, the individual must look down on the outgroup to uphold the ingroup. Similarly, intergroup competition entails a zero-sum relation but with respect to power (or perhaps reputation). A competitive outgroup may threaten the ingroup's perceived value by challenging its control over resources. Competition may also threaten other, more individualistic resources that are important to the member, such as the ability to provide for oneself and one's family. But if the potential loss is due to the individual's group membership, the personal loss should assume an intergroup flavor. In the case of both comparison and competition then, the ingroup's perceived value (and associated psychological utility) is endangered by an outgroup.

It is this common threat to the ingroup's perceived value, we propose, that prompts the emergence of intergroup bias and outgroup hate rather than simple ingroup love. In both cases, negativity toward a threatening group may serve to minimize or neutralize the threat. Derogatory evaluations of the outgroup may quell the threat posed by comparison. Discriminatory behavior or, in extreme cases, violence toward the outgroup may consolidate the ingroup's control over resources. Outgroup hate may thus function to preserve the value (and utility) of the ingroup. This is simply a consequence of the first principle outlined earlier, namely, that the individual should constantly attempt to maximize ingroup value.

Not all comparative and competitive intergroup relationships are threatening, though. We suggested that an individual may value a given ingroup for a variety of reasons (Equation 1). Some groups may be valued because they offer power, not because they offer certainty, but other groups may assume value chiefly because of the sense of certainty they provide. Only when the outgroup threatens a component that is important to the ingroup's overall value (i.e., when the dimension is heavily weighted in the calculation of perceived value; Equation 1) should the existence of a zero-sum relation provoke outgroup hate (cf. Festinger's, 1954, realms of relevance).

In addition to determining the impact of a particular threat, subjective weighting of the components of value may provide the individual with a unique strategy for defending the ingroup's overall perceived value. For example, if a religious group's sense of certainty is endangered by comparison to a group of non-believers, a member may denounce and disparage the outgroup's beliefs, thereby defending the validity of

the ingroup ideology. But, alternatively, the individual may choose to forfeit the ingroup's claim to validity and compensate by impugning the outgroup on some other aspect of value, such as merit. Such a strategy, in combination with modifications to the calculation of value (assigning more weight to the group's recently asserted merit and less to its threatened sense of certainty), should protect the group's overall value and utility. Both of these responses may involve outgroup hate, and both may serve to maximize the ingroup's value, but they do so in very different ways.

If the individual fails to compensate for the value threat occasioned by the outgroup—if the group's perceived value is substantially diminished—the model suggests that the individual will attempt to minimize either identification or entitativity or both. Regarding intragroup processes, we argued that severe threats to value may prompt the individual to either abandon the ingroup by disidentifying from it (Steele, 1988) or minimize its perceived entitativity. Similar mechanisms should apply to major decrements in value resulting from outgroup threat. However, the mathematical model we propose (Equation 2) also suggests that, in the case of slight challenges to value (from either the ingroup or the outgroup), an individual can restore the group's psychological utility by increasing identification, perceived entitativity, or both, thereby accentuating the impact of the group's remaining value. Rothgerber (1997), for example, suggested to his participants that students at another school were biased against them—a manipulation we might characterize as a threat to reputation. The participants responded by increasing entitativity (perceiving the members of their ingroup as internally consistent and distinct from the outgroup) and identification (perceiving themselves as more typical of the ingroup).

Outgroup threats to entitativity. Finally, it is possible for an outgroup to pose a threat without challenging ingroup value at all. By compromising the ingroup's entitativity, an outgroup may undermine the ingroup's sense of distinctiveness (Branscombe et al.'s, 1999, concept of distinctiveness threat; Brewer, 1991; Hornsey & Hogg, 1999; Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1997, 1999; Leonardelli & Brewer, 2001). An outgroup that is too similar to the ingroup may reduce the ingroup's perceived entitativity, diminishing its psychological utility and creating a motivation to differentiate the two groups. In response, the individual may choose to exaggerate semantic intergroup distinctions (i.e., Freud's "narcissism of small differences," cited in Allport, 1954) and strengthen stereotypes, or stress the evaluative superiority of the ingroup by exhibiting outgroup hate, intergroup bias, or simple ingroup love. Machinations that distinguish the ingroup through either stereotypes or prejudice should increase both entitativity and utility.

Conclusions

The model we have proposed integrates a variety of perspectives on the utility of ingroups. Each particular theory highlights a different and important function of the group, and each addresses some specific concern on the part of the individual. These concerns may involve epistemology (“Who am I?” “Is my understanding of the world correct?”), survival, social acceptance, the existential terror of mortality, or a more general concern about self-worth. These are distinct problems, and groups may serve to address them in distinct ways, but we suggest that each of the problems ultimately implicates the global self-concept. In helping to address these concerns, therefore, the ingroup can be understood as a social psychological resource for the individual. From the perspective of the model, this utility constitutes an ingroup’s psychological relevance.

To understand the determinants of the ingroup’s utility, this model draws on three aspects of the member–group relation that have each received substantial attention in recent years. A group’s perceived value, we suggested, results from a member’s assessment of the group’s merit, power, and reputation and its ability to provide a sense of ideological consensus and social acceptance. The member’s identification with the group describes its self-relevance. This may be seen as a function of the group’s situationally and culturally determined salience and the individual’s own motivations to belong. Entitativity represents the degree to which the group is a meaningful, coherent entity—a real group, rather than simply a collection of people. These three factors seem to emerge in empirical examinations of the relation between member and ingroup, and they hold promise for understanding both a group’s psychological utility and, perhaps ultimately, intergroup attitudes.

The MISR clearly revolves around a kind of self-ishness. It suggests that ingroups matter because they further the interests of the individual. We do not mean to imply, however, that the self is a static entity with simple and invariant motivations for which ingroups are simply recruited if and when they are needed. The self must be seen as flexible and dynamic. And though fundamental aspects of the self-concept may represent chronic areas of concern to which the individual turns again and again, the “self,” at any particular moment, may be defined as a subset of a much larger pool of possible domains (Markus & Wurf, 1987). We suggest that the needs of this transitory self provide a psychological context in which a group’s utility will be assessed.

The dynamic nature of the self-concept has important implications for the model we propose. It has been suggested, for example, that an individual shifts between more personal and more collective representations of the self (Brewer, 2001; Turner et al., 1994).

The personal self is concerned primarily with unique traits and abilities, whereas the collective self focuses more on intragroup roles and responsibilities. From the perspective of the MISR, these divergent selves should activate very different motivations and needs. Given a more personal self-construal, an ingroup’s psychological utility may derive primarily from its ability to affirm those traits that the individual considers self-definitional—almost ironically, groups should be valued because they help define the individual as an individual. Given a more collective self-construal, the ingroup’s utility should reflect the motivations of the collective self—that is, groups should be valued because they help affirm the individual as a member of the group.

The dynamic nature of the MISR represents a tremendous empirical challenge, but it is also a key aspect of this theoretical perspective. To understand the conditions that render a particular group psychologically valuable, we must acknowledge that different circumstances highlight different aspects of both the individual and the ingroup, arousing different motivations particular to each. To accurately represent the importance of the ingroup and the beneficial and detrimental consequences of group membership, we must incorporate this dynamism into theory and research. We hope that the MISR, as a general framework, will provide the flexibility to acknowledge and appreciate these dynamic processes while maintaining a grounded theoretical structure. In doing so, we hope that this perspective will ultimately foster a deeper understanding of the extreme emotions and behavior, both positive and negative, that group membership can evoke.

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