Chapter 3

Religious Membership:
Manifestations of Personal and Collective Self-Esteem

Abstract

When looking at reasons for continued group membership and identification, issues pertaining to self-esteem experienced through belonging to a group must be considered. As self-esteem is generally discussed on a personal level, and social identity theory discusses group relations and intergroup dynamics, it is important to also examine the self-esteem as a member of group, more specifically the extent to which *group self-esteem* can be experienced through membership, and the ways in which group self-esteem compares to personal self-esteem (Luthanen & Crocker, 1992). Most institutionalized religious groups can accommodate many degrees of active participation; however, self-identifying members of any religious group should feel some positivity concerning their membership, regardless of their level of devotion. Looking at two study samples from the Jewish community of Vancouver, Canada ($n = 203$; $n = 110$), this study compares results from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1989) and the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luthanen & Crocker, 1992) to assess any differences in personal and group self-esteem along the scale's four subscales, as well as to discuss self-esteem as a means of connection. In study 1, participants knew they were answering the scale questions with respect to their Jewish identity; Jewish was the target group. In study 2, participants were not given the Jewish prime and were asked which group came to mind when completing the scale for two different categories: racial/ethnic group and social group. Evidence was found for generally steady levels of both personal and group self-esteem.

Keywords: self-esteem, social groups, ethnicity, Jewish, belonging, identity

Introduction

For Jewish people in the diaspora, part of their identity involves recognizing that there will be circumstances in which they may find themselves a minority. While the term *minority* can conjure up negative associations, the experience may not necessarily be negative. It may be a matter of perception and attitude instead of circumstance (Rudman, Feinberg, & Fairchild, 2002), or actual numbers that determine how a person experiences minority membership. One can occasionally perceive discrimination (Dion and Earn, 1975; Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990) or create a situation wherein ethnicity and culture are promoted (Fischer, 1976), thereby eliminating some of the potential animosity or prejudice felt as a perceived other. Because being Jewish does not necessarily speak to levels of religiosity, it is interesting to learn how and why those who identify with Judaism feel this connection (Cohen and Eisen, 2000) and how this connection – especially for those who do not subscribe religiously – manifests itself. Why, then, would someone want to be Jewish or retain a Jewish self-identification?

Previous discussions can focus on a historical or political level, but this study will look at the question from an empirical psychological perspective. Based on literature concerning group dynamics, we can see it has been noted that, "Identification with groups often affords us benefits to well-being…groups may be able to accomplish goals…that would otherwise be unattainable at an individual level" (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010, p. 60). With this in mind, identification may be about more than shared history. Perhaps it is also about situational inter-group dynamics and how, in each specific situation, a group is viewed by others and themselves. The goal of this study is a search for the existence of, and driving forces behind, self-esteem as a function of group membership. With clear information on how and why one has positive self-esteem as a group member, we can more clearly understand the motivation for membership within a given group that has historically been persecuted but still perseveres.

In terms of self-esteem and identity, research suggests that being part of a group fosters positive self-esteem (Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999; Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Smith & Tyler, 1997; Tajfel &Turner, 1986). Will people who identify with Judaism only on a passive level have some semblance of positive self-esteem as a result of their identification? Should there indeed be positive self-esteem, the question remains, what sort of self-esteem can be expected? Will there be an increase in personal self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1979) as a result of personal achievements (Weinfeld, 2001), or will collective (group) self-esteem (Luthanen & Crocker, 1992) show a more accurate picture of in-group sentiment? We will also consider religious participation, insofar as how much participation style has an effect on personal or group self-esteem. This paper seeks to test the relationship between group membership and the presence of self-esteem and whether or not it is reflected through active participation. Through assessment of these variables, this study will hope to answer not only how

group identification may affect or produce self-esteem, but also if this participation has a significant effect on this, beyond group identification alone.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), a theory of intergroup relations, speaks of the effects of in-group membership with respect to out-group perception and interaction. One of the posits of this theory is that individuals should not only be able to feel a degree of predictable normative behavior within their in-group (Hogg & Abrams, 1988), but they should also feel positive self-esteem through inter-group comparison as a result of this identification (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). The theory suggests that if a minority in a low status position feels this position to be unfair or feels subjected to discrimination, there may be potential for intergroup conflict. At the same time, if there is no specific policy of discrimination or unfair low status position, this conflict will not be likely to occur.

Rudman, Feinberg, and Fairchild (2002) describe Judaism as a high status minority group in America. They tested this in their 2002 study, and for comparison called Jews and Asians high status minorities, while overweight and poor people were considered low status minorities with a hypothesis that "minorities relatively high in status would associate their own group with positive attributes and their out-group with negative attributes" (Rudman et al., 2002, p. 297). This was demonstrated in their results and should be referred to for a more in-depth discussion of minority group status (pp. 302-311). As such, they suggest that there should be little intergroup conflict and indicate that perhaps perception from within the Jewish group is different concerning in-group/out-group position.

It is possible to look at individuals who identify with a minority group as having a sole salient or core identity; however, if group membership is considered a dual (Haslam, 2004) or contextual (depending on the immediate circumstance) identity (Brewer, 1991; 1996; 1999; Brewer & Gardner, 1996), a very different picture emerges of how Judaism may fit into the daily lives of those who consider themselves to be members (McGuire, 2008). This means that while we can look at belonging to minority groups as a separate and distinct part of a person's identity; the degree to which this identity does or does not interact with other identities a person holds concurrently is a matter which must be considered in order to properly assess how minority group self-esteem may be affected.

Optimal Distinctiveness

Brewer (1991; 1993, 1999; Brewer & Gardner, 1996) enhances the view of possible contextual identities with the theory of optimal distinction. Optimal distinction creates a scenario in which our core identity may be contextual and our overall identity is made up of all the pieces of the complex puzzle that we think of as *ourselves*. More specifically, this theory suggests that individuals should strive for group membership by being accepted

as members, but should not become assimilated into the group to the extent that they no longer have an individual identity.

With respect to Judaism, the theory of optimal distinction suggests that for individuals who identify on a secular or nominal level, contextual membership allows them to spend the day in a secular world as part of the in-group, while at the same time having Judaism be the identity marker, thus maintaining optimal distinctiveness. In a search for the meanings of connection, for instance, to Judaism, it will be important to see which group, if any, lends to positive self-esteem. This is important because when dealing with an identity that is more salient in different contexts, we can explore if self-esteem is a function of personal achievement and majority membership, or if the Jewish identity marker produces positive self-esteem on its own. If this can be demonstrated, we can add to our discussion a possible reason for continued membership and group sustainability. Religious groups can identify amongst each other on both spiritual and social levels, which may be a unique feature that facilitates continued membership. As such, it will be important to determine which group individuals refer to when asked about which social groups they belong to. Ysseldyk, Matheson, and Anisman (2010) remark that, "some group memberships are especially central to the self-concept and might be particularly salient under distressing circumstances" (p. 61). The authors highlight that religion could be particularly salient in this sort of circumstance, and perhaps this will be a force in retaining membership and the presence of positive self-esteem through association. Another important factor will be a comparison with global (personal) self-esteem to discover how overall personal self-esteem is related to group identification. Should we see personal self-esteem as the only functioning source of positive self-esteem, then perhaps we will not be able to make as strong a remark about the importance of religious (group) identity for these purposes. However, should we see positive self-esteem through religious group membership, we can discuss this through the lens of social identity theory.

Self-Esteem:

Personal Self-Esteem

When it comes to assessing self-esteem, it can be difficult to determine an appropriate method and accurately measure the construct (Mruk, 2006). One commonly used measure of self-esteem is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1989), which measures global self-esteem. Global self-esteem, which takes into account both positive and negative aspects of the self (Mruk 2006), has been said to be a better predictor of psychological well-being than a specific behavior (Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is commonly used in conjunction with other scales (Mruk, 2006), and serves to show an overall picture of self-esteem that can be compared with a collective self-esteem scale.

Recalling the benefits of the discovery of positive self-esteem through membership and identifying with Judaism, this paper is not concerned with specific behaviors, but with levels of self-esteem that may or may not contribute to the ability or desire for continued Jewish membership. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale, a scale looking at personal global self-esteem, has previously been used in conjunction with religious research. It has been used to explore Canadian and Turkish groups (Yormulaz, Gencoz, & Woody, 2010), to study French Canadian students (Vallieres &Vallerand, 1990), to examine threat to life in Israeli subjects (Zeidner, Ben-Zur, & Reshef-Weil, 2011), and to explore prayer and subjective well-being (Whittington & Scher, 2010), among other studies. Looking at its prior use among similar groups, (Jewish, religious, Canadian and minorities among them) both on a national and religious level, this scale is appropriate for a study of self-identifying Jewish Canadians.

Collective Self-Esteem

In order to show a more complete perspective of self-esteem, especially with regard to group membership, it will be necessary to compare personal self-esteem and group or collective self-esteem. Looking to religion, there are many modes (traditional, religious, social, etc.) within which one may be more closely tied. Perhaps one is connected to a sense of tradition or a feeling of inclusion or an outsider's perception of one's group. It is not enough to simply know that there is some kind of group self-esteem; to know specific reasons behind the existence of group self-esteem, it is also important to know precisely what it is about group membership that produces this feeling. Luthanen and Crocker (1992) created a scale of collective self-esteem that tests this variable along four different sub-scales: membership self-esteem, which consists of feelings of being a worthy member; public self-esteem, which is a personal judgment on how others view their group; private self-esteem, which refers to personal judgment on how one's group ranks; and an importance to identity category. Along these four sub-scales, a greater picture of overall self-esteem can be created. When used in conjunction with the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Lay & Verkuyten, 1999), Luthanen and Crocker's (1992) collective self-esteem scale produces more rounded results. It has been used with Canadian and non-Canadian born Chinese participants (Lay & Verkuyten, 1999), and it was found that there were similar scores for personal self-esteem across foreign and Canadian born participants. These scores were also displayed alongside generally stable levels of collective self-esteem for both groups. We can also see the scale mentioned among Canadian and Japanese undergraduate students (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Sato & Cameron, 1999), producing a high personal self-esteem score in conjunction with high collective self-esteem scores for membership, private and public subscales among European Canadians. This is important for our discussion, as it will allow us to compare findings in similar contextual situations (Canadian, minority etc.), wherein we can judge if this current study sample is similar or different to what was found in these previous situations. Knowing how a sample of Jewish participants score concerning self-

esteem will allow a consideration of how this specific minority group may be experiencing self-esteem.

Sample

The study was conducted in two rounds: it was given out twice to different samples within the same community in order to compare results across the two samples. The sample from the first round was comprised of self-identifying Jews (*n* = 203) from the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, Canada. The survey was given out both online and in person. The sample was 37.9% male and 62.1% female. The minimum age was 18, and the maximum age was 66; the largest age group was the 18-25 year old category (*n* = 101; 49.8%).

The sample from the second round was comprised of 206 Lower Mainland residents. The survey was handed out both in person and online. There was a greater gender gap in the second round: 26.7% male and 73.3% female. Of this sample, 110 participants self–identified as Jewish, and 96 self-identified as non-Jewish. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 75, with the largest number of responses coming from the 26-35 year old category (*n* = 73; 35.4%). With regard to education level, 43.6% of the participants reported having a bachelor's degree only, and 11.8% reported having a professional degree. In the control group, 45.8% of participants reported having a bachelor's degree only, and 4.2% reported having a professional degree. Concerning denomination, 28.2% (*n* = 31) of participants in the Jewish group identified as orthodox; 36.4% (*n* = 40) as conservative; 14.5% (*n* = 16) as reform; and 20.9% (*n* = 23) as N/A, don't know, or other. Regarding religious participation, this second sample scored a mean of 2.9 out of a possible 5 on the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (Worthington et al., 2003).

Methodology

Study 1

In study 1, participants from sample 1 – as part of a larger survey study – first completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1989), followed by the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luthanen & Crocker, 1992). There are two versions of the Luthanen and Crocker (1992) survey that exist, one using the word "social" in front of the word group, for example, "I am a worthy member of my social group", and one using the words "race/ethnic," for example, "I am a worthy member of my race/ethnic group". Specifically, this first sample was given the version that used the word social when describing groups, as the overall series of questionnaires where this piece was based focused on social memberships. Participants were also told to consider Judaism as this group, because the overall survey was explicit about being based in Jewish research.

Study 2

In study 2, participants from sample 2 – as part of a larger survey – completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1989), followed by the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luthanen & Crocker, 1992). Participants in sample 2 were given both the version using the word *social* and the version using the word race/ethnic, as this second series of questionnaires was longer and allowed for a more in-depth look at how one may consider membership and participation for more than just the social angle of the first questionnaire series. Furthermore, participants were not primed with Jewish as the group in question and they were asked to fill in which group they were thinking of when filling out the social and ethnic versions of the survey after completion.

Results

Table 1 reflects the results from study 1. Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 reflect the results from study 2. The results from Table 1 show us that there is, first of all, positive self-esteem associated with membership. This is the most important piece of information we can obtain. We also see that there is group self-esteem associated with membership, and thus we have satisfied the question of whether or not we see self-esteem produced as a result of membership. Secondly, we see from Table 1 that across the four subscales of group self-esteem (as a social group), Judaism in this case shows evidence of self-esteem.

Table 1. Study 1 descriptive statistics – scale scores

	Mean	SD
Total CSEM	5.6	.97
Total CSEPR	6.1	.81
Total CSEPU	4.9	1.17
Total CSEID	5.1	1.37
Total RSE	2.3	.44

Note. n = 203 (CSEID, RSE n = 202). CSE (collective self-esteem) M (membership) PR (private) PU (public) ID (identity) RSE (Rosenberg self-esteem).

Table 2 is important as we are looking at not only a Jewish group, but this group as it exists alongside all participants of all backgrounds who were given this survey. The importance of this table is in how we can compare it to Table 3 (due to it including only Jewish participants as opposed to overall results) and its inclusion of ethnicity as an identifier. A notable feature of Table 2 is that, again, we see self-esteem existing through social group membership.

Table 2. Study 2 descriptive statistics – scale scores

	Mean	SD
Total ECSEM	5.5	.99
Total ECSEPR	6.0	.99
Total ECSEPU	5.4	1.15
Total ECSEID	4.4	1.58
Total CSSEM	5.8	.95
Total CSSEPR	5.8	.94
Total CSSEPU	5.6	.90
Total CSSEID	4.8	1.18
Total RSE	1.7	.48

Note. n = 206. ECSE (ethnic collective self-esteem) CSSE (social collective self-esteem) M (membership) PR (private) PU (public) ID (identity); RSE (Rosenberg self-esteem).

Table 3 and Table 4, when looked at alongside Table 2, allow us to see that for those living in Vancouver, personal self-esteem is stable with the overall group scores. The importance of this is that, even as a minority group, this Jewish group, as far as personal self-esteem is concerned, is functioning in a similar way to the overall group, as evident from their similar RSE personal self-esteem scores. What we do see that is notable from Table 3 and Table 4 is that group self-esteem scores are slightly elevated but at the same time relatively stable in comparison with the overall group scores (See Table 2). This is important because in a city-wide context and with reference to the literature discussed above, we would expect a group in this situation to produce scores similar to this if we have a high status minority group living amongst a Canadian majority.

Table 3. Study 2 Jewish participants' descriptive statistics – scale scores

	Mean	SD
Total ECSEM	5.6	.94
Total ECSEPR	6.1	.91
Total ECSEPU	5.1	1.19
Total ECSEID	5.1	1.38
Total CSSEM	5.8	.89
Total CSSEPR	5.9	.95
Total CSSEPU	5.6	.93
Total CSSEID	5.0	1.07
Total RSE	1.8	.46

Note. n = 110. ECSE (ethnic collective self-esteem) CSSE (social collective self-esteem) M (memory) PR (private) PU (public) ID (identity); RSE (Rosenberg self-esteem).

Table 4. Study 2 non-Jewish participants' descriptive statistics – scale scores

	Mean	SD
Total ECSEM	5.3	1.02
Total ECSEPR	5.9	1.06
Total ECSEPU	5.7	1.04
Total ECSEID	3.7	1.45
Total CSSEM	5.8	1.01
Total CSSEPR	5.8	.93
Total CSSEPU	5.5	.88
Total CSSEID	4.5	1.26
Total RSE	1.7	.51

Note. n = 96. ECSE (ethnic collective self-esteem) CSSE (social collective self-esteem) M (memory) PR (private) PU (public) ID (identity); RSE (Rosenberg self-esteem).

Table 5. Self-reported group perceptions – Jewish group

Group Combination	'Yes' Answers
Jewish (Social) – Jewish (Ethnic)	22
Miscellaneous (Social) – Jewish (Ethnic)	25
Jewish (Social) – Miscellaneous (Ethnic)	27
No response (Social) – Jewish (Ethnic)	1
Miscellaneous (Social) – Miscellaneous (Ethnic)	16
Jewish (Social) – No response (Ethnic)	19

Note. Miscellaneous responses indicate a response other than Jewish within a given category.

Social / Ethnic Group Descriptions:

Table 5 shows us written responses group participants had in mind when filling out the surveys. This is important so we can confirm whether the scores were or were not filled out with "Jewish" in mind. Responses considered to be a "Jewish" identifier include religious/religion/Ashkenazi. This is because considering themselves Jewish was already clarified at the demographics section of the survey, thus a mention of "religion" will be assumed as Jewish for those who said "yes". Table 5 displays categorizations made by participants regarding how they view Jewish membership with reference to it being a social, ethnic or a combination group in their opinion.

Overall responses concerning mentions of "Jewish" as a social or ethnic group in any combination:

- *Jewish = Social Group: 68/110 (46 social only)*
- *Jewish = Ethnic Group: 48/110 (26 ethnic only)*
- *Jewish = Social & Ethnic Group: 22/110*

What we can further see from Table 5 is that it was important to look at "Jewish" membership defined as either a social or ethnic group. Within each context, it is important to see how many people consider it to be one thing or another. As a group in itself, we see that it can produce positive group self-esteem, and this is an important step in realizing the appropriateness of social identity theory beyond intuition for an empirical discussion of Jewish membership and possible reasons for continued group membership.

Discussion

From the onset of this chapter, we wanted to explore whether or not there was positive self-esteem associated with being a member of a Jewish group. The reason this was important is that concerning social identity theory, we must satisfy its general tenets. Concerning the basic requirements of social identity theory as an applicable theory for this scenario, one important point is that a degree of positive self-esteem associated with group membership must exist. Through analysis of the results of this study, we were able to show the existence of this positive self-esteem not once, but twice over two different samples of Jewish group members. As such, we can conclude that there is indeed positive self-esteem associated with membership, and can continue our discussion of Judaism and Jewish membership through the eyes of social identity theory.

Looking at the above results, the generally stable levels of self-esteem across groups would suggest that regardless of social or ethnic group, there are similar levels of group self-esteem felt between the Jewish and non-Jewish groups. Among the Jewish participants, personal and collective self-esteem scores were generally similar with heightened identity scores (+1.44 ethnic; +0.43 social), which speaks to the significance of this identity. Reverse heightened self-esteem scores in the control group were found for ethnic public perception (+0.54) and social membership (+0.05). As mentioned within social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), positive self-esteem should accompany membership in a group that can be felt as a means of intergroup comparison.

The findings of this study indicate that there is indeed a constant level of both personal and group self-esteem, regardless of perceived numerical or other minority group status. Furthermore, when considering whether or not optimal distinction plays a role in group description, only 22 out of 110 Jewish participants indicated that for them *Jewish* was both a social and ethnic group, which shows that a minority of the sample consider *Jewish* to be an identity on its own. More specifically, 46 participants indicated that *Jewish* was a social group only, suggesting that this is just one piece of their identity, not that Jewish is a singular

identity marker. A closer look at the scores for the Jewish group reveal that in study 2, *the importance to identity scores* were indeed lower than other socially related scores but higher in the ethnic category. Within the context of Brewer's ideas (1991), and due to a difference in the scores, perhaps this result points to evidence of Jewish as optimal distinction among this Canadian Jewish Sample. This is inferred through looking at results and finding that, while slightly higher, a Vancouver Jewish group member's scores for self-esteem are in line with an overall Vancouver sample, and as such it could be that this membership and the self-esteem produced from both a group and personal level allow these participants to feel they are part of both a minority and majority. As Canadians, they are also Jewish, and the notion of Jewish as an identifier, or contextual identifier alongside being Canadian, is a discovery that could help bring to light empirically based reasons behind continued membership.

Further Research

In order to assess the degree to which individuals feel that Judaism fits into their identity as either optimal distinction or core identity, it could be useful for participants to use a diagram similar to the one implemented by Brewer (1991) in order to indicate how this may or may not help visualize their identity. A further comparison with a highly religious population would be important to see the extent to which religious participation influences these identity markers, as this study was conducted with a general sample that was by and large not very religious. One issue that remains is the problem of desired response. It could be that participation scores were inflated as a result of the participants being asked about their religion and religious affiliation. Although the study was set up carefully so as to avoid priming the participants as much as possible, it is possible that different researchers in different scenarios need to give out the survey consecutively to reduce priming. Studies on this subject conducted with additional participants and researchers of different backgrounds could result in useful data for comparison.