

Introduction

Understanding how our self-concept changes is important because our environments, relationships, and self-identities are always changing. Everyone experiences self-concept change, especially during important life events. Prejudice and discrimination can also influence self-concept change. Feeling excluded by others can encourage an individual to strengthen their self-identity by connecting with other members of their ingroup or completely change their self-identity.

The **purpose** of this study is to examine the influence of prejudice on the self-concept by using the Three Elements of Self-Concept Change Model and the Rejection-Identification Model. It is still unknown how changes in the self-concept are affected by experiences of prejudice and discrimination.

Hypotheses:

- 1) Desire to Change is positively associated with self-concept change (the Reward Element Hypothesis).
- 2) Change in Close Others is positively associated with self-concept change (the Relationships Hypothesis).
- 3) Change in Groups (group memberships) is positively associated with self-concept change (the Groups Hypothesis).
- 4) Change in Places and Objects is positively associated with self-concept change (the Cognitive Accessibility Hypothesis).
- 5) Experience with Prejudice is negatively associated with self-concept change (the Rejection-Identification Hypothesis).
- 6) Experience with Prejudice is negatively associated with self-esteem (the Social Exclusion Hypothesis).

Three Elements of Change Model

- The **rewards element** involves the perception of rewards associated with certain self-aspects, which can lead to intentional changes in the self-concept.
- The **social comparison element** involves connections individuals have with others (i.e., relationships and group memberships), and allows people to internalize their priorities by who they associate with and ultimately affects how they construct and change their self-identity.
- The **cognitive accessibility element** involves changes in the self-concept due to exposure to a specific stimuli through semantic memory and cognitive structures (Gore & Cross, 2014).

Rejection-Identification Model

- Stable attributions to prejudice have a direct harmful effect on well-being while increasing hostility toward Whites and minority group identification.
- Attributions to prejudice can indirectly enhance well-being by promoting minority group identification, while having a direct negative effect on well-being (Branscombe et al., 1999).

Method

Participants and Procedures: Eighty-eight junior and senior undergraduates (66 females, 20 males, one non-binary individual, and one person denied answering) from introductory psychology and research methods courses participated in the study. Participants were recruited through the SONA system. All participants were provided with an informed consent statement and a debriefing statement that consists of additional information regarding the study and the principal investigator's contact information for any follow-up questions. They received a 0.5 course completion credit for participation.

Materials:

- The Twenty Statements Test
- The Relationships, Groups, and Places Questionnaire
- The Desire to Change Questionnaire
- The Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire-Community Version (PEDQ-CV)
- The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory
- Demographic questions (age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity/race, and zip code of residence)

Results

- Positive correlation between change in places and objects and self-concept change was found to be statistically significant (H4).
- Positive correlations between change in close others and self-concept change, and between change in groups and self-concept change were not found to be statistically significant. However, they were in the hypothesized direction (H2 and H3).
- Positive correlation between desire to change and self-concept change was not found to be statistically significant (H1).
- Negative correlations between experience with prejudice and self-concept change, and between experience with prejudice and self-esteem were not found to be statistically significant (H5 and H6).

Bivariate Correlations among the Self-Concept Variables.

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Increase in Desire to Change	---				
2. Increase in Centrality of Relationships	.11	---			
3. Increase in Centrality of Groups	.06	.18*	---		
4. Increase in Centrality of Physical Environment	.12	.19+	.30**	---	
5. Increase in Self-Concept Centrality	-.13	.14	.11	.15*	---

Bivariate Correlations among the Discrimination and the Self Variables.

Variables	1.	2.	3.
1. Experience with Discrimination	---		
2. Increase in Self-Concept Centrality	.04	---	
3. Time 2 Self-Esteem	.18	.12	---

Discussion

The Cognitive Accessibility Hypothesis was strongly supported by the results. Students were more likely to associate important self-aspects based on their personal connection to physical environment. The Relationships Hypothesis and the Groups Hypothesis were partially supported by the results. The Reward Element Hypothesis, the Rejection-Identification Hypothesis, and the Social Exclusion Hypothesis were not supported by the findings. Individuals with more experiences of prejudice were more likely to have high levels of self-concept change and self-esteem.

Implications and Limitations

- The theoretical implication is that this study provides evidence in support for the cognitive accessibility element and the social comparison element, but not the rewards elements. In addition, this study provides a new factor, self-concept change, to literature regarding prejudice and discrimination.
- The practical implication is that Eastern Kentucky University and other universities can provide resources that can help students experiencing prejudice to develop coping mechanisms.
- One limitation is that the participants may not have been juniors or seniors. When the survey was posted on SONA, we stated in both the title and description that only juniors and seniors could participate. However, we did not provide a question that asked each participant if they were a junior or senior.

References

- Branscombe, N. R., Schmitt, M. T., & Harvey, R. D. (1999). Perceiving pervasive discrimination among African Americans: Implications for group identification and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77*(1), 135-149.
- Gore, J. S., & Cross, S. E. (2014). Who am I becoming? A theoretical framework for understanding self-concept change. *Self and Identity, 13*(6), 740-764.