

Running Head: INCISIVE YET MISUNDERSTOOD

Perspectives on Psychological Science, in press

Asymmetries in mutual understanding:

People with low status, power, and self-esteem understand better than they are understood

Sanaz Talaifar, Michael D. Buhrmester, Özlem Ayduk & William B. Swann, Jr.,

Authors' Note. We thank Ashwini Ashokkumar, Cliff Burke, and Becca Schlegel for their comments on a prior version of this manuscript. Data, code, study materials, and supplemental materials are available at <https://osf.io/x2bgy/>. Correspondence may be sent to Sanaz Talaifar at stalaifar@gmail.com.

Abstract

All too often, people who develop exceptionally astute insights into others remain mysterious to these others. Evidence for such asymmetric understanding comes from several independent domains. Striking asymmetries occur among those who differ in status and power, such that low status, low power individuals understand more than they are understood. We show that this effect extends to people who merely perceive that they have low status: individuals with low self-esteem. Whereas people with low self-esteem display insight into people with high self-esteem, their high self-esteem counterparts fail to reciprocate. Conceptual analysis suggests that asymmetries in mutual understanding may be reduced by addressing deficits in information and motivation among perceivers. Nevertheless, evidence from several interventions were unsuccessful, indicating that the path to symmetric understanding is a steep and thorny one. Further research is needed to develop strategies for fostering understanding of those who are most misunderstood: people with low self-esteem, low status, and low power.

Keywords: interpersonal perception, perceiver effects, target effects, self-esteem, accuracy, status, power, self-verification, self-enhancement, false consensus

Asymmetries in mutual understanding:**People with low status, power, and self-esteem understand better than they are understood**

"It would probably astound each of us beyond measure to be let into his neighbor's mind and to find how different the scenery was there from that of his own."

--William James, 1890

Although James's fantasy of waltzing into a neighbor's mind remains just that, some individuals are in fact able to glimpse the "scenery" in the minds of others. In fact, these individuals do more than steal fleeting glances into the others' minds—they discern fine-grained details, vivid colors, and subtle textures. Unfortunately, their rich insights into others may not be reciprocated. The result is an asymmetry in mutual understanding, wherein one member of a dyad (the "perceiver") achieves more insight into the partner (the "target") than the target achieves into the perceiver. The most poignant aspect of such asymmetries is that the perceivers who need understanding the most are both the most incisive *and* the least understood.

This article explores such asymmetries in mutual understanding with an eye to decreasing them. In the first section, we review prior evidence indicating that asymmetries in mutual understanding are systematically associated with differential status and power. In the next section, we ask whether asymmetries in mutual understanding exist in an important yet unexplored domain: self-esteem. We show that people with low self-esteem have keen insights into their high esteem counterparts but that people with high esteem do not reciprocate. We attempt to bring people to better understand people with low self-esteem. The fruits of our efforts were largely unsuccessful. Even so, our findings point to future avenues of research for reducing asymmetries in mutual understanding.

Symmetry and Asymmetry in Understanding Others

Understanding others involves attaining accurate insight into their thoughts, emotions, motivations, perspectives, experiences, or behaviors. Whereas some perceivers readily attain such understanding, others do not. This raises the questions that we address in this paper: Who are the most astute perceivers? What are the mechanisms that enable them to understand others? Can we bolster the understanding of less insightful perceivers? To address these questions, we begin by comparing the relative ease with which people recognize similar versus dissimilar others.

Similarity and Homophily as Sources of Accuracy

People will understand others when at least two conditions are met (Funder, 1995). First, perceivers must have access to diagnostic information about targets. Second, they must be motivated to process that information. Both of these variables will increase as the similarity of the target to the perceiver increases (Rule, Ambady, Adams, & Macrae, 2007). That is, similarity will not only increase the sheer volume of diagnostic information available to perceivers, it will also increase the concern that perceivers have for targets (Stotland, 1969), concern that may motivate efforts to obtain and fully process available information about them.

Whether through increasing information or motivation, similarity may also contribute to the accuracy of inferences at the group level. For example, people's judgments of ingroup members, who tend to resemble them, are more accurate than their judgments of outgroup members (Judd, Ryan, & Park, 1991; Judd & Park, 1993). Likewise, people are better able to decode the emotions of individuals in the ingroup as compared to the outgroup (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2003). And the more similar people perceive outgroup members to be to ingroup

members, the less biased they are when judging the traits of outgroup members (Roccas & Schwartz, 1993; Jetten, Spears, & Postmes 2004).

One variable that may increase both information about and motivation to understand others is homophily, the tendency for people to gravitate toward similar others (Youyou, Stillwell, Schwartz, & Kosinski, 2017). Homophily brings together people who share identities, including race, ethnicity, age, religion, education, occupation, and so on (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Shrum, Cheek, & Hunter, 1988). Homophily may also connect people who are similar on other identity-related dimensions, such as levels of self-esteem. For example, the self-esteem scores of long-term friends, but not short-term friends, are correlated (Hafen, Laursen, Burk, Kerr, & Stattin, 2011). And one's level of depression—a strong correlate of self-esteem (Sowislo & Orth, 2013)—predicts the depression scores of one's friends (Rosenblatt & Greenberg, 1991).

Homophily can foster understanding directly by increasing the availability of diagnostic information about similar others (e.g., Blackman & Funder, 1998). Such information, in turn, can augment empathic accuracy (Colvin, Vogt, & Ickes, 1997) and mind-reading accuracy (Thomas & Fletcher, 2003). In this way, homophily could explain why perceivers judge similar targets more accurately than dissimilar ones (Funder, Kolar, & Blackman, 1995¹; Fox, Ben-Nahum, Yinon, 1989; Kenny & Acitelli, 2001).

Homophily may also contribute to understanding indirectly. That is, insofar as people (a) assume that others are similar to them and (b) surround themselves with people who are in fact similar, their assumptions of similarity will allow them to correctly infer the states and preferences of their relationship partners (Cronbach, 1955; Hoch, 1987; Kenny, 2019).

¹ Although Funder points out that similarity is not required for accurate person perception to occur, actual similarity between the perceiver and target is a particularly robustly predictor of accuracy.

Curiously, in such instances, homophily may create “true” consensus in a setting that would otherwise be marked by false consensus (a tendency to overestimate the extent to which others agree with the self; Ross, Greene, & House, 1977).

Whatever the mechanism, similarity of targets to perceivers tends to foster accuracy. This means that in relationships between similar partners, accuracy will be symmetrical, with both individuals enjoying relatively high levels of accuracy. In contrast, in relationships in which partners are *dissimilar*, accuracy may be asymmetrical, with one person being more accurate than the other. Next we consider the nature of such asymmetries in mutual understanding.

Asymmetries in Mutual Understanding: The Role of Status and Power

In most societies, people from lower classes, racial minorities, women, and LGBTQ+ individuals tend to have relatively low status (i.e., subjective perception of one’s place in the social hierarchy) and power (i.e., ability to control others’ resources/outcomes). Ironically, although people who are low in status and power lack access to opportunities and resources, they share one striking asset: insight into others. For instance, lower class individuals excel at emotion reading (Dietze & Knowles, 2020), empathic accuracy (Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010), and inferring category membership (Bjornsdottir, Alaei, & Rule, 2017). Lower class individuals also make fewer perspective-taking errors (Dietze, & Knowles, 2020), and display greater compassion for suffering others (Stellar, Manzo, Kraus, & Keltner, 2012). Moreover, women have greater interpersonal accuracy than men regardless of age, culture, or content of perceptions (Hall, Gunnery, & Horgan, 2016; Thomas & Fletcher, 2003). Furthermore, gay men can predict the sexual orientation of others better than straight men (Shelp, 2003).

The relative insightfulness of people from groups historically low in status and power represents one building block of asymmetries in mutual understanding. The other building block

is the relative cluelessness of people high in status and power. For example, minority group members are better in judging the emotions of majority group members than the reverse (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002). Similarly, Black Americans and low-income individuals estimate the magnitude of current and past racial economic disparities with more fidelity than high-income White Americans individuals (Kraus, Rucker, & Richeson, 2017; Kraus, Onyeador, Daumeyer, Rucker, & Richeson, 2019). Furthermore, the stereotypes that Black Americans form of White Americans are more accurate than the stereotypes that White Americans stereotypes form of Black Americans (Ryan, 1996). The common theme here is that those who lack status, power, or both (Mattan, Kubota, & Cloutier, 2017) are especially inclined to display greater insight into others than their high-status counterparts. Furthermore, status and power actually seem to play a *causal* role in diminishing social perceptiveness. People accorded high power or status tend to display less insight into others in the form of empathic accuracy (Gonzaga, Keltner, & Ward, 2008), accurate detection of emotional tone in speech (Uskul, Paulmann, & Weick, 2016), or concern for others (Wolfin, Corneille, Yzerbyt, & Forster, 2011).²

In part, people with low status/power develop especially accurate insights due to greater availability of information about high status/power people. Consider the longstanding idea that low power individuals pay attention to those who control their outcomes—high power individuals (e.g., Fiske, 1993). This effect is amplified by the fact that those who are low in status and power receive less attention because they are often in the numerical minority. Of course, although minority groups typically have less power and status than majority groups, there are exceptions. For example, women have historically held less status and power than men

² Note, however, that status does not predict less understanding in all domains and contexts. For example, Hall, Mast, & Latu (2015) found that higher status predicted *more* accuracy in decoding nonverbal cues in test settings but not in real life interactions.

despite comprising half the population. And during Apartheid, the Afrikaners held more power despite being the numerical minority in South Africa.

Recent studies conducted in naturally occurring settings have documented the notion that people high in status and power receive more attention. Researchers employing wearable technology and eye tracking have learned that people from lower classes look at and pay attention to other people more than do people from upper classes (Dietze & Knowles, 2016). Complementing this pattern, low status people attract less attention to themselves than do high status people (Foulsham, Cheng, Tracy, Henrick, & Kingstone, 2010; Dalmaso, Pavan, Castelli, & Galfano, 2011; Capozzi, Becchio, Willemse, & Bayliss, 2016). This tendency makes it easier to overlook minority group members, which could explain why majority group members judge the emotions of minority group members with less fidelity than the reverse (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002).

Just as people low in status and power are inclined to yield the stage to others, people high in status and power have a tendency to rush to center stage. People high in status and power exercise more freedom to express themselves in conversation, even conversations that occur in the hallowed halls of the United States Supreme Court. There, male justices are three time more likely to interrupt female justices than the reverse. Moreover, female justices only accounted for 4% of all interruptions over the past 12 years, even though they comprised 24% of the court on average (Jacobi & Schweers, 2017). Given the tendency for high status/power individuals to amplify their own perspective and at the expense of others in interpersonal settings, it is no wonder that these dynamics also play out in the larger culture. Consider the emphasis that the popular culture places on historically dominant groups such as White males (Collins, 2011). For example, an analysis of the dialogue in 2,000 films showed that men had more lines than women

in three-quarters of films (Anderson & Daniels, 2016) and occupied two of the three top roles in 82% of films. And when women are portrayed in the media, they are especially likely to appear in sexualized or subordinated roles (Collins, 2011). Underrepresentation of people of color is also particularly common. In the most viewed U.S. television shows from 1987 to 2009, only 2% of regular primetime characters were of Hispanic origin despite their comprising 10-15% of the population (Tukachinsky, Mastro, & Yarchi, 2015). In short, it is clear that social norms and power structures place those who are high in status and power in the limelight while their low status, low power counterparts remain in the shadows.

Motivational processes also contribute to the asymmetric insights of people who are low versus high in status and power. Due to outcome dependency, people with low status/power are motivated to understand people with high status/power (Fiske, 1993). In contrast, due to concerns that they are the beneficiaries of unjust advantages, people with high status/power are motivated to ignore and/or stereotype their counterparts (Knowles, Lowery, Chow, & Unzueta, 2014). In fact, some contend that gender differences in empathic accuracy are due to differential motivation rather than differential ability (Ickes, Gesn, & Graham, 2000). And asymmetrical motivation is not limited to the differential power and status associated with gender identity. With regards to race, White people are motivated to deny their privilege and distance themselves from their White identity to protect themselves from psychological threats (e.g., Lowery, Knowles, & Unzeta, 2007; Phillips & Lower, 2015; Chow & Knowles, 2016). The ubiquity of such tactics of denial and distance also means that White people will not confront or understand the realities that minorities must navigate.

In a similar vein, System Justification Theory (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004) and Social Dominance Orientation theory (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) suggest that people

are motivated to perceive the systems in which they participate as just and natural. True understanding of the structural inequities and discrimination confronting people with low status would threaten such beliefs. As a result, high status people (who are more likely to view the system as just; Brandt, 2013) may be motivated to avoid understanding low status people. Consistent with this idea, people high on economic system justification show blunted physiological responses to people in need (Goudarzi, Pliskin, Jost, & Knowles, 2019). Similarly, belief in a just world is associated with a tendency for people to underestimate Black-White inequality (Kraus et al., 2017).

Simply put, people develop keen insights into people who are high in status and power while the beneficiaries of such insights routinely misunderstand those low in status and power. In the next section we suggest that this phenomenon generalizes to a new domain. Specifically, we suggest that by virtue of their ubiquity and social influence, people with high esteem have helped perpetrate the belief that there is a fundamental human tendency to prefer positive over subjectively accurate evaluations. People with low esteem are also aware of the allure of positive evaluations, but they uniquely recognize a countervailing desire for subjectively accurate evaluations. The result is an asymmetry in understanding, such that high-esteem individuals understand others with high but not low esteem while low-esteem individuals understand others with low and high esteem.

People with Low Self-Esteem Understand More Than They Are Understood

We chose to focus on self-esteem here because it plays an outsized role in people's lives (Swann, Chang-Schneider & McClarty, 2007) and is broadly relevant to many areas of psychology (clinical, social, developmental, educational, cognitive). In addition, self-esteem is related to the foregoing analysis because it is a clear cousin to status. That is, self-esteem reflects

the degree to which people have status in their own eyes rather than in the eyes of the larger society. Sociometer theory's contention that self-esteem is an index of "social inclusion/exclusion," for example, implies a link between self-esteem and status (e.g., Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Even more relevant, hierometer theory argues that self-esteem evolved specifically to track status hierarchies (Mahadevan, Gregg, Sedikides, & de Waal-Andrews, 2016; Mahadevan, Gregg, & Sedikides, 2019). From this vantage point, low self-esteem enables individuals to navigate social hierarchies successfully by avoiding the social costs associated with status violations. Accurate insight into the predilections of those higher in the status hierarchy would serve a similar function.

Empirical research also supports the linkage between self-esteem and status. A large meta-analysis indicated that relative to upper class people, lower class people have lower self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2002). Researchers recently replicated this finding in a longitudinal study in which lower socioeconomic status predicted lower self-esteem (von Soest, Wagner, Hansen, & Gerstorg, 2018). Moreover, people with fewer material resources and first-generation students reported more self-related negative emotions than their more privileged peers (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000; Covarrubias and Fryberg, 2015; Kraus, Horberg, Goetz, & Keltner, 2011).

Having highlighted the links between status and self-esteem, we hasten to acknowledge that historical and structural forces produce the low status and power of oppressed groups (Salter, Adams, Perez, 2018) whereas developmental and interpersonal forces produce the low status of people with low esteem (Harris, et al., 2017; Wagner, Lüdtkke, Robitzsch, Göllner, & Trautwein, 2018; Harris & Orth, 2019). In a similar vein, we acknowledge that the experience of

having low self-esteem is vastly different from the experience of belonging to a historically marginalized group.

In short, our argument here is not that self-esteem and status are the same, but that the two constructs produce asymmetric understanding in a parallel manner. More specifically, the same mechanisms that contribute to asymmetric understanding among people with differential status (i.e. asymmetric information and motivation) also contribute to asymmetric understanding among people with different levels of self-esteem.

Are People with Low Self-Esteem Misunderstood?

To the best of our knowledge, no studies have directly tested the idea that people with low esteem are misunderstood. Nevertheless, the senior author has been encountering firsthand evidence of this phenomena for several decades. In particular, he has been impressed with the degree to which people misunderstand one of the fundamental markers of low self-esteem: the types of feedback they want. One of the earliest such experiences occurred in 1984 following his colloquium to the Psychology Department at Columbia University. After listening to an hour's worth of evidence of *negative feedback seeking* (i.e., people with low esteem displayed a preference for negative over positive evaluations), one member of the audience hastily approached the podium. Swann was delighted when he recognized that it was the widely acclaimed Stanley Schachter. Swann's delight turned to apprehension, however, when he noticed the fire in Schachter's eyes. Schachter opined: "Everyone knows that all people want to be loved and praised. So, you aren't really saying that people with negative self-concepts actually want negative evaluations, are you?" When Swann stood his ground, Schachter shook his head in disbelief and announced, "Nothing in my experience supports this idea. I don't believe it!"³

³ The conversation with Schachter was not recorded so the "quotes" here are merely good faith approximations to what was actually said.

Schachter, it turned out, was the first of many to express doubts about the preference for negative feedback displayed by people with low esteem. For the ensuing 35 years, reviewers, editors, and those who attended talks on self-verification repeatedly dismissed the idea that anyone would seek negative evaluations. Nevertheless, more evidence of negative feedback seeking accumulated. Under certain specifiable conditions, people with negative self-views (e.g., low global self-esteem, negative specific self-concepts) prefer and seek negative evaluations (e.g., Swann, 2012). Researchers reported evidence of this preference for negative evaluations among spouses (Burke & Harrod, 2005; Neff & Karney, 2005; Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994), roommates (Swann & Pelham, 2002), dating partners (Katz & Beach, 2000), employees (Wiesenfeld, Swann, Brockner, & Bartel, 2007), and even strangers (Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 1992; Rudich & Vallacher, 1999). Yet skeptics of this phenomenon continue to voice their doubts (see, for example, Sedikides & Gregg, 2008).

Why have people doubted the notion that people with low self-esteem prefer negative evaluations? Part of the answer is that people with low self-esteem do not *always* prefer negative evaluations. Instead, people seek self-verification only if the belief is firmly held (Swann & Pelham, 2002) and when they are in fairly stable relationships (e.g., marriages) rather than relatively transitory relationships (e.g., dating relationships; Swann, De La Ronde & Hixon, 1994). Moreover, people with low self-esteem have immediate positive affective responses to praise that are later tempered by the more considered reactions (Hixon & Swann, 1993; Swann, Hixon, Stein-Seroussi, & Gilbert, 1990).

A more important contributor to doubts regarding the existence of negative feedback seeking, however, is hinted in Schachter's remark "Nothing in my experience supports this idea." Schachter was likely among the 71.5% of people in the world who have high esteem (Diener &

Diener, 1995). Parallel to high status/power individuals who cannot wrap their heads around the preferences of people who lack status/power, people with high esteem may dismiss the notion that anyone would prefer negative evaluations because this phenomenon is so disjunctive with their past experiences. Simply put, they lack the information and motivation required to understand people who have had vastly different life experiences. At the same time, like those who lack status/power, people who lack self-esteem have ample information and motivation to understand their counterparts who possess high self-esteem.

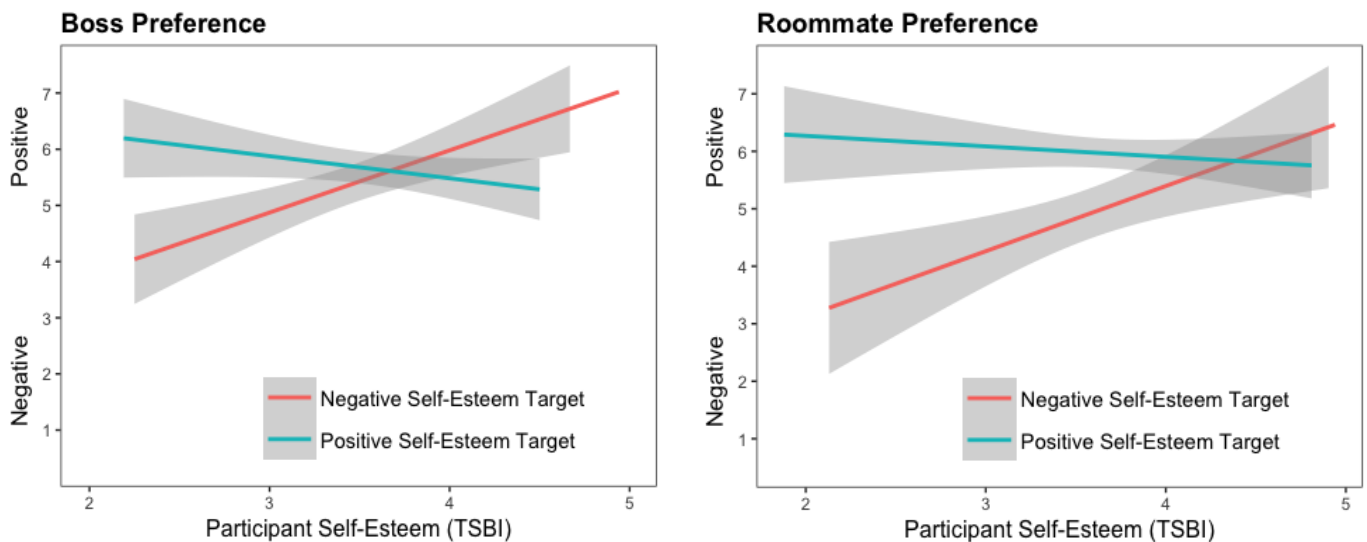
We tested these ideas empirically in two studies. Drawing on several decades of past research (for reviews, see Ashokkumar & Swann, 2020; Swann, 1996), the criterion for understanding was the degree to which participants predicted that people with high self-esteem would desire praise from their interaction partners but that people with low esteem would eschew praise in favor of relatively negative appraisals. We thus relied on a form of accuracy that has been widely embraced by accuracy researchers (Funder, 1987): understanding how targets are likely to behave. We tested whether participants would display asymmetric insight, with high esteem participants failing to understand the motives of people with low esteem while participants with low esteem would understand the motives of people with high esteem.

The Positive vs. Negative Boss and Roommate Studies.

Procedure. We recruited undergraduates ($N_{1a} = 139$; $N_{1b} = 119$) with varying levels of self-esteem to participate in two vignette studies. In each vignette, participants predicted whether a target randomly assigned to have low or high esteem would choose a boss or roommate who perceived the target positively or negatively. We focused on evaluations regarding social self-esteem because this aspect of self-esteem has been the focus of several well-replicated findings in the self-verification literature (e.g., Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987).

We included two outcome variables. First, participants indicated whether they believed the target would choose the negative or positive partner (*1 – most likely the negative boss/roommate, 4 – undecided, 7 – most likely the positive boss/roommate*). Participants then learned that the high esteem target had chosen the positive interaction partner and the low esteem target had chosen the negative interaction partner. For the second outcome variable, participants rated how credible they considered the target’s choice (e.g. “*I find it hard to believe that the target or someone like him would actually choose to work for [the self-verifying boss]*”; *1 – strongly agree, 4 – neither agree nor disagree, 7 – strongly disagree*). Methodological detail for this and subsequent studies reported in this paper can be found in the supplemental materials.

Figure 1a and 1b. Lower self-esteem participants predicted verifying partner choices for higher esteem individuals, but the reverse was not true.



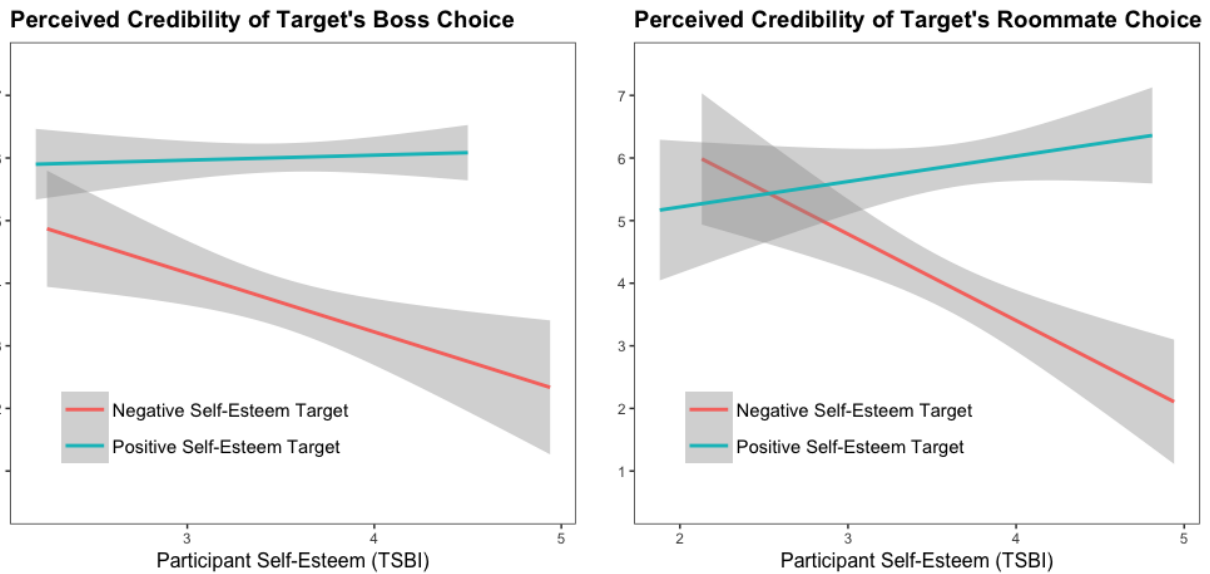
Note. Figure 1a (left panel) depicts the boss vignette, whereas Figure 1b (right panel) depicts the roommate vignette. Higher values on the y-axes indicate prediction of the target preferring the positive evaluator, and lower values indicate prediction of the target preferring the negative evaluator. Shaded regions denote 95% confidence intervals. TSBI = Texas Social Behavior Inventory measure of social self-esteem.

Results. Analyses of predicted choices revealed an interaction between participants’ self-esteem and low/high esteem target condition (boss vignette: $b = 1.50$, 95% CI [.75, 2.25], $t(135)$

= 3.97, $p < .001$, $R_2 = .13$; roommate vignette: $b = 1.32$, 95% CI [.44, 2.20], $t(115) = 2.96$, $p = .004$, $R_2 = .21$). As can be seen in Figure 1a and 1b, the lower the participants' self-esteem, the more they predicted that the low-esteem target would choose the self-verifying negative interaction partner (boss vignette: $b = 1.11$, 95% CI [.58, 1.64], $p < .001$; roommate vignette: $b = 1.13$, 95% CI [.54, 1.72], $p < .001$). In contrast, low and high esteem participants were equally inclined to predict that the high-esteem target would choose the enhancing boss or roommate, (boss vignette: $b = -.39$, 95% CI [-.92, .14], $p = .14$; roommate vignette: $b = -.18$, 95% CI [-.83, .47], $p = .58$).

As shown in Figure 2a and 2b, analyses of perceived *credibility* of the target's self-verifying choices revealed a similar interaction between participants' self-esteem and target esteem condition on participants' perceived credibility of the target's roommate choice, (boss vignette: $b = -1.02$, 95% CI [-1.79, -.25], $t(135) = -2.62$, $p = .0098$, $R_2 = .46$; roommate vignette: $b = -1.79$, 95% CI [-2.69, -.89], $t(115) = -3.94$, $p < .001$, $R_2 = .39$). The lower the participants' self-esteem, the more credible they regarded low-esteem target's choice of the negative, self-verifying partner (boss vignette: $b = -.94$, 95% CI [-1.49, -.39], $p < .001$; roommate vignette: $b = -1.38$, 95% CI [-1.99, -.77], $p < .001$). In contrast, low and high esteem participants were equally inclined to endorse the credibility of the high esteem target's choice of the positive boss or roommate (boss vignette: $b = .08$, 95% CI [-.45, .61], $p = .77$.; roommate vignette: $b = .41$, 95% CI [-.04, .86], $p = .23$).

Figure 2a and 2b. Low self-esteem participants found verifying choices to be more credible than high esteem participants did.



Note. Figure 2a (left panel) depicts the boss vignette, whereas Figure 2b (right panel) depicts the roommate vignette. High values on y-axes indicate high perceived credibility of the target's choice of a self-verifying evaluator (i.e., the positive evaluator in the positive self-esteem target condition and the negative evaluator in the negative self-esteem target condition). Shaded regions denote 95% confidence intervals. TSBI = Texas Social Behavior Inventory measure of social self-esteem.

Discussion. Consistent with research on asymmetries involving status/power, the results of these vignette studies showed that when it came to understanding *similar* others, both high and low esteem participants displayed insight. In contrast, when it came to understanding *dissimilar* others, people with low esteem outperformed those with high esteem: Whereas low self-esteem participants predicted that the high self-esteem target wanted praise, high esteem participants failed to predict that the low self-esteem target desired an interaction partner who provides negative feedback. In fact, even after high-esteem individuals learned that the low self-esteem target preferred the negative interaction partner, they expressed disbelief. Low self-esteem participants expressed no such incredulity regarding the choices of high-esteem targets.

Together, these results illustrate an asymmetry in mutual understanding such that people with low self-esteem understand, but are not understood, by people with high self-esteem.

Consistent with the asymmetric understanding hypothesis, then, low self-esteem participants predicted more negative self-verification strivings for the low esteem target than high self-esteem participants. It was also true that there was an overall tendency for participants to predict a preference for positive bosses and roommates. Several factors could have contributed to this tendency. First, this pattern may have reflected the fact that they live in a society that places enormous value on positivity in all its forms. Second, when people receive self-enhancing evaluations, their initial affective reactions are favorable (Kwang & Swann, 2010). Although these warm initial reactions are later chilled by incredulity for people with low self-esteem (Swann, Predmore, Griffin & Gaines, 1987), the memory of these warm reactions may encourage them to acknowledge the allure of positive evaluations. Finally, truly low esteem was rare in our sample, with only a minority of participants (17% in Study 1 and 13% in Study 1b) scoring below the midpoint of the scale, let alone at the extreme negative end of the scale. This is important because it means that many participants on the lower end of our self-esteem scale may not have viewed themselves as negatively as the roommate or boss viewed the target, and so were not judging a truly similar other.

Can High Self-Esteem Individuals be Induced to Understand Low Self-Esteem Individuals?

Together, the research discussed in the first two sections of this article suggest that people who are high in status, power, and self-esteem achieve a dimmer understanding of their dissimilar counterparts than those who are low in status, power, and self-esteem. There are at least three reasons why the last of these variables—low self-esteem—may be relatively invisible in contemporary society. First, low self-esteem itself is relatively rare (28.5% in Diener &

Diener's [1995] large international study). This imbalance means that low self-esteem people will meet high self-esteem people more than high self-esteem people will meet low self-esteem people. In addition, people with low self-esteem tend to socialize less than people with high esteem, thus diminishing opportunities for high self-esteem people to meet them (Robins, Tracy, Trzesniewski, Potter, & Gosling, 2001). Moreover, when people with low self-esteem do socialize, they do not necessarily gravitate toward people with positive self-views (Rosenblatt & Greenberg, 1991).

Second, both low self-esteem and the associated preference for negative evaluations may be difficult to detect. For example, people often misjudge neuroticism, a correlate of low self-esteem (Vazire, 2010). Also, preferences for negative evaluations are often automatized and thus outside of conscious awareness (Kraus & Chen, 2009). In such instances, people with low self-esteem could not explain that they enacted a preference for negative evaluations even if they wanted to.

Which brings us to a third point: people with low self-esteem may not want to report their preference for negative evaluations. The high value that Western cultures place on high self-esteem and its pursuit may motivate people who suffer from low self-esteem to conceal their preference for negative evaluations from others. Concealment incentives may be especially strong when interacting with people who possess high esteem, for low self-esteem individuals will have sound reasons for anticipating that their counterparts will have little understanding of active attempts to maintain low esteem.

This relative invisibility of low self-esteem may encourage their high self-esteem counterparts to overlook their goals, needs, and desires. With this in mind, in this section, we explore several strategies designed to correct the tendency for people with high self-esteem to

misunderstand the motivational inclinations of people with low self-esteem. Our starting point was the evidence presented in Section II that people with low esteem understand what it is like to possess low esteem. Apparently, their experiences provided them with the information and motivation needed to recognize that others with low self-esteem are drawn to negative interaction partners for the same reasons that they themselves were. The question, then, is this: How can one inform and motivate high self-esteem individuals to peer into the realities that low self-esteem individuals routinely confront?

Based on the authors' collective experience teaching self-verification theory and interacting with individuals with low self-esteem, we generated four distinct strategies for encouraging people with high self-esteem to understand their counterparts. First, in the Tommy study, we provided information about someone with low self-esteem who sought self-verifying evaluations. That is, we had perceivers with high esteem read an account of a young boy with low esteem who solicited negative evaluations (i.e., displayed a preference for negative evaluations). Second, in the overly positive feedback study, we focused on motivation. That is, we gave people overly positive evaluations that we believed would motivate a desire for negative feedback. Third, in the study of clinical students, we focused on a group of participants who presumably possessed high levels of information and motivation to understand people with low self-esteem. Finally, in the gone-but-not-forgotten study, we examined a group of people whose experiences provided them with an extra dose of information and motivation to understand people with low self-esteem: those who had actually possessed low self-esteem in the past.

The Tommy Study: Augmenting Information About Preference for Negative Evaluations

If people with high self-esteem rarely gain insight into people with low esteem in the course of their everyday interactions, they may encounter vivid images of such individuals in

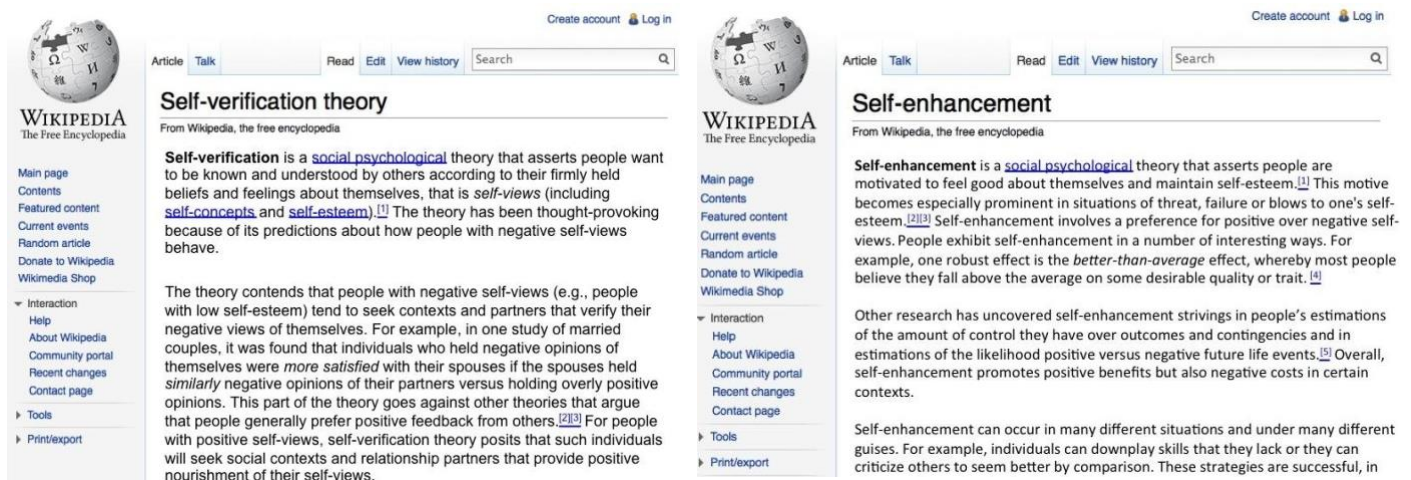
books such as *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara. This bestselling novel was nominated for multiple literary awards, despite the fact that the author spent over 700 pages chronicling the life of a man whose “self-loathing is shocking from the start and only grows more abject,” (Greenwell, 2015). Like readers of the book, the protagonist’s loving friends were flummoxed by his intense self-loathing. The award-winning memoir *Educated* features similar themes. In reflecting on her college years, author Tara Westover (2018) recalls that, “Praise was a poison to me; I choked on it. I wanted the professor to shout at me, wanted it so deeply I felt dizzy from the deprivation. The ugliness of me had to be given expression.” Both books show how people who suffer from maltreatment as children may develop self-loathing that is so intense that they find praise unbearable.

The popularity of such accounts suggest that the public is intensely curious about people with low self-esteem, perhaps because outsiders rarely glimpse their inner lives. We reasoned that satisfying this natural curiosity would acquaint people with the unique worldviews of people with low self-esteem and the desire for self-verification. Familiarizing them with such individuals should, in turn, encourage them to recognize the legitimacy of a preference for negative evaluations. To test this reasoning, we exposed people to a story of a young boy named Tommy, a child at a camp for underprivileged children whom the senior author encountered as a college student.

Procedure. We randomly assigned a sample of Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) participants with high self-esteem (1 SD above M ; $N = 111$; as determined in a prescreening survey) to an experimental or control condition. In the experimental condition, participants were acquainted with Tommy’s story. Tommy had a difficult early childhood. He developed low self-esteem and tragically reaped the fruits of sustained preference for negative evaluations in the

form of repeated rejection (Swann, 2012). Participants were then encouraged to recall and reflect on someone in their own lives who struggled with negative self-views. Participants in the control condition skipped to the dependent measure which consisted of rating both the self-enhancement and self-verification Wikipedia articles (See Figure 3). Participants then rated the relative credibility of the two theories on a 3-item scale (i.e., convincing, true of human motivation, scientifically valid). For example, one item of the scale ranged from (*1 – self-verification much more true of human motivation, 7 – self-enhancement theory much more true of human motivation*).

Figure 3. Participants rated the credibility of self-enhancement vs. self-verification Wikipedia articles.



Note. In the studies included in Section III of the paper, participants rated the credibility of (slightly edited) Wikipedia articles on self-verification and self-enhancement theory. Stimuli are available at https://osf.io/x2bgy/?view_only=340aead81ebb43ccaef36e8aeb6faf0e. Ratings of the self-verification article were the indicator of understanding people with low self-esteem, as this article explains why such individuals seek negative evaluations.

Results. A one-sample *t*-test revealed that relative credibility ratings were above the scale midpoint ($M = 5.00$, $t(110) = 11.45$, $p < .001$), indicating that self-enhancement theory was perceived as more credible by the high self-esteem participants than self-verification theory, regardless of condition. A second *t*-test revealed no effect of condition on ratings of the relative

credibility of the two theories (experimental condition $M = 4.98$ vs. control condition $M = 5.02$, $t(109) = -.24, p = .81$). To quantify support for the null hypothesis, we conducted Bayesian analysis (Morey et al., 2015). The Bayes factor (BF_{10}) was .21, indicating that null hypothesis is five times more likely than the alternative hypothesis. This is considered substantial evidence for the null hypothesis (Wetzels & Wagenmakers, 2012).

Discussion. Exposing people with high self-esteem to a scenario in which someone with low self-esteem embraced negative evaluations did not foster understanding of the motives of people with low esteem. Why? Conceivably, reading a brief story about Tommy was simply too weak; surely reading Yanagihara's 700-page tome about a man suffused with self-loathing would have been a far stronger test of our hypothesis. Alternatively, experiencing any second-hand evidence of a preference for negative evaluations—even a protracted one—may not be sufficiently compelling to convince a skeptic. Perhaps firsthand experience with overly positive evaluations is needed to make them realize why people with low esteem might welcome negative evaluations. To test this idea, we provided participants with overly positive evaluations. We hypothesized that experiencing such evaluations might make them realize why someone might subsequently compensate by seeking negative evaluations.

The Overly Positive Feedback Study: Augmenting Firsthand Information About the Preference for Negative Evaluations

Research on self-verification theory has shown that receiving evaluations that are unexpectedly positive evokes discomfort and intensifies efforts to acquire self-verifying evaluations (Swann & Hill, 1982). We hypothesized that people, including those with high esteem, who receive such evaluations will be more inclined to subsequently empathize with the negative feedback seeking of others who receive overly positive evaluations. That is, people with

high as well as low self-esteem possess specific qualities that they perceive as weaknesses (Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989), and self-verification theory predicts that they should experience discomfort when they receive positive evaluations regarding those weakness (Swann, 1983; 1996). Such an experience may convince them that overly positive evaluations would make others (e.g. those with global low esteem) feel uncomfortable as well. This may open them to the idea that people with low esteem would seek negative evaluations to avoid the discomfort associated with overly positive evaluations. We tested this reasoning in the next study.

Procedure. We randomly assigned a sample of MTurk participants with high self-esteem (1 SD above M ; $N = 130$; as determined in a prescreening survey) to an experimental or control condition. In the experimental condition, we provided participants with feedback that was markedly more positive than their standing on a self-view they acknowledged to be negative (e.g., unintelligent, unsociable, unattractive). In the control condition, participants received ambiguous feedback. This manipulation was effective in that participants in the experimental condition rated the feedback as less accurate than participants in the control condition, $p = .002$. We then asked participants to reflect on the feedback and rate the relative credibility of the self-enhancement vs. self-verification theory articles using the same measures used in the Tommy study.

Results. A one-sample t -test revealed that relative credibility ratings were above the scale midpoint ($M = 4.61$, $t(129) = 4.81$, $p < .001$), indicating that self-enhancement theory was perceived as more credible by the high self-esteem participants than self-verification theory, regardless of condition. A t -test revealed no effect of condition on credibility ratings (experimental condition $M = 4.62$ vs. control condition $M = 4.59$, $t(128) = .13$, $p = .90$). More direct support for the null hypothesis was provided by a Bayes Factor (BF_{10}) of .19. This finding

indicates that the null hypothesis is five times more likely than the alternative hypothesis, which is considered substantial evidence for the null hypothesis (Wetzels & Wagenmakers, 2012).

Discussion. Our participants, all of whom possessed high esteem, judged self-enhancement theory to be more credible than self-verification theory. Moreover, exposing them to overly positive evaluations did not reduce the incredulity that people with high esteem expressed toward the self-verification strivings of people with low self-esteem. Conceivably, the evaluations we provided were not sufficiently positive. Alternatively, having specific negative self-views disconfirmed does not translate to understanding the need for verification of global self-views. In any event, our findings are consistent with prior research showing that when people are asked to imagine themselves in a target's position, they actually generate more self-related than other-related thoughts (Davis et al., 2004).

The results of the first two studies suggested that our attempts to increase information about people with low self-esteem did not improve high self-esteem people's understanding of these individuals. Neither indirect exposure (with an example of negative feedback seeking through the Tommy story) *nor* direct exposure (with a presumed trigger of negative feedback seeking) increased perceptions of the credibility of negative feedback seeking. In the next study, we focused on a group of participants who had both indirect *and* direct exposure to preference for negative evaluations, as well as the motivation to understand such preference: clinical psychology graduate students.

The Clinical Student Study: Do Information and Motivation to Understand Negative Feedback Seeking Foster Insight Into People With Low Self-esteem?

Clinical graduate students have greater information about people with low self-esteem for several reasons. First, they undergo supervised therapy sessions with actual clients. At least some

clients suffer from low self-esteem or depression, thereby directly exposing students to low self-esteem persons who could be seeking verification for their negative self-views. Second, they receive indirect exposure to negative feedback seeking through course work that covers the nature and consequences of conditions such as depression and low self-esteem. Such direct and indirect exposure to a preference for negative evaluations should work together to reduce incredulity toward negative feedback seeking.

An additional reason for us to be confident that clinical graduate students would understand negative feedback seeking: motivation. That is, the MTurk workers who participated in our two earlier studies had no particular motivation to understand people with low self-esteem. In fact, understanding negative feedback seeking is not only somewhat irrelevant for most people, it may also threaten their rosy, optimistic worldviews and thwart their desire to avoid unpleasant experiences. In contrast, clinical psychology students are likely interested in the self-defeating patterns of people with low esteem and should be motivated to fully understand such patterns so they are better positioned to address them in therapy.

Procedure. We invited 80 university students to take part in a study of perceptions of psychological theories. Thirty students were currently enrolled in clinical psychology graduate programs; 50 control participants were undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in non-clinical programs. In response to the question “what degree are you currently seeking?,” the modal response for clinical graduate students was Ph.D., whereas the modal response for non-clinical students was B.S. Clinical students also indicated how long they had been enrolled in their current academic program, number of practice therapy hours logged, and their self-rated level of experience (a) practicing therapy in general and (b) providing therapy to clients with persistent negative self-views. As in the foregoing studies, participants read Wikipedia’s self-

enhancement theory and self-verification theory articles in random order and rated the relative credibility of the two theories. In this study, on five-point scales, they rated the relative credibility of the two theories and then additionally rated the credibility of each theory.

Results. A repeated-measures ANOVA with independent ratings of each theory as the within-subjects factor and clinical versus non-clinical student status as a between-subjects factor revealed only an effect of theory, $F(1, 78) = 7.82, p = .007$, such that self-enhancement theory ($M = 3.25$) was rated as more credible than self-verification theory ($M = 2.99$). The clinical versus non-clinical status had no impact on the perceived credibility of either theory, $F(1, 78) = .18, p = .67$. Furthermore, the Bayes factor (BF_{10}) for this null effect was .25, indicating the null hypothesis is four times more likely than the alternative hypothesis. For the relative credibility rating outcome, a t -test revealed no effect of clinical vs. non-clinical student status on relative credibility ratings (clinical students $M = 3.26$ vs. non-clinical students $M = 3.27$), $t(67) = -.08, p = .93, BF_{10} = 24$). As in previous experiments, a one-sample t -test revealed that mean relative credibility ratings were above the scale midpoint, favoring self-enhancement theory as more credible, $t(79) = 2.67, p = .005$. We also examined correlations between credibility ratings and clinical students' (1) amount of time enrolled in current academic program, (2) self-rated level of experience practicing therapy, (3) self-rated experience providing therapy to clients with persistent negative self-views, and (4) number of practicing therapy hours logged. No significant correlations emerged.

Discussion. The results of this study suggest that even therapists in training failed to understand the self-verification strivings of people with low self-esteem. We were especially surprised by converging evidence that there was no relationship between experience in a clinical program and perceptions of self-verification theory.

Of course, it is surely possible that a larger sample of more experienced clinicians would have revealed that clinical experience does indeed produce insight into preference for negative evaluations. That said, in combination with our earlier unsuccessful attempts to reduce incredulity toward self-verification theory, the results of this study provided further evidence that people fail to understand the preferences of people with low self-esteem. In fact, when considered together with the findings presented in Section II, the results presented here suggest that people who suffer from low self-esteem are the only ones who readily recognize the viability self-verification strivings. We followed this lead by proposing that having a history of negative self-views may enable people with high esteem to understand self-verification strivings.

The Gone-But-Not-Forgotten Study: Those Both Informed and Motivated to Understand by a History of Negative Self-Views

Although self-esteem tends to remain stable over people's lifetimes, it can change as people mature (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2003). This raises the possibility that those who suffer from low self-esteem as children or adolescents may enjoy high self-esteem as adults. Nevertheless, even those who enjoy improvements in their self-esteem may remember their earlier selves. This may afford them with insights into two worlds. On the one hand, they may recall what it was like to possess low esteem, including ambivalence about praise and motivation to verify their negative self-views. On the other hand, they may become newly appreciative of the allure of praise.

To test these ideas, we asked whether people with current high self-esteem who experienced low self-esteem in the past might display insight into the worlds of people with both low and high self-esteem. That is, they may not only understand that people with high self-

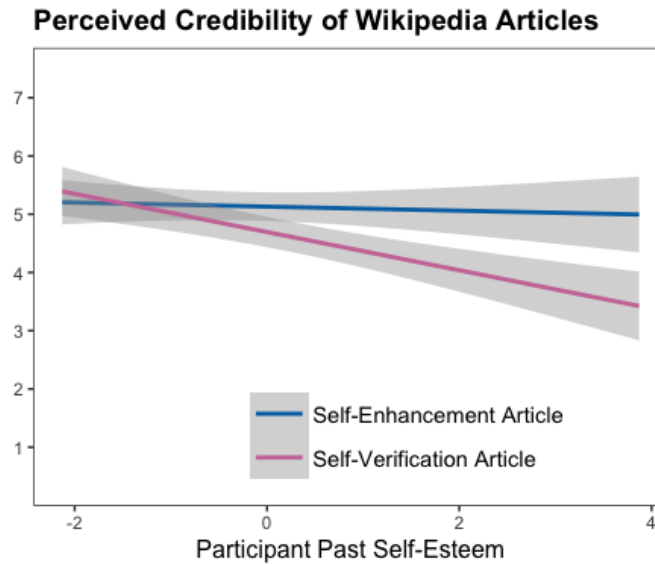
esteem would prefer positive evaluations but also that people with low self-esteem would prefer negative evaluations.

Procedure. We invited 171 participants to take part in a study of people's thoughts about themselves and their opinions of various psychological theories. Participants completed a measure of self-esteem⁴ and three items that we designed to measure the extent to which they had experienced chronic negative self-views in their past ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.74$ e.g. "In my past, there was a significant time in my life where... I had persistent, negative views of myself." 1 – totally untrue of me, 7 – totally true of me). Not surprisingly, responses to measures of present and past self-esteem were moderately correlated, $r(169) = .47$, $p < .001$. Depending on article condition, participants read a brief summary of either self-verification theory or self-enhancement theory formatted like Wikipedia articles. Participants then rated the credibility of either theory (e.g., convincing, true, scientifically valid) on 7-point scales (1 - not at all to 7 - totally).

Results. Regression analyses revealed an interaction between *past* self-esteem and article condition on participants' evaluations of the theories ($b = -.29$, 95% CI [-.50, -.09], $t(167) = -2.81$, $p = .005$, $R^2 = .15$). As shown in Figure 4 and corroborated by simple slope analyses, the lower participants' past self-esteem, the more credible they rated self-verification theory ($b = -.33$, 95% CI [-.47, -.19], $p < .001$). In contrast, participants imputed high levels of credibility to self-enhancement theory regardless of whether they had high or low esteem in the past ($b = -.04$, 95% CI [-.20, .12], $p = .65$).

⁴ In this study, again to adhere to the specificity matching principle, we switched to a measure of global self-esteem (the SLSC scale; Tatarodi & Swann, 2001) because the Wikipedia entries for self-enhancement and self-verification theory focused on global self-esteem.

Figure 4. Participants' past self-esteem predicted perceived credibility of self-verification theory, but not self-enhancement theory.



Note. Figure 4 depicts the gone-but-not forgotten study. High values on y-axes indicate high perceived credibility of the respective Wikipedia article. Shaded regions denote 95% confidence intervals.

The preceding analysis supports our hypothesis that having low esteem in the past fosters perceptions of credibility of self-verification theory. Nevertheless, by definition, the gone-but-not-forgotten hypothesis requires that past low self-esteem is “gone”—that is, participants currently have high esteem. To test this idea directly, we repeated the foregoing analysis including only participants whose current self-esteem was above the mean ($N = 86$). The effect reported above replicated. That is, an interaction emerged between past self-esteem and article condition on evaluations of the two theories ($b = -.34$, 95% CI $[-.63, -.045]$, $t(82) = -2.30$, $p = .024$, $R^2 = .17$). Simple slope analyses of high self-esteem participants revealed that the lower their past self-esteem, the more credible they rated self-verification theory ($b = -.21$, 95% CI $[-.41, -.014]$, $p = .04$). In contrast, high self-esteem participants imputed high levels of credibility to self-enhancement theory whether their past self-esteem was high or low ($b = .12$, 95% CI $[-$

.10, .34], $p = .25$). In short, high self-esteem participants who recovered from negative self-views acknowledged the viability of self-verification theory's prediction that people with low esteem might actively seek negative feedback.

The foregoing analysis support the gone-but-not-forgotten hypothesis. That is, high self-esteem participants who recovered from negative self-views understood that people with low self-esteem might actively seek negative feedback. Nevertheless, the substantial correlation between past self-esteem and current self-esteem ($r = .47$) raises the possibility that current self-esteem may have contributed to this effect. In a follow-up analysis we entered the interaction of current self-esteem and condition, the interaction of past self-esteem and condition, and the interaction of current and past self-esteem into a model predicting credibility of self-verification vs. self-enhancement theory. Both the current self-esteem X condition interaction and the current self-esteem X past self-esteem interaction predicted credibility ratings ($b = -.65$, 95% CI [-1.25, -.058], $t(164) = -2.17$, $p = .032$; $b = .19$, 95% CI [.04, .34], $t(164) = 2.56$, $p = .011$, respectively). Simple slopes analyses for the latter interaction revealed that current self-esteem predicted credibility ratings at high ($b = .56$, $p = .03$) but not low ($b = -.10$, $p = .65$) levels of past self-esteem. Past self-esteem did not interact with condition to predict credibility ratings once the interaction of current self-esteem with condition was included in the model ($p = .19$).

Nevertheless, we believe that head-to-head comparisons of measures of current and past self-esteem are unfair given the likely psychometric superiority of the former (a well validated, 16-item measure of current esteem) over the latter (an ad hoc, 3-item measure of past esteem).

One unexpected finding displayed in Figure 4 was that even participants who had a history of low esteem perceived self-enhancement theory as credible. This finding is reminiscent of the aforementioned evidence that even participants with low esteem indicated an overall

preference for positive bosses and roommates. The same factors likely contributed to both sets of findings. For example, all of our participants grew up in a culture that enthusiastically embraced self-enhancement. This gave them ample evidence that self-enhancement strivings are quite common. Moreover, even those who have low esteem report feeling good after receiving positive evaluations (Kwang & Swann, 2010). This gave them personal experience with the allure of positive evaluations.

General Discussion

There is a widespread belief that Western nations are meritocracies in which people at the top are there for a reason—they are exceptionally proficient at socially valued activities. Our literature review and new empirical data suggest that this belief is sometimes wrong. It is people at the *bottom*—those low in status, power, and self-esteem—who excel at one crucially important skill: understanding other people. Within this domain, those with high status, power and self-esteem routinely misunderstand their counterparts. Asymmetric understanding results.

After reviewing extant support for the asymmetric understanding phenomenon, we presented new evidence showing that it extends to people with low esteem. More specifically, people with low esteem understood correctly that others with low esteem would prefer and seek negative evaluators (i.e., display a preference for negative evaluations) and that their counterparts with high esteem would prefer and seek positive evaluations (i.e., self-enhancement strivings). In contrast, people with high esteem correctly predicted that others with high self-esteem would seek self-enhancement but inaccurately predicted that people with low self-esteem would also seek self-enhancement.

Our findings notwithstanding, some people with high esteem are surely aware that people with negative self-views embrace, or at least fail to eschew, negative evaluations. Predators who

routinely abuse their partners, for instance, may develop a keen eye for new victims. The aforementioned memoir by Tara Westover (2018) provides a case in point. She reports that her brother subjected her to physical and psychological abuse throughout her childhood. Presumably he recognized her feelings of worthlessness and believed that these feelings would undercut her resistance to his attacks.

Coming to Terms with Asymmetric Insight

In the foregoing scenarios and related ones, insight into the worlds of people with low esteem could be beneficial. For example, recognizing the existence of a preference for negative evaluations would not only make perceivers more knowledgeable about people with low self-esteem, it might also motivate them to be more respectful and empathic toward them. Such respect and empathy may encourage them to make more informed decisions (e.g., clinical diagnoses, teacher evaluations, employee selection, etc.) about these individuals. The same could be said of decisions that impact those who lack status and power.

To bring people with high self-esteem to better understand those with low esteem, we designed a series of interventions. In each study we sought to increase information, motivation, or some combination of the two. To our surprise, these efforts were largely unsuccessful. For example, having high self-esteem individuals read accounts of individuals who struggled with low self-esteem (thereby bolstering information) or providing them with overly positive evaluations (thereby bolstering motivation) did little to increase their understanding of the preferences of low self-esteem persons. Even more surprising, clinical graduate students, who should be trained and highly motivated to understand people with low-esteem, registered skepticism regarding the tendency for people with low esteem to prefer negative evaluations. Although the results of this study certainly do not rule out the possibility that expertise can foster

understanding of people with low self-esteem (or status or power), they raise the possibility that expertise must be substantial (e.g. clinicians with years of experience or those who are the best in their field) to overcome the challenges of understanding people with low-esteem.

Amidst this flurry of negative findings, the sole ray of hope came from evidence that high self-esteem individuals who had experienced negative identities earlier in their lives recognized that people with low self-esteem would prefer and seek negative evaluations. This finding is reminiscent of evidence regarding the mechanisms underlying the “endowment effect” (Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1990). Whereas early evidence indicated that perceivers struggle to understand the seemingly irrational preference for their own mug over an equivalent mug that belongs to someone else, later research revealed that the endowment effect was diminished by giving participants themselves a coffee mug (Van Boven et al., 2000). Apparently, leveraging the personal experiences of individuals by having them live the reality of someone else seems to hold some promise for designing effective interventions overriding strong biases such as those explored in research on the endowment effect and asymmetrical insight.

Although we were surprised that our efforts to improve the understanding of people with high esteem bore little fruit, perhaps we should not have been. After all, people tend to have a “belief in a favorable future” (Rogers, Moore, & Norton, 2017) such that they expect future others will share their worldviews. Accordingly, people with high self-esteem may suspect that people with low self-esteem will eventually recognize the virtues of seeking praise and adjust their feedback preferences accordingly. In addition, for decades, therapists have noted that people require intensive and sustained psychotherapy to change their longstanding beliefs (but see Schleider, Dobias, Sung, & Mullarkey, 2019). Conceivably, “one off” exposures to a new way of thinking will do little to alter entrenched world views. This may be particularly true of

people with high self-esteem, as they appear *even less* susceptible to influence than people with low esteem or depression (Rhodes & Wood, 1992; Hofheinz et al., 2017). This parallels evidence from the status literature suggesting that those with higher status experience greater distance from others and are thus more resistant to social influence than those with low status (Magee & Smith, 2013). Taken together, these findings suggest that high status, power, and self-esteem may make people impervious to new information that could provide helpful insights. This is unfortunate, because misunderstanding the realities of the disadvantaged may undercut efforts to achieve social justice for them.

Related Themes in the Psychological Literature

Two earlier lines of research foreshadow elements of our asymmetric understanding idea: the anchor-adjust heuristic (Epley, Morewedge, & Keysar, 2004) and the false consensus effect (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977). In taking the perspective of others, for example, people anchor on their own responses to a given situation and then adjust their judgments. The result is a tendency to overestimate the degree to which others agree with the self (i.e., false consensus). Our formulation suggests that people who are high in status, power and self-esteem display these biases to a greater degree than their counterparts. Moreover, our findings show that just as knowledge of oneself can sometimes enhance the accuracy of our judgments (Hodges, Denning, & Lieber, 2018), at other times self-knowledge can undermine accuracy.

This discussion of the links between negative self-views and authenticity may evoke a sense of *déjà vu* among those familiar with research on depressive realism. The tag line for this line of research is that depressed persons are “sadder but wiser” (Alloy & Abramson, 1988). Our findings do seem superficially consistent with the idea that people with low esteem are “sadder but wiser.” For example, people with low esteem do report feeling unhappy when they receive

negative feedback, at least initially (Swann et al., 1987). Similarly, the incisiveness of low status persons can be burdensome. For example, the tendency for racial and sexual minorities to codeswitch when navigating majority-dominated spaces can reduce feelings of belongingness and authenticity (McCluney et al., 2019). Despite these parallels, there are clear differences in the two approaches. For example, we are proposing only that people with low esteem and low status/power have a relatively deep understanding of their relationship partners; we are not contending that they are “wiser” in any other way. Even more problematic, the research literature indicates that the depressive realism effect is not robust (Colvin & Block, 1994; Moore & Fresco, 2012) calling its very existence into question.

Summary and Future Directions

In this article, we focused on the consequences of differential status, power, and self-esteem for mutual understanding in social relationships. A major contribution of our work was to integrate relevant research on status and power with research on self-esteem. We are the first to argue explicitly that people with low esteem resemble low status people in that they display similar patterns of understanding and being understood. The literature we review, in conjunction with the new data we report, suggest that members of each of these low status/power groups will be systematically misunderstood by powerful others. Such misunderstanding likely adds to the hardships imposed by the lack of resources, opportunities, and respect from which low status/power individuals already suffer (Rucker, Galinsky, & Magee, 2018).

An important limitation of the new research we report here is our focus on asymmetries in understanding along a single dimension (i.e., self-esteem) using a single conceptual definition of “understanding” (understanding self-verification vs. self-enhancement strivings; Yarkoni, 2019; Simons, Shoda, & Lindsay, 2017). Conceivably, people with low self-esteem may

understand a high esteem person's desire for praise but not necessarily their racial or sexual identity.

The power and status literature we reviewed is similarly restricted in this regard. Future research should accordingly examine the conditions under which insight associated with a specific characteristic has boundary-crossing properties. It is possible, for example, that people with low status, power, or self-esteem have greater insight into people on other dimensions as well. Indirect support for this possibility comes from evidence indicating that depressed people exhibit less false consensus than non-depressed people even for attributes irrelevant to depression (Tabachnik, Crocker, & Alloy, 1983). On the other hand, there is no guarantee that understanding in one domain will translate to understanding in other domains. For example, the failure of early feminists to include non-white, middle and lower-class women in the feminist cause reduced understanding of the female experience in all its breadth and diversity (hooks, 1991; Allen, 2016). Modern feminist scholars have responded by emphasizing the importance of understanding how people's various identities intersect to produce unique patterns of experience and discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991).

Further research is clearly needed to examine how people with identities associated with low status/power may understand better than they are understood. This research will not only enrich theory, it could also have practical implications. Feeling misunderstood by outgroup members, for example, increases mistrust and prejudice and reduces feelings of forgiveness (Vázquez, Gómez, & Swann, 2018; Livingstone, Fernández, & Rothers, 2020).

Misunderstanding can have lasting effects when it involves people from different groups.

Although time increases the accuracy of people's perceptions of ingroup members, it decreases the accuracy of perceptions of outgroup members (Ryan & Bogart, 2001).

A tendency to misunderstand people low in power may also shape what is known about WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic) vs. non-WEIRD societies (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Because the epicenter of power in psychology is in the West, Western psychologists have accumulated greater understanding of WEIRD people than non-WEIRD people. Theorists and researchers have responded to this imbalance by devoting considerable attention to the overrepresentation of WEIRD samples in psychology (Rad, Martingano, & Ginges, 2018; Nielsen, Haun, Kärtner, & Legare, 2017). Even so, psychologists in the non-WEIRD world are likely to understand WEIRD populations better than WEIRD scientists understand non-WEIRD populations (Arnett, 2008). To address this disparity, we encourage scientists to acknowledge asymmetries in understanding that occur as a function of geography and nationality. Only then can WEIRD scientists use their resources and institutional power to reduce asymmetrical understanding by seeking and valuing research on understudied phenomena prevalent in other cultures and more generalizable samples; reading, funding, and rewarding the work of scientists from the Global South; drawing on the many rich non-Western philosophical traditions and their specific historical legacies of power and subordination (e.g., the caste system in India), and so on.

Conclusion

In the quote from William James with which we opened this article, he noted the difficulty that humans experience in truly understanding their fellow humans. Here we argue that some people experience this difficulty more than others. In particular, people who are high in status, power, and self-esteem tend to misunderstand their counterparts while those who are low in status, power, and self-esteem understand their counterparts rather well. We suspect that asymmetric understanding may generalize to a broad array of groups, including gender and

sexual identity minorities, first-generation college students, immigrants and other groups that have historically had low status. In these and other instances, asymmetric understanding may well extend beyond traditional notions of power and status.

As scientists, it is crucial for us to take stock of asymmetric misunderstandings that we can systematically avoid. To this end, it is important to recognize that one of the building blocks of asymmetrical insights—the interpersonal and intergroup blindspots that people experience—are not randomly distributed. Instead, our blindspots track entrenched status and power hierarchies in which the realities of women, ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, and people with low self-esteem are overlooked in favor of the realities of white heterosexual males with high self-esteem (Dietze, Gantman, Nam, & Niemi, 2019). One way to avoid this problem is to increase the inclusiveness of the scientific community itself so that the experiences and identities of all people are represented. Only then will psychological science be poised to transcend the asymmetric insights that might otherwise distort its vision of the human condition.

References

- Adler, N. E., Epel, E. S., Castellazzo, G., and Ickovics, J. R. (2000). Relationship of subjective and objective social status with psychological and physiological functioning: Preliminary data in healthy, White women. *Health Psychology*, 19, 586–592.
- Allen, A. (2016). Feminist Perspectives on Power. In E.N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/feminist-power>.
- Anderson, H., & Daniels, M. (2016). The Largest Analysis of Film Dialogue by Gender, Ever. Retrieved from <https://pudding.cool/2017/03/film-dialogue/>
- Arnett, J. J. (2016). The neglected 95%: Why American psychology needs to become less American. In A. E. Kazdin (Ed.), *Methodological issues and strategies in clinical research* (p. 115–132). American Psychological Association.
- Ashokkumar, A. & Swann, W. B., Jr., (2020). The saboteur within: Self-verification strivings can make praise toxic. In E. Brummelman (Ed.), *Psychological Perspectives on Praise*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Bjornsdottir, R. T., Alaei, R., & Rule, N. O. (2017). The perceptive proletarian: Subjective social class predicts interpersonal accuracy. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 41(2), 185-201.
- Blackman, M. C., & Funder, D. C. (1998). The effect of information on consensus and accuracy in personality judgment. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 34(2), 164-181.
- Brandt, M. J. (2013). Do the disadvantaged legitimize the social system? A large-scale test of the status–legitimacy hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 104(5), 765.
- Burke, P. J., & Harrod, M. M. (2005). Too much of a good thing?. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 68(4), 359-374.

- Capozzi, F., Becchio, C., Willemsse, C., & Bayliss, A. P. (2016). Followers are not followed: Observed group interactions modulate subsequent social attention. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, *145*(5), 531.
- Chow, R. M., & Knowles, E. D. (2016). Taking race off the table: Agenda setting and support for color-blind public policy. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *42*(1), 25-39.
- Collins, R. L. (2011). Content analysis of gender roles in media: Where are we now and where should we go?. *Sex Roles*, *64*, 290-298.
- Colvin, C. R., & Block, J. (1994). Do positive illusions foster mental health? An examination of the Taylor and Brown formulation. *Psychological Bulletin*, *116*, 3–20.
- Colvin, C. R., Vogt, D., & Ickes, W. (1997). Why do friends understand each other better than strangers do?. In W. J. Ickes (Ed.), *Empathic accuracy* (p. 169–193). The Guilford Press.
- Covarrubias, R., & Fryberg, S. A. (2015). Movin' on up (to college): First-generation college students' experiences with family achievement guilt. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *21*(3), 420.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 139-168.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241-1300.
- Cronbach, L. J. (1955). Processes affecting scores on “understanding of others” and “assumed similarity.” *Psychological Bulletin*, *52*(3), 177-193.
- Dalmaso, M., Pavan, G., Castelli, L., & Galfano, G. (2011). Social status gates social attention in humans. *Biology Letters*, *8*(3), 450-452.

- Davis, M. H., Soderlund, T., Cole, J., Gadol, E., Kute, M., Myers, M., & Weihing, J. (2004). Cognitions associated with attempts to empathize: How do we imagine the perspective of another?. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *30*(12), 1625-1635.
- Diener, E., & Diener, M. (1995). Cross-cultural correlates of life satisfaction and self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *68*(4), 653-663.
- Dietze, P., Gantman, A., Nam, H. H., & Niemi, L. (2019). Marginalised ideas are key to scientific progress. *Nature Human Behavior*, *3*, 1024.
- Dietze, P., & Knowles, E. D. (2016). Social class and the motivational relevance of other human beings: Evidence from visual attention. *Psychological Science*, *27*(11), 1517-1527.
- Dietze, P., & Knowles, E. D. (2020). Social Class Predicts Emotion Perception and Perspective-Taking Performance in Adults. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1177/0146167220914116.
- Elfenbein, H. A., & Ambady, N. (2002). On the universality and cultural specificity of emotion recognition: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, *128*(2), 203.
- Elfenbein, H. A., & Ambady, N. (2003). When familiarity breeds accuracy: Cultural exposure and emotional facial recognition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *85*, 276-290
- Epley, N., Morewedge, C. K., & Keysar, B. (2004). Perspective taking in children and adults: Equivalent egocentrism but differential correction. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *40*(6), 760-768.
- Fiske, S. T. (1993). Controlling other people: The impact of power on stereotyping. *American Psychologist*, *48*(6), 621.

- Foulsham, T., Cheng, J. T., Tracy, J. L., Henrich, J., & Kingstone, A. (2010). Gaze allocation in a dynamic situation: Effects of social status and speaking. *Cognition, 117*(3), 319-331.
- Fox, S., Ben-Nahum, Z., & Yinon, Y. (1989). Perceived similarity and accuracy of peer ratings. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 74*(5), 781-786.
- Funder, D. C. (1987). Errors and mistakes: Evaluating the accuracy of social judgment. *Psychological bulletin, 101*(1), 75-90.
- Funder, D. C. (1995). On the accuracy of personality judgment: A realistic approach. *Psychological Review, 102*(4), 652.
- Funder, D. C., Kolar, D. C., & Blackman, M. C. (1995). Agreement among judges of personality: Interpersonal relations, similarity, and acquaintanceship. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*(4), 656.
- Gonzaga, G. C., Keltner, D., & Ward, D. (2008). Power in mixed-sex stranger interactions. *Cognition and Emotion, 22*(8), 1555-1568.
- Goudarzi, S., Pliskin, R., Jost, J. T., & Knowles, E. D. (2020). Economic system justification predicts muted emotional responses to inequality. *Nature Communications, 11*, 383.
- Greenwell, G. (2015). A Little Life: The Great Gay Novel Might Be Here. *The Atlantic, 31*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/05/a-little-life-definitive-gay-novel/394436/>.
- Hafen, C. A., Laursen, B., Burk, W. J., Kerr, M., & Stattin, H. (2011). Homophily in stable and unstable adolescent friendships: Similarity breeds constancy. *Personality and Individual Differences, 51*(5), 607-612.
- Hall, J. A., Gunnery, S. D., & Horgan, T. G. (2016). Gender differences in interpersonal accuracy. In J. A. Hall, M. S. Mast, T. V. West (Eds.). *The Social Psychology of*

- Perceiving Others Accurately* (pp. 309-327), Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hall, J. A., Mast, M. S., & Latu, I. M. (2015). The vertical dimension of social relations and accurate interpersonal perception: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 39*(2), 131-163.
- Harris, M. A., Donnellan, M. B., Guo, J., McAdams, D. P., Garnier-Villarreal, M., & Trzesniewski, K. H. (2017). Parental co-construction of 5-to 13-year-olds' global self-esteem through reminiscing about past events. *Child Development, 88*(6), 1810-1822.
- Harris, M. A., & Orth, U. (2019). The link between self-esteem and social relationships: A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/pspp0000265
- Henrich, J., Heine, S. J., & Norenzayan, A. (2010). The weirdest people in the world?. *Behavioral and brain sciences, 33*(2-3), 61-83.
- Hixon, J. G., & Swann, W. B. (1993). When does introspection bear fruit? Self-reflection, self-insight, and interpersonal choices. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 64*(1), 35.
- Hoch, S. J. (1987). Perceived consensus and predictive accuracy: The pros and cons of projection. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 53*(2), 221-234.
- Hodges, S. D., Denning, K. R., & Lieber, S. (2018). Perspective taking: Motivation and impediment to shared reality. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 23*, 104-108.
- Hofheinz, C., Germar, M., Schultze, T., Michalak, J., & Mojzisch, A. (2017). Are depressed people more or less susceptible to informational social influence?. *Cognitive Therapy and Research, 41*(5), 699-711.

- hooks, bell (2001). Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory. In B. Kum-Kum (Ed.). *Feminism and 'Race'* (pp. 33–39). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ickes, W., Gesn, P. R., & Graham, T. (2000). Gender differences in empathic accuracy: Differential ability or differential motivation?. *Personal Relationships*, 7(1), 95-109.
- James, W. (1890). *The Principles of Psychology*. Dover Publications.
- Jacobi, T., & Schweers, D. (2017). Justice, interrupted: The effect of gender, ideology, and seniority at Supreme Court oral arguments. *Virginia Law Review*, 104(7), 1379-1485.
- Jetten, J., Spears, R., & Postmes, T. (2004). Intergroup distinctiveness and differentiation: A meta-analytic integration. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 86(6), 862.
- Jost, J. T., Banaji, M. R., & Nosek, B. A. (2004). A decade of system justification theory: Accumulated evidence of conscious and unconscious bolstering of the status quo. *Political Psychology*, 25(6), 881-919.
- Judd, C. M., & Park, B. (1993). Definition and assessment of accuracy in social stereotypes. *Psychological Review*, 100(1), 109.
- Judd, C. M., Ryan, C. S., & Park, B. (1991). Accuracy in the judgment of in-group and out-group variability. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61(3), 366.
- Kahneman, D., Knetsch, J. L., & Thaler, R. H. (1990). Experimental tests of the endowment effect and the Coase theorem. *Journal of Political Economy*, 98(6), 1325-1348.
- Katz, J., & Beach, S. R. (2000). Looking for love? Self-verification and self-enhancement effects on initial romantic attraction. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26(12), 1526-1539.
- Kenny, D. A. (2019). *Interpersonal perception: A social relations analysis (2nd edition)*. Guilford Press.

- Kenny, D. A., & Acitelli, L. K. (2001). Accuracy and bias in the perception of the partner in a close relationship. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *80*(3), 439.
- Knowles, E. D., Lowery, B. S., Chow, R. M., & Unzueta, M. M. (2014). Deny, distance, or dismantle? How white Americans manage a privileged identity. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *9*(6), 594-609.
- Kraus, M. W., & Chen, S. (2014). Relational self-verification through self-presentation: Implications for perceptions of one's honesty and authenticity. *Self and Identity*, *13*(1), 45-57.
- Kraus, M. W., Côté, S., & Keltner, D. (2010). Social class, contextualism, and empathic accuracy. *Psychological Science*, *21*(11), 1716–1723.
- Kraus, M. W., Horberg, E. J., Goetz, J. L., and Keltner, D. (2011). Social class rank, threat vigilance, and hostile reactivity. *Personality and Social Psychological Bulletin*, *37*, 1376–1388.
- Kraus, M. W., Onyeador, I. N., Daumeyer, N. M., Rucker, J. M., & Richeson, J. A. (2019). The misperception of racial economic inequality. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *14*(6), 899-921.
- Kraus, M. W., Rucker, J. M., & Richeson, J. A. (2017). Americans misperceive racial economic equality. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *114*(39), 10324-10331.
- Kwang, T., & Swann Jr, W. B. (2010). Do people embrace praise even when they feel unworthy? A review of critical tests of self-enhancement versus self-verification. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *14*(3), 263-280.

- Leary, M. R., Tambor, E. S., Terdal, S. K., & Downs, D. L. (1995). Self-esteem as an interpersonal monitor: the sociometer hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 68*(3), 518.
- Livingstone, A. G., Fernández, L. R., & Rothers, A. (2020). " They just don't understand us": The role of felt understanding in intergroup relations. *Journal of personality and social psychology*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/pspi0000221
- Lowery, B. S., Unzueta, M. M., Knowles, E. D., & Goff, P. A. (2006). Concern for the in-group and opposition to affirmative action. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 90*(6), 961-974.
- Magee, J. C., & Smith, P. K. (2013). The social distance theory of power. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 17*(2), 158-186.
- Mahadevan, N., Gregg, A. P., & Sedikides, C. (2019). Is self-regard a sociometer or a hierometer? Self-esteem tracks status and inclusion, narcissism tracks status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 116*(3), 444.
- Mahadevan, N., Gregg, A. P., Sedikides, C., & de Waal-Andrews, W. G. (2016). Winners, losers, insiders, and outsiders: Comparing hierometer and sociometer theories of self-regard. *Frontiers in Psychology, 7*, 334.
- Mattan, B. D., Kubota, J. T., & Cloutier, J. (2017). How social status shapes person perception and evaluation: A social neuroscience perspective. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 12*(3), 468-507.
- McCluney, C. L., Robotham, K. J., Lee, S., Smith, R., & Durkee, M. I. (2019). The costs of codeswitching. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2019/11/the-costs-of-codeswitching>

- McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Cook, J. M. (2001). Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27(1), 415-444.
- Moore, M. T., & Fresco, D. M. (2012). Depressive realism: A meta-analytic review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 32(6), 496-509.
- Moore, M. T., & Fresco, D. M. (2012). Depressive realism: A meta-analytic review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 32(6), 496-509.
- Morey, R. D., Rouder, J. N., & Jamil, T. (2015). Package 'BayesFactor.' Retrieved from <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/BayesFactor/BayesFactor.pdf>.
- Neff, L. A., & Karney, B. R. (2005). To know you is to love you: The implications of global adoration and specific accuracy for marital relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88(3), 480.
- Nielsen, M., Haun, D., Kärtner, J., & Legare, C. H. (2017). The persistent sampling bias in developmental psychology: A call to action. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 162, 31-38.
- Phillips, L. T., & Lowery, B. S. (2015). The hard-knock life? Whites claim hardships in response to racial inequity. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 61, 12-18.
- Pratto, F., Sidanius, J., Stallworth, L. M., & Malle, B. F. (1994). Social dominance orientation: A personality variable predicting social and political attitudes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67(4), 741.
- Rad, M. S., Martingano, A. J., & Ginges, J. (2018). Toward a psychology of Homo sapiens: Making psychological science more representative of the human population. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(45), 11401-11405.

- Rhodes, N., & Wood, W. (1992). Self-esteem and intelligence affect influenceability: The mediating role of message reception. *Psychological Bulletin*, *111*(1), 156.
- Robins, R. W., Tracy, J. L., Trzesniewski, K., Potter, J., & Gosling, S. D. (2001). Personality correlates of self-esteem. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *35*(4), 463-482.
- Robinson, D. T., & Smith-Lovin, L. (1992). Selective interaction as a strategy for identity maintenance: An affect control model. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *55*(1), 12-28.
- Roccas, S., & Schwartz, S. H. (1993). Effects of intergroup similarity on intergroup relations. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *23*(6), 581-595.
- Rogers, T., Moore, D. A., & Norton, M. I. (2017). The belief in a favorable future. *Psychological Science*, *28*(9), 1290-1301.
- Rosenblatt, A., & Greenberg, J. (1991). Examining the world of the depressed: Do depressed people prefer others who are depressed? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *60*(4), 620–629.
- Ross, L., Greene, D., & House, P. (1977). The “false consensus effect”: An egocentric bias in social perception and attribution processes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *13*(3), 279-301.
- Rucker, D. D., Galinsky, A. D., & Magee, J. C. (2018). The agentic–communal model of advantage and disadvantage: How inequality produces similarities in the psychology of power, social class, gender, and race. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, *58*, 71-125.
- Rudich, E. A., & Vallacher, R. R. (1999). To belong or to self-enhance? Motivational bases for choosing interaction partners. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *25*(11), 1387-1404.

- Rule, N. O., Ambady, N., Adams, R. B., & Macrae, C. N. (2007). Us and them: Memory advantages in perceptually ambiguous groups. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, *14*(4), 687-692.
- Ryan, C. S. (1996). Accuracy of Black and White college students' in-group and out-group stereotypes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *22*(11), 1114-1127.
- Ryan, C. S., & Bogart, L. M. (2001). Longitudinal changes in the accuracy of new group members' in-group and out-group stereotypes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *37*(2), 118-133.
- Salter, P. S., Adams, G., & Perez, M. J. (2018). Racism in the structure of everyday worlds: A cultural-psychological perspective. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *27*(3), 150-155.
- Schleider, J. L., Dobias, M. L., Sung, J. Y., & Mullarkey, M. C. (2020). Future directions in single-session youth mental health interventions. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, *49*(2), 264-278.
- Sedikides, C., & Gregg, A. P. (2008). Self-enhancement: Food for thought. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *3*(2), 102-116.
- Shelp, S. G. (2003). Gaydar: Visual detection of sexual orientation among gay and straight men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *44*(1), 1-14.
- Shrum, W., Cheek Jr., N. H., & Hunter, S. M. (1988). Friendship in school: Gender and racial homophily. *Sociology of Education*, *61*(4), 227-239.
- Simons, D. J., Shoda, Y., & Lindsay, D. S. (2017). Constraints on generality (COG): A proposed addition to all empirical papers. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *12*(6), 1123-1128.

- Sowislo, J. F., & Orth, U. (2013). Does low self-esteem predict depression and anxiety? A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, *139*(1), 213–240.
- Stellar, J. E., Manzo, V. M., Kraus, M. W., & Keltner, D. (2012). Class and compassion: socioeconomic factors predict responses to suffering. *Emotion*, *12*(3), 449.
- Stotland, E. (1969). Exploratory investigations of empathy. In *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 4, pp. 271-314). Academic Press.
- Swann Jr, W. B. (1983). Self-verification: Bringing social reality into harmony with the self. *Social Psychological Perspectives on the Self*, *2*, 33-66.
- Swann, W. B., Jr. (1996). *Self-traps: The elusive quest for higher self-esteem*. Freeman: New York
- Swann, W. B., Jr. (2012). Self-verification theory. In P. Van Lange, A. Kruglanski, & E.T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology* (pp. 23-42). London: Sage.
- Swann, W. B., & Hill, C. A. (1982). When our identities are mistaken: Reaffirming self-conceptions through social interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *43*(1), 59.
- Swann, W. B., Jr. Chang-Schneider, C. & McClarty, K. (2007) Do our self-views matter? Self-concept and self-esteem in everyday life. *American Psychologist*, *62*, 84-94.
- Swann Jr, W. B., De La Ronde, C., & Hixon, J. G. (1994). Authenticity and positivity strivings in marriage and courtship. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *66*(5), 857.
- Swann, W. B., Jr., Griffin, J. J., Predmore, S., & Gaines, B. (1987). The cognitive-affective crossfire: When self-consistency confronts self-enhancement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *52*, 881-889.

- Swann, W. B., Hixon, J. G., Stein-Seroussi, A., & Gilbert, D. T. (1990). The fleeting gleam of praise: Cognitive processes underlying behavioral reactions to self-relevant feedback. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59*(1), 17.
- Swann Jr, W. B., & Pelham, B. (2002). Who wants out when the going gets good? Psychological investment and preference for self-verifying college roommates. *Self and Identity, 1*(3), 219-233.
- Swann Jr, W. B., Pelham, B. W., & Krull, D. S. (1989). Agreeable fancy or disagreeable truth? Reconciling self-enhancement and self-verification. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57*(5), 782.
- Swann, W. B., Jr. Chang-Schneider, C. & McClarty, K. (2007) Do our self-views matter? Self-concept and self-esteem in everyday life. *American Psychologist, 62*, 84-94.
- Tabachnik, N., Crocker, J., & Alloy, L. B. (1983). Depression, social comparison, and the false-consensus effect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45*(3), 688.
- Tafarodi, R. W., & Swann, W. B., Jr., (2001). Two-dimensional self-esteem: Theory and measurement. *Personality and Individual Differences, 31*, 653-673
- Thomas, G., & Fletcher, G. J. (2003). Mind-reading accuracy in intimate relationships: assessing the roles of the relationship, the target, and the judge. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85*(6), 1079.
- Trzesniewski, K. H., Donnellan, M. B., & Robins, R. W. (2003). Stability of self-esteem across the life span. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*(1), 205.
- Tukachinsky, R., Mastro, D., & Yarchi, M. (2015). Documenting portrayals of race/ethnicity on primetime television over a 20-year span and their association with national-level racial/ethnic attitudes. *Journal of Social Issues, 71*(1), 17-38.

- Twenge, J. M., & Campbell, W. K. (2002). Self-esteem and socioeconomic status: A meta-analytic review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 6(1), 59-71.
- Uskul, A. K., Paulmann, S., & Weick, M. (2016). Social power and recognition of emotional prosody: High power is associated with lower recognition accuracy than low power. *Emotion*, 16(1), 11-15.
- Vazire, S. (2010). Who knows what about a person? The self–other knowledge asymmetry (SOKA) model. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 98(2), 281.
- Vázquez, A., Gómez, Á., & Swann, W. B. (2018). You Just Don't Get Us!. *Social Psychology*, 49(4), 231–242.
- Van Boven, L., Dunning, D., & Loewenstein, G. (2000). Egocentric empathy gaps between owners and buyers: misperceptions of the endowment effect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(1), 66.
- Von Soest, T., Wagner, J., Hansen, T., & Gerstorf, D. (2018). Self-esteem across the second half of life: The role of socioeconomic status, physical health, social relationships, and personality factors. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 114(6), 945.
- Wagner, J., Lüdtke, O., Robitzsch, A., Göllner, R., & Trautwein, U. (2018). Self-esteem development in the school context: The roles of intrapersonal and interpersonal social predictors. *Journal of Personality*, 86(3), 481-497.
- Wetzels, R., & Wagenmakers, E. J. (2012). A default Bayesian hypothesis test for correlations and partial correlations. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 19(6), 1057-1064.
- Wiesenfeld, B. M., Swann Jr, W. B., Brockner, J., & Bartel, C. A. (2007). Is more fairness always preferred? Self-esteem moderates reactions to procedural justice. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(5), 1235-1253.

- Westover, T. (2018). *Educated: A Memoir*. Random House.
- Woltin, K. A., Corneille, O., Yzerbyt, V. Y., & Förster, J. (2011). Narrowing down to open up for other people's concerns: Empathic concern can be enhanced by inducing detailed processing. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *47*(2), 418-424.
- Yanagihara, H. (2016). *A little life*. Pan Macmillan.
- Yarkoni, T. (2019, Nov). The generalizability crisis. PsyArXiv. Retrieved from psyarxiv.com/jqw35.
- Youyou, W., Stillwell, D., Schwartz, H. A., & Kosinski, M. (2017). Birds of a feather do flock together: Behavior-based personality-assessment method reveals personality similarity among couples and friends. *Psychological Science*, *28*(3), 276-284.