Finding Value in Diversity: Verification of Personal and Social Self-views in Diverse Groups

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Abstract

A model of group processes is proposed that accords a key role to the verification of people's self-views (thoughts and feelings about the self). This approach partially incorporates past work on self-categorization (under the rubric of verification of <u>social</u> self-views) and introduces a set of processes (the verification of <u>personal</u> self-views) that is new to the groups literature. Recent conceptual and empirical analyses suggest that the verification of personal self-views represents a novel strategy for finding value in diversity.

Finding value in diversity:

Verification of personal and social self-views in diverse groups

In his global history, Jared Diamond (1997) argues persuasively that major technological advances have often occurred when previously unacquainted societies have discovered one another. Diamond's explanation for such advances is straightforward: combining the varied ideas, knowledge, and skills of different cultures greatly enhances the potential for creative synthesis. Proponents of the "value in diversity" hypothesis (e.g., Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; Watson, Kumar, & Michaelsen, 1993) have recently made a parallel--albeit more modest—claim. They have argued that contact between workers from diverse backgrounds will lead to the development of novel solutions to the tasks at hand. These novel solutions will, in turn, enable them to outperform workers from homogenous backgrounds.

Or so it would seem. As likely as the value in diversity hypothesis would appear, no one seems to have gotten the word to the participants in the relevant research. To the dismay of many, diverse groups display less attachment to each other, show less commitment to their respective organizations (Tsui, Egan & O'Reilly, 1992; Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998), communicate less with one another (Hoffman, 1985; Watson, Kumar, & Michaelsen, 1993), are absent more often (Wagner, Pfeffer, & O'Reilly, 1984; O'Reilly et al., 1989; Tsui et al., 1992), experience more conflict (Jehn et al., 1999; Pelled, Eisenhardt & Xin, 1999) and take more time to reach decisions (Hambrick et al., 1996) than homogeneous groups. There is a ray of hope, however: diversity may actually improve performance on some tasks, although it is just as apt to hurt it (e.g., Guzzo & Dickson, 1996; Milliken & Martins, 1996; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999; Jehn et. al., 1999; for a review, see Williams & O'Reilly, 1998).

Why does diversity sow dissension within groups? Some researchers (Pelled et al., 1999; Tsui et al., 1992) have proposed that identifying individual group members as members of distinct groups (i.e., "out-groups") may disrupt group dynamics. Consistent with this, research on self-categorization theory has shown that out-group members evoke more disliking, distrust, and competition than in-group members (e.g., Brewer, 1979; Hogg, Cooper-Shaw, & Holzworth, 1993; Hogg & Hardie, 1991, 1992). Moreover, biases against out-group members seem to unfold automatically: the perception of a salient quality (e.g., race, sex) more or less inevitably triggers a corresponding categorization (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). In addition, if out-group members come from cultures or subcultures that are unfamiliar to in-group members, linguistic or para-linguistic differences may foster miscommunication and misunderstanding (Hambrick et al., 1998; Palich & Gomez-Mejia, 1999). Less palpable differences associated with attitudes, perceptions, and expectations (Palich & Gomez-Mejia, 1999; Tsui et al, 1992) may pose subtler but nevertheless formidable deterrents to understanding in diverse groups. Together, these factors may combine to make diverse groups a fertile breeding ground for misunderstanding and discord.

The challenge of translating diversity's potential into reality would appear to be a formidable one. Self-categorization theory has attempted to meet this challenge by contending that diverse group members must disregard their unique qualities and instead align themselves with the superordinate identity of the group. This contention, however, is tantamount to arguing that the best way to exploit a resource (in this case, the diverse characteristics of workers) is to ignore that resource! As a strategy for finding value in diversity, self-categorization theory's approach seems untenable.

In this article, we advance an alternative strategy for finding value in diversity. Our approach, which is grounded in self-verification theory (Swann, 1983), emphasizes the processes through which people seek and attain confirmation for their self-views. We suggest that because members of diverse groups (and people in general) crave verification for their self-views, structuring groups so that they receive such verification will embolden them to make significant creative contributions to their groups. We buttress this hypothesis by describing relevant empirical evidence. To better understand this novel approach to group processes and how it differs from the approach championed by self-categorization theory (e.g., Turner et. al., 1987), we begin by contrasting the two theories.

SELF-CATEGORIZATION AND SELF-VERIFICATION

APPROACHES TO GROUP FUNCTIONING

Self-categorization theorists (e.g., Hogg & Haines, 1996; Turner, 1985) assume that groups create cohesiveness by encouraging members to see themselves in terms of their membership in the group. Theoretically, one manifestation of this cohesiveness is the in-group bias mentioned above: the tendency to favor members of one's own group over the members of other groups. Presumably, the in-group bias fosters cohesiveness within groups, which in turn promotes cooperation and productivity.

A tendency for group members to align themselves with the group comes at a price, however. The principle of functional antagonism (Turner, 1985) states that, insofar as people emphasize the qualities that they share with the group, they will de-emphasize the qualities that make them unique individuals. Indeed, when people align themselves with the group, they theoretically undergo a change "in the level of abstraction of self-categorization in the direction that represents a <u>depersonalization of self-perception</u> [our italics], a shift toward the perception

of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of

self as a unique person defined by individual differences from others" (Turner, Hogg, Oakes,

Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987: 50-51). To "sign on" to the goals of the group, then, people must

relinquish—if only temporarily—a bit of themselves. And if they do not, group functioning will

suffer.

Self-verification theory (Swann, 1983; 1996) turns this argument on its head. Whereas

self-categorization theory asks, "How do groups bring the self-views of their members into

harmony with the group's agendas?" self-verifiation theory asks, "How do individuals bring their

experiences in groups into harmony with their self-views?" Whereas in self-categorization theory

the group shapes the self-views of its members, in self-verification theory individuals shape the

responses they receive from groups. More specifically, self-verification theory proposes that

people actively strive to ensure that their experiences in groups confirm their self-views

(thoughts and feelings about the self). To this end, they employ three distinct strategies. First,

people construct self-verifying "opportunity structures" [McCall & Simmons (1966) label for

social environments that satisfy people's needs] by seeking and entering into groups that are apt

to confirm their self-views.[1] Second, people work to ensure that the evaluations they receive will

confirm their self-views by systematically communicating their self-views to fellow group

members. Finally, people use their self-views to guide the selection, retention and interpretation

of their experiences in groups. Through these processes (described further below), people

increase the chances that their experiences in groups will validate and nourish their self-views.

Self-categorization and self-verification theory also differ in their conceptualization of

why people enter groups. Self-categorization theory's intellectual parent, social identity theory

(Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), holds that people seek group membership as a means of

enhancing their self-esteem. This assumption has fallen on hard times of late, however. For example, people do not always ally themselves with groups that make them feel good about themselves. Instead, at times people identify strongly with groups that are disadvantaged and stigmatized (e.g., Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994; Turner, Hogg, Turner, & Smith, 1984); at other times they display a preference for groups that enjoy higher status than their own group (e.g., Hewstone & Ward, 1985; Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Furthermore, attempts to provide evidence that a desire for self-esteem motivates group membership have met with failure (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998).

In the wake of evidence discrediting the self-esteem hypothesis, Hogg (Hogg & Abrams, 1993; Hogg & Mullin, 1990) suggested that people join groups to reduce uncertainty and achieve meaning and clarity in social contexts. Hogg and his collaborators (Grieve & Hogg, 1999; Mullin & Hogg, 1998) have buttressed this hypothesis with evidence indicating that when people are made less certain of themselves (by, for example, having them engage in an unfamiliar task), they display more self-categorization activity (as indexed by ingroup bias). Be this as it may, as a motive for group membership, uncertainty reduction falls short because it merely suggests that people will be motivated to enter groups that are apt to quell their feelings of uncertainty (e.g., Hogg & Terry, 2000); it says nothing more about the types of groups people will choose to enter nor does it specify how people respond behaviorally to their experiences within the groups they have entered. In contrast, self-verification theory predicts which groups people will select (i.e., self-verifying groups) as well as how they are likely to react behaviorally and cognitively to their experiences in the groups they enter (i.e., by implementing the self-verification strategies alluded to earlier). The self-verification approach thus makes a priori predictions regarding group-related activities about which self-categorization theory is silent.

In the context of this article, however, a more important advantage of self-verification theory over self-categorization theory is that it suggests a novel strategy for finding value in diversity. Because understanding the link between self-verification and the functioning of diverse groups requires some familiarity with self-verification theory, we provide a brief snapshot of the theory next.

SELF-VERIFICATION STRIVINGS IN NON-GROUP SETTINGS:

THEORY AND EVIDENCE

Self-verification theory can be traced to the writings of the symbolic interactionists (e.g., Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934), who held that people form self-views as a means of making sense of the world and predicting the responses of others to them. For example, just as a woman's belief that she is intelligent will allow her to predict that others will take her opinions seriously, it will also provide her with a set of hypotheses about her relative status and the outcomes of various actions she might enact. Self-views will not only play an important role in predicting the reactions of other people, they will also be instrumental in interpreting incoming information and guiding behavior. From this vantage point, self-views represent the "lens" through which people perceive their worlds and organize their behavior. As such, it is critical that these "lenses" maintain their integrity and stability; otherwise, they will offer shifting and unreliable visions of reality. Hence, people are motivated to stabilize their self-views, and they pursue this end by working to bring others to see them as they see themselves (e.g., Secord & Backman, 1965; Lecky, 1945).

This reasoning suggests that the intended fruits of such self-verification strivings—evaluations that confirm self-views—will be alluring for two reasons. First, self-verifying evaluations will bolster people's perceptions of psychological coherence by reassuring them that

things are as they should be ("epistemic" concerns). Second, self-verifying evaluations will

signal people that they are recognized as the persons that they believe themselves to be, which

they may take as a sign that their interactions will unfold smoothly ("pragmatic" concerns).

Furthermore, these benefits of self-verification should emerge in groups as well as in dyadic

settings: whether self-verifying evaluations come from one hundred persons or a single

individual, they will reassure people that they are known and understood.

Thus, there are sound reasons to believe that people are highly motivated to obtain

evaluations that verify their self-views. Groups may offer a particularly rich source of self-

verification, as group interaction and group membership itself may provide verification of two

distinct types of self-views. First, groups may validate people's _personal_ self-views, self-views

that refer to unique properties of individuals that bear no necessary relation to group membership

(e.g., warm, athletic). Personal self-views are verified when people's interaction partners

individuate them and provide them with self-verifying feedback. Second, groups may validate

people's _social_ self-views, self-views that are based on membership in a particular social

category (e.g., professor, democrat, workgroup). Social self-views are verified through

confirmation of membership in particular groups (Pinel & Swann, 2000).

Personal and social self-views thus represent complementary components of self-

knowledge that can be verified through group membership. Several related approaches exist in

the extant literature. For example, one could think of the verification of personal self-views as

representing a form of convergent thinking (e.g., Guilford, 1959; 1967) wherein group members

come to see target persons in ways that converge with targets' self-views. Be this as it may, it is

important to note that not all instances of convergent thinking are psychologically equivalent.

Theoretically, the verification of personal self-views holds exceptionally deep meaning for

targets because self-views constitute the psychological lenses through which people interpret their experiences. In addition, verification of self-knowledge is pragmatically crucial because establishing workable agreements about "who is who" in social interaction provides the social-psychological "glue" that holds social interaction together (e.g., Goffman, 1955; Swann, 1987). For these reasons, verification of personal self-views may be far more emotionally compelling than other forms of convergent thinking.

Our approach is also related to recent suggestions that people prefer groups that are distinctive (Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). We agree that distinctiveness is valued but add that it is often the motive for verification of social self-views that underlies the preference for distinctive groups. That is, one reason why group membership is alluring is its capacity to make a statement about the self and thus validate people's social self-views. Group membership will serve this function only insofar as the group is distinctive. In the extreme case, a group that is quite non-distinctive from other groups would say very little distinctive about the self and would thus provide minimal self-verification.

Self-categorization theorists may note that the verification of social self-views is similar to self-categorization processes in that both sets of processes represent mechanisms through which people connect to groups. Nevertheless, the two approaches have very different understandings of the nature of this connection. When self-verification occurs, the flow of influence moves from the person, who enters the group with established self-views, to the group. Also, self-verification theory states that the person's self-views guide selection of the group, the identities that the person negotiates with other group members, and the meanings that the person attaches to his or her experiences in the group. From this vantage point, the group is--in the person's mind or in reality--an <u>externalization</u> of the person's self-views. In contrast, self-

categorization theory suggests that the flow of influence moves in the opposite direction, as

when the person internalizes the pre-existing values and goals (i.e., "prototype") of the group.

Thus, the self-categorization framework assumes that the group dictates the terms of the persons'

experiences with the group; the individual must simply decide whether or not to accept those

terms by using or eschewing the group as a basis for self-definition. This decision will

theoretically be determined by the extent to which the person identifies with the group, which

will affect his or her "perceptual readiness" to use the particular social category associated with

the group (Haslam, 2001).

A key quality that distinguishes a self-verification versus self-categorization approach to

groups, then, is the existence of several distinct strategies through which people theoretically

strive to verify their self-views (for a recent review, see Swann, Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2002). In

what follows, we will summarize the empirical evidence documenting the existence of these

strategies.

Choice of self-verifying opportunity structures. For decades, observers have noted

anecdotal evidence indicating that people seek occupations and other social contexts that provide

an optimal fit for their self-views (e.g., Englander, 1960; Secord & Backman, 1965; Super,

1966). Recent investigations in controlled laboratory settings have provided complementary

support for this idea. For example, Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and Giesler (1992) asked participants

with positive and negative self-views whether they would prefer to interact with evaluators who

had favorable or unfavorable impressions of them. Contrary to the common assumption that

people always prefer and seek those who adore them, just as those with positive self-views

preferred favorable partners, those with negative self-views preferred unfavorable partners. More

than a dozen replications of this effect using diverse methodologies have confirmed that people

prefer self-verifying evaluations and interaction partners. Both men and women display this propensity even if their self-views happen to be negative and even when the dimension is relatively immutable (intelligence). Moreover, when people choose negative partners over positive ones, they are not doing so merely to avoid positive evaluators whom (they believe) they are apt to disappoint. To the contrary, people choose negative partners even when the alternative is participating in a different experiment (Swann, Wenzlaff, & Tafarodi, 1992).

Psychological and physical withdrawal from non-verifying relationships. Just as self-verification strivings influence the contexts people enter initially, so too will they influence whether or not they remain in those contexts. Research on married couples, roommates and work groups suggests that they will gravitate toward partners who provide verification and drift away from those who do not. For example, people who wound up in marriages in which their spouses perceived them more (or less) favorably than they perceived themselves withdrew from the relationship, either psychologically (Burke & Stets, 1999; De La Ronde & Swann, 1998; Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994) or through divorce or separation (Cast & Burke, 2002). Moreover, college students with firmly held self-views planned to find a new roommate if their current roommate perceived them more or less favorably than they perceived themselves (Swann & Pelham, 2002). Finally, in a prospective study of the employment histories of 13,154 people, Schroeder (2001) found that for people with high esteem, turnover was greatest among people who failed to receive raises; for people with low esteem, turnover was greatest among people who received pay *increases.* Apparently, when faced with a choice between their negative self-views or high salaries, people with low esteem chose to retain their negative self-views.

Researchers have also uncovered preliminary evidence that people prefer verification for their *social* self-views, even if those self-views happened to be negative. For example, members

of low status groups are sometimes quite reluctant to abandon firmly held identities, even when

doing so would be highly advantageous. Witness Metcalf's (1976) study of Navajo women who

moved to urban settings so that they could enjoy improved educational and financial

opportunities. When they arrived in the city, these women found that they were required to give

up their traditional dress, language, and ways of doing things. This caused them to feel so

uprooted and cut off from their "true selves" (i.e., individuals who dressed and spoke like

Navajos) that they were eager to return to their reservations despite the hardships that awaited

them there.

        Considered together, these data show that people gravitate toward relationships and

settings that provide them with evaluations that confirm both their personal and social self-views.

Such tendencies have obvious implications for people's choice of groups as well as their choice

of relationship partners within those groups.

        Evocation of self-confirming reactions from partners. In theory, people may ensure

that they receive self-verifying reactions within groups by judiciously displaying identity cues.

Ideally, identity cues are readily controlled and reliably evoke self-verifying responses from

others. Physical appearances represent a particularly salient class of identity cues. The clothes

one wears, for instance, can advertise numerous social self-views, including one's political

leanings, income level, sexual preference, and so on. For instance, people routinely display

company or school logos, buttons, bumper stickers, and wear uniforms with an eye to evoking

reactions that verify their personal and social self-views. Pratt and Rafaeli (1997; Rafaeli &

Pratt, 1993) found that dress, style, and fabric revealed a great deal about individuals' jobs, roles,

and self concepts. Even body posture and demeanor communicate identities to others. Take, for

example, the CEO who projects importance in his bearing or the new employee who exudes

naiveté. Such identity cues can be used to announce social self-views (e.g., group affiliations) as well as personal self-views.

Note that people should theoretically display identity cues to communicate negative as well as positive identities. Some highly visible examples include skinheads and members of the Ku Klux Klan. Of course, critics could point out that although such groups are held in low esteem by the larger society, the people who join them probably regard them quite positively. The results of a recent study by Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli and Morris (2002) addresses this ambiguity. These investigators discovered that people structure their personal environments (e.g., bedrooms and offices) to communicate negative as well as positive identities to others. For example, just as people brought observers to recognize them as "closed" and "messy," they also brought them to see them as "open" and "tidy." Hence, it appears that people use identity cues to communicate their negative as well as positive self-views to others.

Even if people fail to gain self-verifying reactions through their choice of environments or the display of identity cues, they may still acquire such evaluations through their overt behavior. Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, and Pelham (1990), for example, found that mildly depressed college students were more likely to solicit unfavorable feedback from their roommates than were non-depressed students. Moreover, students' efforts to acquire unfavorable feedback apparently bore fruit: the more unfavorable feedback they solicited in the middle of the semester, the more their roommates derogated them and planned to find another roommate at the semester's end.

If people are motivated to bring others to verify their self-conceptions, they should intensify their efforts to elicit self-confirmatory reactions when they suspect that they are misconstrued. Swann and Read (1981b, Study 2) tested this idea by informing participants who perceived themselves as either likeable or dislikeable that they would be interacting with people

who probably found them likeable or dislikeable. Participants tended to elicit reactions that

confirmed their self-views, especially if they suspected that evaluators' appraisals might

disconfirm their self-conceptions. Therefore, participants displayed increased interest in self-

verification when they suspected that evaluators' appraisals challenged their self-views.

People will even go so far as to stop working on tasks if they sense that continuing to do

so will bring them non-verifying feedback. Brockner (1985) recruited participants with positive

or negative self-views to work on a proofreading task. He then informed some participants that

they would be receiving more money than they deserved (i.e., positive feedback) or exactly what

they deserved (i.e., neutral feedback). Self-verification theory would predict that people's self-

views would influence how they responded to positive as compared to neutral feedback. This is

precisely what happened. Whereas participants with positive self-views worked the most when

they believed they would receive positive feedback, participants with negative self-views worked

the least when they received positive feedback. Apparently, people with negative self-views

withdrew effort when they thought that they would be receiving positive feedback because,

unlike those with positive self-views, they felt undeserving.

"Seeing" more self-confirming evidence than actually exists. The research literature

provides abundant evidence that expectancies (including self-conceptions) channel information

processing (e.g., Higgins & Bargh, 1987). This suggests that self-conceptions may guide

people's perceptions of their experiences in groups in ways that make those experiences seem

more self-verifying than they are in reality.

Self-views may guide at least three distinct aspects of information processing. For

example, Swann and Read (1981b, Study 1) focused on selective attention. Their results showed

that participants with positive self-views spent longer scrutinizing evaluations when they

anticipated that the evaluations would be positive and people with negative self-views spent longer

scrutinizing evaluations when they anticipated that the evaluations would be negative. In a second

study, the researchers linked self-views to selective recall. In particular, participants who

perceived themselves positively remembered more positive than negative statements, and those

who perceived themselves negatively remembered more negative than positive statements.

Finally, numerous investigators have shown that people tend to interpret information in ways that

reinforce their self-views. For example, Markus (1977) found that people endorse the validity of

feedback only insofar as it fits with their self-conceptions. Similarly, Story (1998) reported that

just as people with high self-esteem remembered feedback as being more favorable than it actually

was, people with low self-esteem remembered it as being more negative than it actually was.

Together, such attentional, encoding, retrieval, and interpretational processes may

systematically skew people's perceptions of their groups. For this reason, even when people

happen to wind up in groups whose agendas are somewhat discrepant with their self-views, they

may fail to recognize the discrepancy.

Moderator variables.   The research literature thus suggests that people may strive to

verify their self-views by gravitating toward self-confirming groups, by systematically eliciting

self-confirming reactions within those groups, and by perceiving their experiences within groups

in a self-verifying manner. Although people must obviously choose to enter particular groups

before the other processes unfold, once people are in groups the other forms of self-verification

occur more or less simultaneously.

The research literature indicates that self-verification strivings are relatively robust and

distinct from other motives. For example, evidence that people with negative as well as positive

self-views display such self-verification strivings suggests that these strivings are distinct from

and can override the desire to be viewed positively. Having said this, we should add that

researchers have identified several variables that moderate the magnitude of self-verification

strivings. One such variable is the nature of people's self-views. Whereas some work has shown

that people strive for verification of self-views that are highly specific (e.g., athletic or sociable;

Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989) as well as global (e.g., low self-esteem, worthless; Geisler,

Josephs, & Swann, 1996), other work has indicated that people are more inclined to strive for

verification of strongly held self-views (i.e., self-views that are important to them and of which

they are certain; Pelham, 1991; Swann & Ely, 1984; Swann & Pelham, 2002).

Social situational factors may also moderate self-verification strivings. For example, a

group atmosphere that is open and encourages freedom of expression should foster self-

verification by encouraging people to express themselves freely. Moreover, variables that

increase the psychological significance of group membership should increase self-verification

strivings (much as do increments in the strength of people's self-views). Witness, for example,

Hixon and Swann's (1993) evidence that people were more apt to seek verification from

interaction partners when they expected to interact with those partners for a substantial period of

time. These data suggest that people may be more inclined to seek verification if they expect to

be affiliated with the group for some time. From this vantage point, attempts to determine if

people prefer self-verification in group settings should examine groups that remain intact for a

substantial period. The research we describe in the next section possessed this quality.

<center>SELF-VERIFICATION IN DIVERSE GROUP SETTINGS</center>

In a prospective study, Swann, Milton and Polzer (2000) followed a group of MBA

students for a semester. The measure of personal self-verification was the extent to which

individuals brought other group members to see them as they saw themselves (i.e., congruently)

over the first nine weeks of the semester. In addition, late in the semester, they assessed

participants' feelings of connection to the group (i.e., group identification, social integration, and

emotional conflict) as well as performance on creative tasks (e.g., tasks that benefit from divergent

perspectives, such as devising a marketing plan for a new product or determining how to increase

the productivity of a failing corporation). They discovered that self-verification was related to

both feelings of connection and creative task performance. Moreover, in addition to the direct link

between verification and performance on creative tasks, there was also evidence that feelings of

connection to the group partially mediated the relation between verification and performance on

creative tasks. Finally, verification of personal self-views was linked to connectedness and

performance whether the self-views happened to be negative or positive. Apparently, when group

members had their unique attributes and perspectives verified, they felt recognized and

understood. Such feelings emboldened them to offer creative ideas and insights that they might

otherwise have felt inhibited to share. In addition, feeling known and understood by the group

may have made members feel more identified with the group and more motivated to cooperate

with other members of the group.

Self-categorization theory cannot accommodate Swann et al.'s (2000) evidence that

verification of participants' personal self-views increased identification with their groups and

fostered creative task performance (see, for example, Hogg, Cooper-Shaw, & Holzworth, 1993).

To the contrary, self-categorization theory would have predicted that less verification of personal

self-views would have fostered identification with the group and creative task performance.[2] But

if Swann et al.'s (2000) findings fly in the face of self-categorization theory, they are roughly

consistent with a previous study by Prentice, Miller, and Lightdale (1994). In a study of

members of eating halls at Princeton, Prentice et al. (2002) discovered that in some groups, the

extent to which group members liked one another was quite unrelated to how attached they were

to the group in the abstract. They argued that this phenomenon might reflect the fact that from

the outset these eating clubs were based on interpersonal attraction rather than joint commitment

to a goal.

In this connection it is worth noting that many of the studies that support self-

categorization theory are either based on minimal groups (in which group members are

completely unacquainted and are brought together for the explicit purpose of completing the

experiment) or on groups in which personal relationships are deemphasized, such as sports teams

(Hogg & Hardie 1991). In both instances, there is little that brings people together aside from

their common goals. This bias in the types of groups sampled by self-categorization researchers

might explain why they have generally found that interpersonal attraction does not facilitate

performance in such groups (e.g., Hogg & Haines, 1996). Although this bias has presumably

been inadvertent, we believe that it has led researchers to underestimate the importance of

personal relationships in groups. In the following section, we review evidence indicating that the

nature of personal relationships between group members can be important determinants of

productivity in groups, especially when those groups are highly diverse.

Self-verification and the "Value in Diversity" Hypothesis

Polzer et al. (in press) asked whether the identity negotiation processes identified by

Swann et al. (2000) moderated the relation between diversity and performance. They began by

defining diversity as the amount of inter-individual variability across several demographic and

functional categories (e.g., sex, race, previous job function, area of concentration in the MBA

program). They reasoned that the identity negotiation processes through which group members

come to see one another as they see themselves might offset the tendency for categorical

differences to disrupt group processes. In particular, they predicted that verification of personal

self-views might encourage diverse group members to apply their differences in knowledge,

experiences, perspective, and networks associated with their cultural identities and categorical

differences to the tasks at hand (Ely and Thomas, 2001) and thus translate their diverse qualities

into exceptional performance. Consistent with this, they found that the self-verification achieved

within the first ten minutes of interaction moderated the impact of diversity on performance.

Specifically, among groups that achieved high levels of self-verification, diversity facilitated

performance. In contrast, among groups that failed to achieve substantial self-verification,

diversity undermined performance. Thus, group members who quickly recognized the unique

qualities of their fellow group members were optimally positioned to capitalize on their

divergent perspectives about their work subsequently.

Polzer et al.'s evidence of links between self-verification, diversity, and performance are

provocative, for they suggest that the failure of previous researchers to consider self-verification

processes may explain why they obtained mixed support for the value in diversity hypothesis.

Taken together, the powerful direct and moderating effects of self-verification on performance

demonstrated by Swann et al. (2000) and Polzer et al. (2002) raise a key question: why did some

groups achieve high levels of self-verification in the first place? Swann, Kwan, Polzer and

Milton (2001) hypothesized that the answer might be the extent to which study group members

individuated one another.

Individuation and positivity of impressions. When group members form impressions

of each other, they can base their impressions on at least two distinct types of information. In the

individuation strategy, perceivers carefully attend to and use idiosyncratic information about

each target, noting what each target says and does and translating this idiosyncratic information

into a corresponding impression. Alternatively, in the homogenization strategy, perceivers may place targets in a category based on race, gender, or other qualities and conceive of the target as a mere exemplar of that category (e.g., Allport, 1954; Brewer & Miller, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). When perceivers encounter several targets from another group (i.e., "out-group members"), the homogenization strategy leads them to impute the same qualities to everyone.

When do perceivers individuate versus homogenize targets? The contact hypothesis suggests that bringing members of different groups together under "favorable conditions" encourages them to abandon their mutual stereotypes about one another in favor of individuated impressions (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000). Specifically, group members tend to individuate one another insofar as contact is voluntary, equal status, cooperative, and extended in duration (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969; Stephan, 1985). In addition, people's initial impressions of one another must be positive (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000; Prentice & Miller, 1999).

In the sample of MBA students discussed above, nearly all of the conditions for individuation were met—students had enrolled in the business school voluntarily, they all had student status, and they were encouraged to work together cooperatively over an extended period of time. Yet there was one necessary ingredient for individuation that was met in only some groups: positivity of initial impressions. That is, whereas some perceivers were quite favorably disposed toward the other group members, others were only neutral toward them.

How might the positivity of initial impressions set the stage for individuation? Intuitively, members of diverse groups should perceive their groups as more variegated than non-diverse groups simply because, by definition, there is more variability in such groups. Nevertheless, perceivers who are neutral or negative toward targets may not fully appreciate such variability because they may attend to superficial information about category membership at the expense of

information about the unique properties of individuals. For example, research on the out-group

homogeneity effect suggests that perceivers not only dislike members of other social categories,

they also perceive them as less variable than members of their own categories (e.g., Boldry &

Kashy, 1999; Brauer, 2001; Judd & Park, 1988; Linville, Fischer, & Salovey, 1989; Park &

Rothbart, 1982). As a result, perceivers who are neutral or negative toward targets may fail to

look beyond superficial cues to the group membership of such targets and may use these cues as

a basis for lumping them into a category as in, for example, "out-group members." This

tendency to homogenize targets may be particularly strong if targets possess diverse

characteristics, as salient markers of group identification may invite perceivers to apply the "out-

group" label to them. As a result, when perceivers are relatively neutral or negative toward

targets, more diversity should lead to more homogenization.

In contrast, perceivers who have positive impressions of targets may attend to the

idiosyncratic qualities that provide the basis for individuating such targets. Among such

perceivers, then, increases in diversity will mean increases in the raw materials available for

individuation. Furthermore, more positive impressions will foster more communication (e.g.,

Dabbs & Ruback, 1987), thereby providing perceivers with additional raw materials for use as a

basis of individuation. Positive perceivers, then, may be particularly sensitive to the unique

qualities inherent in diverse targets. As a result, among positive perceivers, more diversity should

lead to more individuation.

The results supported this reasoning. That is, Swann et al. (2002) discovered that when

when perceivers' impressions were relatively neutral, more diversity led to more

homogenization; in contrast, when perceivers' initial impressions were positive, more group

diversity was associated with more individuated inferences. Moreover, the extent to which

perceivers individuated targets at the beginning of the semester predicted the degree to which

they perceived them in self-verifying ways nine weeks later, such that more individuation led to

more self-verification. Apparently, individuation is linked to self-verification because perceivers

can will verify the self-views of targets only if they first recognize what their self-views (or

qualities associated with them) are. Putting these findings together with the results of the earlier

findings in this line of research, it appears that positive impressions moderate the effect of

diversity on individuation, which in turn fosters self-verification. The resulting self-verification

enhances creative task performance directly and heightens the performance benefits of diversity,

with both of these effects partially mediated by feelings of connection to the group.

THE VERIFICATION OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SELF-VIEWS IN DIVERSE GROUPS

       The studies of MBA students by Polzer et al (2002) and Swann et al (2000; 2002) provides

evidence of a new pathway to effective processes and performance in diverse groups—a

pathway characterized by verification –of –personal self-views. This research thus complements

recent work by Chatman and her colleagues (Chatman, Polzer, Barsdale, & Neale, 1998;

Chatman & Flynn, 2001). Chatman and colleagues were likewise interested in developing a

strategy for counter-acting the potentially negative effects of diversity on performance. Based on

self-categorization theory, they reasoned that fostering a collectivist culture in diverse groups

(thus verifying a social self-view) would reduce the salience of categorical differences between

group members. In support of this prediction, they discovered that diverse groups which

developed a collectivist culture outperformed groups which developed an individualistic culture.

       The work of Chatman and her colleagues, in conjunction with the companion findings of

Polzer et al (2002) and Swann et al. (2002), suggests that destructive intergroup categorizations

(e.g., perceptions based on racial prejudice) can be reduced in two ways. First, Chatman et al.'s

work suggests that negative categorizations can be replaced with collective categorizations that encourage group members to rally around their shared social self-view. Second, pernicious categorizations can be replaced by individuated perceptions that verify the personal self-views of group members [cf. Gaertner, Mann, Murell, and Dovidio's (1989) evidence that people can shift away from problematic intergroup categorizations either by emphasizing a superordinate social self-view or by decategorizing both the in-group and out-group through individuation].

Note that self-categorization theory's principle of functional antagonism would suggest that the social self-view pathway and the personal self-view pathway are incompatible. That is, self-categorization theory assumes that increasing the salience of one level of categorization (e.g., the relevant social self-view) will necessarily decrease the salience of other levels of categorization (e.g., personal self-views). We argue, however, that as long as <u>social</u> self-views are not incompatible with <u>personal</u> self-views, verification of one class of self-views does not preclude verification of the other class of self-views. As a result, the relation between verification of personal and social self-views is not necessarily hydraulic, as assumed by a self-categorization approach. For example, the tendency for new group members to become more bonded to the group as they receive verification for their social self-view "group member" (which highlights commonalties such as shared work goals, shared work activities, and shared norms) may be <u>accompanied by</u> a tendency for other group members to simultaneously provide them with verification for personal self-views that reflect their unique qualities. People may thus discard destructive intergroup categorizations due to increased verification of both their social *and* personal self-views.

A recent study reported by Ely and Thomas (2001) illustrates such simultaneous verification of social and personal self-views. These authors studied three professional services

firms that had recruited and retained a culturally diverse workforce. Through interviews with the

employees at these firms, they identified several distinct approaches to diversity in the workplace.

Of greatest relevance here, in the "integration-and-learning perspective," unique qualities of

different group members were viewed as assets and were thus openly discussed. Such discussions

proved to be extraordinarily fruitful: "This process communicated to all employees that they were

valued and respected and encouraged them to value and express themselves as members of their

racial identity groups. These aspects of the way they functioned afforded opportunities for cross-

cultural learning, which enhanced the group's work." (p. 265).

Ely and Thomas discovered that in groups that featured an integration-and-learning

perspective, group members were very committed to the ideals of the group (which focused their

attention on their shared goals and activities) but also felt that they were known, understood and

valued by the other group members as individuals. Here, then, group members enjoyed

verification of both their social self-views (associated with their shared membership in the

group) and personal self-views (associated with idiosyncratic personal traits and membership in

social categories other than the work group in question). Not surprisingly from the perspective

of self-verification theory, members of such groups performed quite well.

The results of Ely and Thomas's (2001) research thus support our suggestion that the

verification of personal and social self-views are not antagonistic as suggested by Turner's

(1985) principle of functional antagonism. Having said this, we hasten to add that we agree that

there are instances in which verification of one class of self-view is not accompanied by

verification of the other. As a result, there are four possible self-verification configurations

possible in workgroups. As we will show below, each of these configurations will be associated

with a distinctive type of attachment to the group.

Personal self-views verified, social self-views verified. This is the configuration that was theoretically present in organizations that featured an integration and learning perspective in Ely and Thomas's (2001) research. Compatibility between personal self-views and the goals and qualities of the group allow group members to enjoy verification of their personal and social self-views simultaneously. Verification of their personal self-views will make them feel known and understood and thus increase their attraction to other group members as well as their commitment to the group. Quite independently, verification of their social self-views will increase their allegiance to, and interest in remaining in, the group.

Recall that self-categorization theory would not hold this configuration as viable. That is, the principles of functional antagonism and depersonalization assert that people cannot enjoy verification of distinct personal and social self-views simultaneously; insofar as people conceptualize themselves in terms of a social self-view (e.g., professor), they are less likely to think of themselves in terms of an unrelated idiosyncratic personal self-view (e.g., witty). As we will note later in this article, the possibility that people can "have it both ways" has important implications for how one approaches diverse groups. Rather than mandating that all group members should "sign on" to a common super-ordinate group identity as suggested by self-categorization theory, our approach suggests that people can avoid this "one size fits all" approach and instead enjoy verification for both personal and social self-views. This combination should be optimal for diverse groups engaged in creative tasks that benefit from divergent thinking yet require disparate ideas to be integrated. Cross-functional task forces, top management teams, and other groups working on complex, interdependent tasks should gain the most from such verification. We will return to this point later in this article.

Personal self-views verified, social self-views not verified. In such groups, members

will feel connected to the group due to their personal attachment to the other group members.

Nevertheless, because their social self-views are not verified, they may feel somewhat estranged

from the group as an abstract construct. They may consequently fail to openly identify

themselves with the group as a whole and may fail to engage in some tasks associated with group

membership. Consider, for example, a member of a business school who studies organizational

phenomena by constructing theoretical mathematical models. Because she loves the precision of

quantitative models, she may feel greater intellectual affinity toward the economics department

than her own school. She may express her ambivalence by failing to attend school meetings and

by developing a strategic cough when reporting her school affiliation to others. Nevertheless,

because her business school colleagues frequently verify her personal self-views (e.g., as

intelligent, fun, etc.), she may feel attached to them and seek them out. Such verification of her

personal self-views may thus encourage her to remain in the school of business despite her

preference for the social self-view associated with another department. From a self-verification

standpoint (i.e., holding equal pragmatic considerations), whether or not she ultimately remains

in the business school will be determined by the relative strength of two countervailing forces:

the enjoyment of the personal self-verification she receives from her co-workers and the

dissatisfaction with her membership in the school of business. As such, she will remain in the

school of business as long as nothing happens to alter the status of these two influences. This

combination should be optimal for groups when members work relatively independently on

separate tasks (or subtasks) and do not require their efforts to be closely integrated. In such

cases, highly talented "star" individuals may be brought together who are best suited to perform

relatively independently (and can achieve extraordinarily high performance while doing so),

even though they may not fit particularly well with the identity of the group.

Personal self-views not verified, social self-views verified. Members of such groups will feel committed to the group as a whole but feel alienated from the members of the group. Such feelings of detachment from the other group members will produce some inclination to leave the group but these feelings will be offset by the fact that group membership verifies an important social self-view. Imagine, for example, the rigorous analyst who revels in his company affiliation but feels no connection to his coworkers. Here again, a self-verification analysis would suggest that the man will remain affiliated with the group insofar as nothing happens to upset the balance between the two sources of verification. This combination is akin to self-categorization theory's principle of depersonalization. It may be optimal for group tasks that require rapid execution of tightly connected but routine subtasks rather than creative input or divergent thinking.

Personal self-views not verified, social self-views not verified. Membership in such groups will be characterized by lack of any feeling of connection to the other group members or to the group more generally. For example, consider the draftee who dislikes all aspects of the military and the military establishment, including the other draftees. Unless there is a compelling reason to remain engaged in the group (e.g., the possibility of court martial), people will withdraw either psychologically or in actuality from such groups. There are no group tasks for which this combination is optimal.

Which brings us to a more general point. In this article, we are not questioning the existence or importance of the group-to-self flow of influence championed by self-categorization theory; rather, we are merely suggesting that this group-to-self influence process captures only a small portion of the psychologically significant processes that unfold in groups. By assuming

that, under optimal circumstances, people are passively influenced by implacable group members, the self-categorization approach overlooks the profound influence that people may exert on their experiences in groups. That is, armed with a powerful motive to verify their personal and social self-views, people may exert considerable control over the groups they join, the reactions they elicit and the manner in which they process those reactions. In this way, people may actively ensure that their experiences in groups are self-verifying ones.

To be sure, we are not suggesting that people never change in response to their experiences in groups or that such changes never occur in the manner specified by self-categorization theory. An extreme example includes members of cults or other total institutions who internalize, if only temporarily, the values of the group. And there are surely other less dramatic instances in which people are coaxed into groups or cajoled by members of those groups into accepting ideas that are alien to their self-views. Witness the intensive training programs that many corporations have designed to socialize fresh recruits (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996).

Often, however, we suspect that changes in people's personal self-views occur in the context of their efforts to verify their social self-views. Imagine, for example, a moderately liberal professor who joins a group of feminists on campus because she feels that the goals and social identity of such a group provides verification of her view of herself as a liberal intellectual. Joining the group may expose the professor to a wealth of reminders of her personal self-view. Other group members may, for example, communicate expectancies about how feminists conduct themselves, present information which supports liberal views, and in discussions focus on the feminist perspective on social issues. Such experiences will increase the salience of the professor's liberal self-views, and this increase in salience may, in turn,

encourage her to contemplate examples of her past behavior that are consistent with liberalism. Such heightened attention to instances of liberalism may polarize her attitudes, resulting in a shift toward more liberalism (e.g., Tesser, 1978).

In the process of verifying her "liberal intellectual" personal self-view, then, the woman underwent experiences that activated values that were consistent with the values of the group she joined, much as self-categorization theory would suggest. Nevertheless, note that the shift in self-views in a liberal direction occurred in the service of verifying the larger self-view, "liberal intellectual." Indeed, had she not viewed herself as a liberal, it is doubtful that the professor would have joined the feminist group in the first place. In short, when temporary (or permanent) changes in the self emerge, they often do so as by-products of efforts to verify personal and social self-views. This example thus illustrates how the "group-to-self" influence process championed by self-categorization theory is embedded in a larger process in which the self plays an active role. In the section that follows, we suggest that acknowledging the active role of the self in teams and workgroups points to several new research questions.

REMAINING QUESTIONS

For those interested in the variables that determine the effectiveness of teams, the self-verification perspective points to several new research agendas. One general goal will be to examine how self-verification processes unfold in groups. Researchers have shown that individual perceivers form impressions of individual targets very quickly (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992; 1993), but relatively little is known about the fate of these initial impressions when perceivers are members of a group. Do perceivers observe the reactions of other perceivers to particular targets, use these observations to infer the impressions of these other perceivers, and adjust their own reactions to targets accordingly? If so, such "contagion" could cause group

members' appraisals of a particular target to converge over time. Depending on the veracity of

the initial perceivers' impressions, this process could set into motion a reinforcing spiral of

cognitive and behavioral activity that might systematically raise or lower the amount of

verification enjoyed by targets—an outcome that could have bear importantly on group

functioning.

Factors that impede or distort the process of identity negotiation in groups deserve special

attention. A commonplace example involves instances in which one or more perceivers

underestimate a target's capability, causing the target to feel offended or insulted. Just as

potentially problematic, however, are instances in which targets feel fraudulent because

perceivers have mistakenly imputed qualities to them that they do not possess. Targets may react

to such incongruencies by masking their insecurities behind displays of compensatory arrogance,

audacity, or superciliousness. Such reactions may systematically disrupt group functioning.

Although incongruencies may emerge in any groups, they may be particularly common

in diverse groups. For example, perceivers may use prejudicial stereotypes to form impressions

of targets who are demographically or functionally unique. In addition, targets from distinct

groups may be more likely to hold self-views that clash with the team's prevailing values, norms,

and shared identity. The joint impact of perceivers with stereotype-based impressions and targets

with atypical self-views may systematically distort the identity-negotiation process. The poverty

of self-verification that results may deter minority members from expressing their unique ideas

and, on those occasions when they manage to express their ideas, diminish the recognition they

receive from the group. Future work might strive to identify the particular difficulties that

members of minority groups have in attaining self-verification in diverse groups (e.g., Nemeth,

1986).

Demographic and functional differences may be particularly problematic when they are organized around clearly demarcated subgroups (Lau & Murnighan, 1998). When subgroups become salient, verification may well become the norm among members *within* a subgroup (based on individuation of "ingroup" members), whereas stereotyping and prejudice may characterize appraisals *across* subgroups (based on homogenization of "outgroup" members; Judd & Park, 1988; Park & Rothbart, 1982). Early and Mosakowski (2000) demonstrated the negative consequences of such dynamics in multinational teams composed of two subgroups organized around members' nationalities. Although Early and Mosakowski (2000) discussed the importance of member's nationalities to their self-identities, they did not explicitly consider the contribution of patterns of self-verification within these groups. Conceivably, difficulties grew out of a tendency for group members to receive verification only from members of their own countries. If so, further research should explicitly explore the impact of subgroups on self-verification processes. The results of such analyses may help identify potential threats to self-verification and such information may, in turn, enable team leaders to take steps to ward off discord.

Identification of processes that distort the identity negotiation processes in diverse groups should be complemented by efforts to uncover strategies for facilitating self-verification in such groups. One useful approach might be to teach group members to embrace select principles of multiculturalism (e.g., Takaki, 1993). For example, instead of glossing over or merely tolerating differences among themselves, group members may be taught to embrace those differences. Naturally, constructing work environments that promote the verification of personal and social self-views will be a central component of this approach. To this end, group leaders might attempt to cultivate a psychologically safe climate (Edmondson, 1999) that will encourage group

members to express their viewpoints openly (within reason). They may also urge members to

display respect and appreciation for the unique qualities of others and to individuate members of

other groups rather than conceiving of them as mere exemplars of a category. Moreover, group

leaders might encourage members to strive to understand the antecedents of conflict rather than

reacting defensively to it. These guidelines should be especially important early in the life of

groups when identities are first being negotiated. They may also be important, however, when

members of established groups strive to re-negotiate an identity that had been agreed upon

earlier.

The goal of facilitating self-verification may also be approached through a task analysis.

Such an analysis should focus on identifying the goals of the workgroup, the types of verification

that are apt to facilitate those goals, and the forms of verification that are possible at various

stages of group formation and maintenance. For example, tasks that are highly nuanced, vague,

or underspecified tend to require more divergent thinking, whereas tasks that involve multiple

well-defined steps call for carefully orchestrated division of labor with relatively little divergent

thinking. Our formulation suggests that verifying personal self-views should enhance divergent

thinking, whereas verifying social self-views may increase the amount of effort people expend

but will not necessarily foster divergent thinking or creativity. Research is needed to identify the

match among task characteristics, the shared and unique abilities of team members, and types of

verification. Models of group performance that stress the importance of diagnosing a group's

task (e.g., Hackman, 2002; McGrath, 1984) could offer useful guidelines for this research.

More generally, although our focus in this paper has been on small groups, the

verification approach could also illuminate processes that unfold in larger organizations. For

example, verification processes may, in part, mediate the successfulness of programs designed to

maximize person-organization fit and other types of organizational socialization programs.

Moreover, managers who appreciate the psychological importance of self-verification may be at

an advantage in designing interdependent work, motivating employees or colleagues, or leading

teams. One key goal here may be maximizing the flexibility of the organization in general and

work environment in particular. Such flexibility may encourage workers to develop and express

their unique preferences and work styles and thus construct idiosyncratically skewed work

environments that are exceptionally self-verifying. Such environments will, in turn, foster

creativity and innovation.

Clearly there is much to be learned about the nature and consequences of identity

negotiation processes in diverse groups. Nevertheless, we believe that pursuing these issues will

yield rich dividends, for there are sound reasons to believe that the social psychological climate

that prevails in groups will be a powerful determinant of innovation--even more powerful,

perhaps, than the abilities and other characteristics of group members. This assertion brings us

back to a central theme in Diamond's (1997) world history with which we opened this article.

Diamond contended that it is a mischaracterization to say that great leaps forward in human

technology occurred when brilliant people had dazzling insights, for the earth has always been

populated by brilliant people and there have been precious few great leaps forward. Instead, he

concluded that major advances occurred when conditions ensured that people communicated

distinctive ideas and unique perspectives. In this tradition, we suggest that the communication of

distinctive ideas and unique perspectives is every bit as essential to innovation today as it ever

was. Moreover, ensuring that group members enjoy verification of their personal and social

self-views represents the key to attaining such communication patterns.

Footnotes

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[1] Other authors have suggested that people actively construct social environments that suit their idiosyncratic preferences and agendas. For example, in his attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) model, Schneider (1987) proposed that people choose groups whose members seem similar to them in personality, interests and values [see also Pfeffer's (1983) organizational demography model]. Also, in their group socialization model, Moreland and Levine (2000) acknowledge the reciprocal influence of individuals and groups and suggest that group members are most attracted to, and more apt to remain in, groups that they believe will satisfy their goals. Our formulation is unique in its emphasis on the role of people's self-views in this active construction process.

[2] Advocates of self-categorization theory could argue that the theory predicts depersonalization or self-stereotyping in intergroup contexts and personalization (seeing the self as a unique individual, as in self-verification effects) in intragroup contexts. Perhaps the climate in our study groups was intragroup in nature and therefore facilitated personalization. Nevertheless, this would not explain why self-verification effects were positively associated with connection to the group when self-categorization theory predicts a negative association.

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