

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: The Effects of Self-esteem and Threat on the  
Formation of Prejudiced Attitudes and Ingroup Bias.

Abstract approved: Cooper B Holmes

It has been shown fairly consistently that those individuals low in self-esteem, as well as those exposed to a threat tend to develop prejudiced attitudes towards outgroups, or groups to which they do not belong. However, when these two factors are combined, threatened individuals who are high in self-esteem also develop prejudiced attitudes, as well as an ingroup bias. The current study sought to further investigate the relationship between these two factors.

One hundred and fifty lower division sociology students were given a self-esteem measure and then separated into high and low groups on the basis of scoring .5 standard deviations above or .5 standard deviations below the mean, respectively. The remaining 87 subjects were then randomly assigned to a threat or nonthreat condition, then completed an ingroup rating scale (average Emporia State student) and an outgroup rating scale (average minority student).

A 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVA showed highly significant effects for the rating variable, with minority students being rated lower than the average ESU student,  $F(1,83) = 40.29, p < .0001$ . However, there were no significant main effects for either self-esteem or threat. Thus, although there was definitely a more negative rating of minority students, this result was consistent across all four cells.

This result contradicted findings of previous research and one possible explanation was the nature of the threat condition. It is possible the threat used was not significant enough to cause differences between the groups. Another possibility for the lack of differences might be the nature of the sample. The majority of students at Emporia State come from rural communities with limited exposure to minorities. This rather homogeneous sample was possibly more homogeneous in their attitudes, regardless of level of self-esteem. Lack of contact with minority students among the sample might also have been a contributing factor to the more negative ratings across all groups. These possibilities could be of great interest to future researchers and warrant further investigation.

THE EFFECTS OF SELF-ESTEEM AND THREAT ON THE FORMATION OF  
PREJUDICED ATTITUDES AND INGROUP BIAS

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Division of Psychology  
and Special Education  
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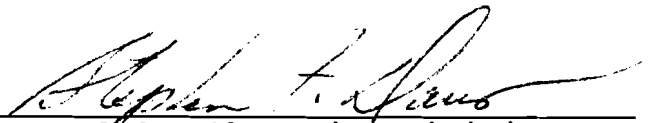
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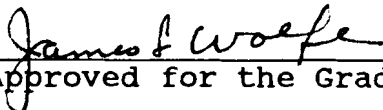
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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

The study of prejudice has been of interest to social scientists for many years, and despite the considerable amount of research which has been done, several theories fail to account for the many different aspects of social bias (Traub-Werner, 1984). Prejudice is such a complex phenomenon it is no wonder researchers encounter difficulty when attempting an explanation. Perhaps some of the difficulty arises from the fact that prejudice is an attitude, with several different components. When trying to explain an attitude, three component parts must be examined (Ehrlich, 1973). First, there is the cognitive dimension, which refers to the way people think. With regard to prejudice, this would involve stereotypes people hold about a group. A second dimension involves the emotional aspect of prejudice, referring to the feelings and emotions which are attached to the stereotypes. The final dimension involved in prejudice is the behavioral aspect, or how people act towards certain groups in society. All three of these dimensions are important in the formation of attitudes, and they are certainly not all mutually exclusive, however, before researchers can combine these



dimensions into a comprehensive theory of prejudice, they first need to be able to thoroughly explain how each individual aspect contributes to social bias. This can only be done by intensively studying each of these dimensions and then trying to fit all explanations together into a comprehensive theory. The purpose of the present paper is to contribute to the study of one dimension of prejudice, the emotional dimension.

The emotional component of prejudice is the one aspect which has been studied the least (Ehrlich, 1973). Researchers have instead chosen to focus on the cognitive and behavioral aspects, which may, in fact, actually be outcomes of the affective component. Whatever the case may be, people's feelings are an important determinant in the attitudes they form. In prejudiced attitudes, the affective component involves the negative feelings and emotions which a person holds with regard to a certain groups' moral, intellectual, behavioral, and ethnic character. Notice the group does not have to be based on certain characteristics such as race, but can involve any group to which a person does not belong, such as religious groups, social classes, or occupations. Almost any category can serve as a basis for formation of an outgroup. When people make distinctions like this, intergroup interactions tend to lead to ingroup

favoritism, or a defense of the group to which one belongs, which in turn can lead to the next obvious step of negative feelings toward the outgroup.

This concept of prejudice being a result of feeling threatened by others has been the topic of a considerable amount of research, and a review of this literature occurs later in this paper. However, before focusing on that line of research, another closely related topic needs to be discussed. Intergroup behavior research has shown how people tend to distinguish between groups, and also assign certain characteristics to those groups. How people go about assigning these characteristics, and why some are tagged positively and some negatively have also been the topic of considerable research (Hamburg, 1985).

One variable which appears influential in determining how people feel about other groups is how people feel about themselves. The term self-concept refers to the way a person views oneself, and is developed and mediated, in part, through comparison with other people. One hypothesis regarding self-concept and comparison with others develops along the premise that a person who feels poorly about him/herself will also feel poorly about other people. Thus, the person with low self-esteem will necessarily feel more negatively towards other people, and members of certain

groups might serve as ready targets for these negative attitudes. This has also been the focus of a considerable amount of research, which will also be reviewed later in this paper.

While these two concepts, threat and self-esteem, both seem to relate independently to the formation of prejudicial attitudes, the combination of these two concepts seems to be a logical connection. People who have a poor self-concept often feel incompetent and helpless. Thus, they are also likely to feel more threatened by events than people with a positive self-image. Likewise, those with high self-esteem, feeling competent and able to handle situations, will probably not perceive threat in the same way as those with low self-esteem. When the source of the threat is transferred from situations to groups of people, it becomes clear how self-esteem and threat relate to the formation of prejudicial attitudes, and how important this line of research is to the study of prejudice. It has only been in recent years, however, that both factors have been combined in the study of prejudice, and the studies which have been done look at a very specific group as the target of the prejudice. However, these studies are important and will be reviewed.

The purpose of the current study is to expand on the research which has been done involving self-esteem, threat, and social bias, focusing on how these factors combine to influence prejudice expressed against racial groups. Before proceeding, however, it is important to understand how both of these factors individually correlate with prejudice. Thus, studies on threat and prejudice, and self-esteem and prejudice will be reviewed more closely. First, research conducted on threat and prejudice will be reviewed.

Miller and Bugelski (1948) were among the first researchers to investigate the relationship between threat and prejudice. They exposed subjects to arbitrary deprivation, and then measured how this deprivation would affect subject's ratings of Japanese and Mexicans as measured by an adjective checklist. Miller and Bugelski found that deprived subjects derogated both the Japanese and Mexican targets.

Weiss and Fine (1956) examined how an insult-failure ego threat would affect subjects' view of juvenile delinquents. These researchers found that insulted subjects advocated more punitive treatment for the juvenile delinquents than a group not exposed to the ego threat.

Feshbach and Singer (1957) found that subjects exposed to a threat condition judged minority groups more negatively

than a control group. Cowan, Landes, and Schaet (1959) obtained similar results using insult and failure as the ego threat. Subjects in this study scored higher on an anti-Negro scale, however, there was no significant effect for prejudice against other minorities.

In a study by Ferson (1959), looking at other measures of derogation besides racial prejudice, subjects were first frustrated by the experimenter. They were then given an attitude rating scale on various college groups. Subjects in the threat condition derogated teaching assistants, however, there was no significant derogation of professors.

Berkowitz and Holmes (1959, 1960) conducted a series of studies on threat and prejudice. The threat conditions were imposed by the subject receiving a negative evaluation from an experimental partner in one study, and by being insulted by the experimenter in the other study. The source of the threat then became a possible target of the derogation, with positive attitudes towards partner and general impression rating for experimenter serving as dependent variables. The results showed subjects receiving negative evaluations from their partner derogated the experimenter, while subjects insulted by the experimenter were more negative towards their partner.

Continuing along this line of research, Berkowitz and Green (1962) examined how negative evaluations from partners and insults by the experimenter would affect subject's rating of their peers via an adjective checklist. Results showed that subjects who were insulted by the experimenter derogated their partner and a confederate, while subjects negatively evaluated by their partner derogated a confederate.

Kaufmann and Feshbach (1963a, 1963b) did a series of experiments examining how insults from the experimenter affected subjects' attitudes and behavior. In one study, insulted subjects rated an experimental partner's pleasantness; however, no significant effect was obtained. In the second study, juvenile delinquents were the target of the derogation with punitiveness imposed by the subjects as the dependent variable. Researchers found insulted subjects advocated more punitive treatment for the delinquents.

Strickner (1963) returned the focus of research to the effects of threat on expression of ethnic prejudice. In this study, the threat imposed was a film depicting unjust treatment of persons similar to the experimental subjects. Researchers then measured how this affected subjects' ratings of various ethnic groups. Results indicated that the experimental group derogated Blacks, Turks, and Chinese,

while there was no significant derogation of Canadians.

Worchel (1966) imposed ego threat by inducing test stress in subjects via an assistant, and also by having the experimenter insult the subjects. Subjects receiving the test stress condition imposed by the assistant reacted by derogating the experimenter on an adjective checklist.

Griffitt and Guay (1969) conducted two studies in which the ego threat was a negative evaluation by a partner. The targets of the prejudice were a confederate peer and the experimenter. In both studies, the subjects who were negatively evaluated by their partners derogated the target variable.

A final study on threat and prejudice was conducted by Nickel (1974). Electric shock from a partner served as the threat, with punitiveness measures for juvenile delinquents serving as measures of prejudice. Subjects provoked by their partner advocated more punitive treatment.

It is important to remember that in the majority of these studies, the variable of threat was not imposed by the target of prejudice, thus retaliation was not a motive among the subjects. Another important point is that in studies where subjects were given a choice of targets to derogate, they consistently chose a target deemed by society as having lower status, giving them a "safe" group upon which to

impose their bias.

As can be concluded from the previous studies, perceived threats lead to derogation and prejudice projected upon a target group. Another factor closely related to the issue of ego threat is self-concept and self-esteem. The amount of threat perceived is influenced by one's self-concept and perceived ability to handle the threat. People with poor self-images and low self-esteem are likely to perceive situations as potentially more threatening than those with higher self-esteem. Thus, it seems possible that people with low self-esteem will be more prejudiced than those with higher self-esteem. Research done on the hypothesis supports this line of reasoning.

Studies investigating this relationship often look at how self-acceptance correlates with acceptance of others. It is assumed that self-acceptance is another measure of positive self-concept and self-esteem. Sheerer (1949) and Stock (1949) were some of the initial social scientists who empirically measured this relationship. Both of their studies used patients in outpatient counseling as subjects. Sheerer reported that as self-acceptance increased through counseling, acceptance of others also increased. Stock measured the affective responses towards self and responses towards others made by patients in counseling interviews.



The correlation between the two types of responses was a strong .66, indicating positive statements made about oneself were related with positive statements made about others.

After these initial studies, researchers saw the need for more reliable measures of self- and other-attitudes and the development of formal testing instruments began. Phillips (1951) constructed a 25 item scale of self-attitudes and a 25 item scale of attitudes towards others. He administered the scales to four sample groups of college and high school students. Correlations between the two scales ranged from .51 to .74, again showing the strong, positive relationship between attitudes toward self and attitudes towards others.

Several studies sought to validate Phillips' scale, and several researchers replicated his study using various groups. McIntyre (1952), using male college students, obtained a correlation between Phillips' self- and other-attitudes scales of .46. Suinn and Hill (1964) obtained a correlation between these two scales of .35. In this study, introductory psychology students served as subjects. Suinn and Geiger (1965) used Phillip's scales under two different conditions, one defined as "stress" and the other "neutral". They obtained correlations of .57 and .58, respectively.

Berger (1952) also constructed a set of scales designed to measure attitudes towards self and attitudes towards others. He initially gave this set of scales to five diverse groups, ranging from college students to prison inmates to persons with speech pathologies. He obtained correlations ranging from .36 to .69.

Omwake (1954) investigated the relationship between acceptance of self and of others using the scales developed by Berger, as well as one developed by Bills, Vance, and McLean (1951). In Omwake's study, 113 introductory psychology students were given both sets of scales. Correlations between all the self-attitudes scales and all the other-attitudes scales were calculated. The direction of all the correlations was positive, indicating positive attitudes about self are related to positive ratings of others. The magnitude of these correlations ranged from .18 to .41.

More recently, Shepard and Glass (1972), using Berger's scales of self acceptance and acceptance of others, obtained a correlation between these two scales of .52. Using a slightly different subject pool, Coons, McEachern, and Annis (1973) studied the correlation between Berger's scales using mental patients. Among the mental patients, Coons et al. found a positive relationship between acceptance of self and

acceptance of others. Furthermore, this correlation increased when patients were reinforced for endorsing self-accepting items.

Fey (1955) also designed a scale measuring the relationship between self-concept and acceptance of others, and obtained a correlation of .43 between these two variables. He also went a step further and added a third dimension: "estimated acceptability to others." Persons with positive self concepts perceived themselves as also being highly acceptable to others, the correlation between self concept and estimated acceptability to others being a strong .71.

Williams (1962) replicated Fey's study, obtaining a higher correlation between self- and other attitudes ( $r = .64$ ) and a slightly lower correlation between self-attitudes and perceived attitudes of others toward oneself ( $r = .62$ ). Thus, based on the results of these two studies, not only do persons with positive self-images have more positive attitudes towards others, but they also feel that other people share their favorable self-attitude.

Gough, Harris, Martin, and Edwards (1950) looked at how self-concepts correlate with attitudes towards a specific group. Researchers found that negative self-attitudes in children correlated with high scores on an anti-Negro scale

which they developed.

Tabachnick (1962) also hypothesized that degree of self-satisfaction would vary systematically with degree of prejudice in children. Fifth grade students were given the anti-Negro scale developed by Gough et al. (1950) and ten assessments of self-attitudes. The overall correlation between self-attitudes and anti-Negro attitudes was  $-.22$ . Thus, children who had developed positive self concepts were less prejudiced than children whose attitudes towards self were more negative.

Trent (1957) studied 202 black children in New York City ranging in age from 9 to 18 years. Students were given scales which measured attitudes towards both blacks and whites. They were also given a sentence completion test from which an index of self-concept was constructed. All three scores were positively correlated, with the most self-accepting students expressing significantly more positive attitudes towards both blacks and whites than did the least self-accepting.

Williams (1964) collected data in two cities measuring the self- and ethnic attitudes of 515 black residents. Using a three-item index of prejudice directed towards foreigners, Mexicans, and Jews, Williams found that black residents who rejected other minority groups also tended to

accept negative stereotypes and criticisms of blacks, an indication of negative self-concept.

Research cited thus far all seems to lead to the conclusion that poor self-concept is related to poor acceptance of others. Reports such as the ones previously cited as well as others led Ashmore and DelBocha (1976) to conclude that a poor self-concept does seem to predispose a person towards ethnic prejudice.

Research conducted since the statement made by Ashmore and DelBocha does not dispute its validity. Church (1976) found that White students scoring higher in academic achievement, IQ, and occupational aspiration had more positive views of the average Indian than Whites with lower scores. Thus, due to the relationship between these factors and self-concept, it can be concluded that those with a better self-image had a better image of others.

Clark (1982) also investigated the relationship between racial stereotypes and self-concept, finding a positive relationship between the two variables. However, Clark qualified this conclusion by adding that the relationship is dependent upon the type of social stereotype assessed and the dimension of self-concept being studied.

Bowler, Rauch, Rocchio, and Jue (1982) examined the relationship between self-esteem, self-efficacy and racial

tension in a multi-cultural high school. Significant differences were found among the various ethnic groups in levels of self-esteem and also among expressed perception of racial tension. Bower et al. hypothesized that negative correlations exist between racial tension and self-esteem.

Griffore and Parsons (1983) studied the relationship between achievement and racial attitudes among school children. They found positive correlations between academic achievement, educational self-concept, and future aspirations, which all seem to be indicators of positive self-concept. A positive correlation between self-concept and racial attitudes was also obtained.

While the previous research showed fairly conclusively that a correlation exists between self-esteem and prejudice, a cause-effect relationship had not been established. Wills (1981) developed a theory which attempts to explain how low self-esteem leads to prejudice. In what he called a downward comparison theory, Wills hypothesized that people with negative affect can enhance their subjective well being through comparison with others who are worse off than they are. Derogating members of outgroups provides a target to which one can be favorably compared.

Continuing along this line of reasoning, Wills stated that people with low self-esteem are more likely to engage

in downward comparison due to a greater need for self-enhancement. This causal explanation is not new, as many theorists have brought forth this point (Allport, 1954; Ehrlich, 1973; Lippman, 1922; Sherwood, 1981). However, Wills extends his theory to explain why persons experiencing threat are also likely to react in a prejudiced manner. According to downward comparison principles, when subjects are presented with a significant ego threat, they will devalue and derogate other people. This gives people a favorable group to compare themselves with, thus enhancing subjective well-being. This also accounts for the research showing individuals will not necessarily derogate the people who are the source of the threat. Moreover, this theory explains research showing when threatened people are given a choice of groups to derogate, they choose a lower status group, which society deems more acceptable to derogate. When engaging in downward comparison, it does not matter who one derogates, just as long as there is a group to which one can compare oneself favorably.

Using Wills' theory, self-esteem and threat would combine in an additive fashion to produce downward comparison. Thus, a person with low self-esteem who experiences an ego threat, is twice as likely to form prejudiced attitudes as a person who just possesses one of

these variables. A few studies have been conducted on Wills's approach to explaining prejudice, however, many of these studies sought to clarify other issues before preceding with researching the theory directly.

One question which researchers sought to clarify is whether people with low self-esteem are more negative towards groups to which they do not belong (outgroups), defined as prejudice, or whether they are more positive towards the groups to which they belong (ingroups), defined as ethnocentrism or ingroup favoritism. The relationship between prejudice and ethnocentrism was the topic of several experiments.

Tabachnik, Crocker, and Alloy (1983a) examined these two factors using depressed and nondepressed college students. Results of the study indicate that it was those students with positive self-images who were more ethnocentric. The depressed rated both themselves and others more negatively, whereas the nondepressed students rated themselves more positively than others.

The same researchers repeated the study using self-esteem as a variable instead of depression (Tabachnik, Crocker, & Alloy, 1983b). Results were consistent with previous findings, with high self-esteem individuals showing an ingroup bias while those with low self-esteem evaluated



both themselves and others more negatively. Thus, while those with low self-esteem were more prejudiced, those with high self-esteem were more ethnocentric.

Crocker and Schwartz (1985) continued this line of research, but instead of having subjects evaluate self as compared with others, they sought to determine how people evaluated groups in a group situation. These researchers investigated this issue in a minimal intergroup situation, in which subjects were divided into groups on the basis of a lottery procedure. The results indicate that both high and low self-esteem subjects showed ingroup favoritism. However, the low self-esteem subjects rated both the ingroup and outgroup more negatively than did those with high self-esteem, indicating a higher degree of ethnocentrism among high self-esteem subjects. Thus, results were consistent with previous studies in finding low self-esteem individuals more prejudiced and less ethnocentric than high self-esteem individuals.

The fact that both groups showed some degree of ingroup favoritism challenges Wills's contention that downward comparison is motivated by a need for self-enhancement. If this were true, then those with low self-esteem would be more motivated and show a stronger degree of ethnocentrism, which is the opposite of what was found. Obviously, both

groups have the need for self-enhancement, and these needs might not be met in a similar manner. This possibility led researchers to investigate whether or not ingroup favoritism and derogation of outgroups actually does result in greater subjective well-being and enhanced mood.

Whether or not social bias results in self-enhancement was the focus of experiments conducted by Crocker and Gallo (1985) and by Lemyre and Smith (1985). The results indicated that subjects who engaged in downward comparison by derogating outgroups did experience an increase in self-esteem and enhanced mood. Thus, it might be that ingroup favoritism is not a factor in self-enhancement, but this effect is instead achieved through outgroup biases.

Researchers continued to focus on this dimension of Wills' theory, adding the dimension of threat to the studies and seeing how this affected ethnocentrism and prejudice. Crocker, McGraw, Thompson, and Ingerman (1987) conducted two experiments on how threat and self-esteem affected prejudice and ethnocentrism. The first study was done in a laboratory setting while the second was conducted in a real-life setting.

In the first study, subjects of high, medium, and low self-esteem were exposed to either a threatening or non-threatening situation. They were then given the opportunity

to evaluate members of their group and outgroup members, with membership being determined by scores on a test. The researchers found that nonthreatened subjects did not engage in ingroup bias, whereas subjects who were threatened did show ingroup enhancement. This is a mode of self-enhancement, however, subjects did not achieve this self-enhancement by derogating outgroups as Wills predicts.

Another interesting finding, besides the fact that enhancement occurs through ethnocentrism and not prejudice, was that it was the high self-esteem threatened subjects, not the low self-esteem threatened subjects, who developed ingroup bias. This finding is contrary to Wills's contention, but does provide evidence that favorable social comparison serves as a maintaining strategy for people with high self-esteem.

To further investigate this finding, Crocker et al. (1987) addressed this issue in a naturally occurring group, that of campus sororities. Membership in a low status sorority served as the threat condition while membership in a high status sorority was defined as nonthreatening. Subjects were also divided into high and low self-esteem groups. The only group failing to show an ingroup bias were nonthreatened, high self-esteem sorority members. Consistent with previous studies, subjects with low

self-esteem were more negative in general, evaluating outgroups more negatively in both threat and nonthreat conditions. High self-esteem subjects who were threatened developed ingroup biases, also consistent with previous research. However, they also evaluated outgroups more negatively. Thus, the results of these studies replicate the finding that persons with low self-esteem tend to evaluate outgroups negatively while those with high self-esteem tend to become more ethnocentric. However, when the variable of threat is introduced, the issue becomes more complicated. When a person is threatened, it appears that high self-esteem and not low self-esteem is predictive of prejudice and ethnocentrism. The introduction of the variable of threat could provide researchers with a more thorough explanation of who is vulnerable to developing prejudiced attitudes.

#### Purpose of current study.

The purpose of the current study was to further investigate the relationship between self-esteem, threat, and the formation of ingroup bias and prejudiced attitudes expressed toward a minority group.

#### Significance.

Although previous research has investigated the interaction between threat, self-esteem, and prejudiced

attitudes, the results were far from conclusive. It is still not clear how threat affects those with high and low self-esteem with regards to attitude formation. Certainly, further investigation is warranted

In summary, previous research has shown that low self-esteem and the perception of threat all predispose a person to form prejudiced attitudes. Combining these two factors, previous studies looked at how the interaction of these variables affects attitudes towards different types of groups, ranging from groups formed by a lottery procedure to sorority members. Thus far, attitudes formed towards members of racial and ethnic groups have not been studied under the influence of both threat and self-esteem. The current study investigated the relationship between the independent variables of threat and self-esteem, and how these two factors affected attitudes towards ingroups and outgroups, with the specific outgroup being minority students.

## CHAPTER 2

### Method

#### Subjects

Subjects were 87 students, 51 females and 36 males, enrolled in lower division Sociology courses at Emporia State University in the Spring semester, 1990. Due to the nature of the experiment, minority students were excluded from the sample. This sample sought to be representative of rural, Midwestern college students. All students volunteered to participate in the study.

#### Instrumentation

The short form of the Texas Social Behavior Inventory (TSBI) Form A was used to measure self-esteem (See appendix A). The TSBI is a 16-item Likert-type scale designed to obtain "an objective measure of self-esteem and social competence (Helmreich & Stapp, 1974, p.473)."

Since the perception of threat was one independent variable in the study, this factor was implemented by having subjects complete a questionnaire containing basic demographic information, such as grade point average (gpa), awards, honors, and activities. A sample questionnaire was provided for students to compare their answers (See appendix B). In the threat condition, the sample questionnaire appeared to be from a student with a very high gpa, many

awards and honors, and involved in many clubs and activities. In the non-threat condition, the sample questionnaire appeared to be from a student with a low gpa, no outstanding awards or honors, and involved in a minimum of activities.

As this study was similar to the research done by Crocker et al. (1987) the same technique was used to measure attitudes towards ingroups (in the current study, white college students) and outgroups (minority college students). Subjects were asked to rate on 7-point scales how true each of 16 traits are of the average Emporia State Student, including themselves (the ingroup), and the average minority student (the outgroup). The 16 traits were divided into 8 positive and 8 negative traits designed to represent social and intellectual attributes. The positive traits were: intelligent, considerate, trustworthy, sincere, friendly, creative, ambitious and motivated. The negative traits were: incompetent, insensitive, uninformed, apathetic, self-centered, stupid, rude, and boring. The traits were placed in order on the basis of a random drawing, and were presented in the same order to all subjects (See appendix C).

The scales were scored by summing all positive ratings and subtracting all negative ratings for each target group.

Thus, the resulting scores indicated a subject's positivity of rating towards the target group with a possible range of -48 to 48. Crocker et al. (1987) reported the internal consistency as being greater than .85 for both scales, using the Cronback alpha coefficient.

### Procedure

Subjects were tested during two regular classroom sessions. In the initial session, the following explanations and instructions were given to the subjects.

My name is Sharon Perne, and I am a graduate student in Psychology here at Emporia State. For my thesis, I am investigating the attitudes of Emporia State students. Your participation will be very beneficial to the study. If you choose to participate, I will give you two packets of questionnaires during two different class sessions. It will be necessary for you to put your student ID number on the packets, however, this is only necessary so I will be able to match up the two sets of questionnaires. Your answers will remain confidential, with only myself having access to them. If you choose to participate, please read and sign the consent form I am about to pass out, then continue filling out the



remainder of the packet according to the directions given.

After these instructions, test packets containing an informed consent form (See appendix D) and the TSBI were distributed to the subjects.

Test packets were then collected and subjects were thanked for their participation in the initial phase of the study. The TSBI was scored, with students scoring .5 standard deviations above and .5 standard deviations below the mean assigned to the high self-esteem and low self-esteem groups, respectively. Within each of these groups, subjects were then assigned via a random drawing to either the threat or non-threat condition. Students scoring within .5 standard deviations of the mean, although they were no longer part of the study, were also randomly assigned to either the threat or non-threat condition.

The second test packets, containing either the threat or non-threat sample questionnaire, a blank questionnaire, Emporia State student rating scale, and minority student rating scale, were put together, with each subject's student ID number written across the top page. This was necessary in order for the experimenter to be able to match the results of these scales with the self-esteem measure.

After this was completed, the experimenter went into the class sessions a second time. The following instructions were given.

I'd like to remind you that the purpose of this study is to assess the attitudes and perceptions of Emporia State students. Remember, all your answers will be confidential, I just need your student ID number to match up the two sets of questionnaires. In order to more fully explain the results of the study, I need to gather some basic demographic information about all participants. The second page of the packet I'm about to pass out will gather this information. On the first page is a sample questionnaire. Please read through this example and fill yours out in a similar manner. The remaining scales are simply student attitude scales, and I would appreciate it if you answered them as honestly as possible.

After these instructions, the second test packet was distributed, and subjects were given ample time to complete all measures. Test packets were then collected, subjects were thanked, debriefed, and asked not to discuss the study with anyone.

### Hypothesis

One specific hypothesis being tested was that significant main effects for self-esteem would be found, with subjects low in self-esteem showing more negative attitudes towards minority students than subjects high in self esteem, demonstrated by more negative ratings of the average minority student on the minority student rating scale. It was also hypothesized that high self-esteem subjects would develop a stronger ingroup bias than subjects low in self-esteem, demonstrated by more positive ratings of the average Emporia State student on the Emporia State student rating scale.

It was also hypothesized that there would be a main effect for the variable of threat. Specifically, it was hypothesized that threatened subjects would rate minority students more negatively than nonthreatened subjects.

Another question of interest was how these two variables interact and lead to prejudice and/or ingroup bias. Previous studies seem to indicate that threatened subjects who are high in self-esteem, as well as those who are low in self-esteem, develop more negative attitudes towards outgroups. However, since this has not been studied conclusively in the past, no specific hypotheses were made about possible interaction effects.

## CHAPTER 3

### Results

The TSBI was distributed to 64 males and 86 females. Scores ranged from 27 to 56 out of a possible range of 0 to 64. The mean of all scores was 42.14 with a standard deviation of 7.11. To determine whether any gender differences existed which could confound results, a t-test was performed on the two sets of scores. Female TSBI scores ( $\bar{M} = 41.17$ ) did not differ significantly from male TSBI scores ( $\bar{M} = 43.45$ ),  $t(148) = 1.081$ ,  $p > .05$ .

Subjects scoring .5 standard deviations below the overall mean (TSBI < 38.59) represented the low self-esteem group while subjects scoring .5 standard deviations above the mean (TSBI > 45.70) were considered the high self-esteem group. Subjects were then randomly assigned to the threat or nonthreat condition. Thus, the following number of subjects were in each cell:

High self-esteem, threat;  $n = 21$

High self-esteem, nonthreat;  $n = 25$

Low self-esteem, threat;  $n = 18$

Low self-esteem, nonthreat;  $n = 23$

Ratings of ingroups and outgroups were analyzed with a repeated measures ANOVA, with self-esteem and threat as between subjects factors and rating (ingroup versus

outgroup) as the within subjects factor. The analysis yielded a highly significant main effect for rating, indicating that minority students were rated significantly less positive than the average Emporia State student,  $F(1, 83) = 40.29, p < .0001$ . However, when results were analyzed across the main effects of self-esteem and threat they failed to yield significance. The rating x self-esteem condition yielded the following results,  $F(1, 83) = 1.80, p < .18$ , while the rating x threat condition also failed to reach significance,  $F(1, 83) = 3.85, p < .053$ . The interaction, rating x self-esteem x threat also yielded no significance,  $F(1, 83) = .00, p < .99$ . Thus, the differences in ratings were consistent across all groups. Means for all groups are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
Mean ratings of ingroups and outgroups by level of self-esteem and threat condition.

Self-Esteem	Threat Condition			
	Threat		Nonthreat	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
High				
Ingroup	19.90	11.24	19.00	12.05
Outgroup	7.48	14.34	11.60	15.62
Low				
Ingroup	20.55	7.69	16.17	8.22
Outgroup	11.55	11.34	12.26	10.66

Note. Ingroup = average Emporia State students, Outgroup = average minority (nonwhite) students. Higher numbers indicate more positive evaluations.

In order to test the hypothesis that subjects low in

self-esteem would rate minority students more negatively than subjects high in self-esteem and the hypothesis that the threatened subjects would respond with more negative ratings than nonthreatened subjects, a 2 x 2 factorial ANOVA was performed with the minority student rating as the dependent variable. Results indicated no main effect for self-esteem,  $F(1, 83) = .61, p < .43$ , or for threat,  $F(1, 83) = .77, p < .38$ . For the self-esteem x threat interaction, no significant effects were obtained,  $F(1, 83) = .35, p < .55$ . This result failed to support previous research (Crocker et al., 1987) showing prejudiced attitudes developing among high self-esteem individuals who are threatened.

In order to test the final hypothesis, that subjects high in self-esteem would develop a stronger ingroup bias than those low in self-esteem, a 2 x 2 factorial ANOVA was performed using the ingroup rating as the dependent variable. Once again, no significant main effects were found for self-esteem,  $F(1, 83) = .37, p < .55$ , or for threat,  $F(1, 83) = 1.35, p < .42$ . Thus, subjects high in self-esteem were no more ethnocentric than those low in self-esteem. The self-esteem x threat interaction also yielded no significance,  $F(1, 83) = .63, p < .43$ . These findings also failed to support previous research showing threatened individuals high in self-esteem more ethnocentric than those high self-esteem individuals who are not threatened.

## CHAPTER 4

### Discussion

The results of the current study indicate a less positive rating of minority students by non-minority Emporia State students, regardless of exposure to a threat or level of self-esteem. Previous research (e.g. Church, 1976; Griffitt & Guay, 1969; Nickel, 1974; Wills, 1981), showing threatened individuals and those low in self-esteem exhibiting more prejudiced attitudes than those not threatened or those high in self-esteem, is contradictory to the results found in the current study. Since these contrary findings were found with regard to all hypotheses, each result will be addressed individually.

One hypothesis was that individuals who are threatened would rate outgroups more negatively than individuals who were not threatened. Contrary to previous research (e.g. Berkowitz & Green, 1962; Ferson, 1959; Strickner, 1963), this result was not obtained. One possible explanation for the negative result might be the nature of the threat condition. In most of the previous studies (e.g. Crocker et al., 1987; Miller & Bugelski, 1948; Weiss & Fine, 1956), the threat condition was imposed in a much more direct manner. For example, insults by the experimenter, arbitrary deprivation, and failure feedback were the main sources of

threat. These methods were much more direct than the method used in the current study, which involved asking students to fill out a demographic questionnaire after examining a sample from either a very high achieving or a very low achieving student. Perhaps a more threatening situation would have been imposed had subjects been told they would actually be compared to the student portrayed on the sample questionnaire. Whatever the case may be, the lack of a strong threat might explain why outgroups were not rated differentially in the threat versus nonthreat condition, as well as explain why threatened high self-esteem individuals failed to develop ingroup bias and prejudiced attitudes as had been shown in previous studies.

The current study also failed to support the fairly consistent findings of previous studies (e.g. Gough et al., 1950; Omwake, 1954; Shepard & Glass, 1972; Wills, 1981) showing individuals low in self-esteem being more prejudiced than those high in self-esteem. The fact that this hypothesis was not substantiated, as well as the failure of the results to support the hypothesis that high self-esteem individuals would become more ethnocentric, was most surprising. Thus, speculations as to why these results occurred must be made cautiously.



One possible explanation for the negative result might be the nature of the sample. Emporia State students generally come from rural, Kansas communities in the lower middle to upper middle income bracket. Given these population parameters, the sample drawn was a fairly homogeneous one. The lack of diversity among the population demographics might also have been expressed in the lack of diversity among sample subject's attitudes.

Another possibility for the lack of differential findings among high and low self-esteem subjects again relates back to the nature of the population. The minority population in rural Kansas, as well as minority enrollment at Emporia State, is rather low, thus giving subjects in this study limited contact and interaction with minorities. It is possible that subjects across all groups rated minority students less positively simply because of this lack of exposure. As a review of the literature showed, when individuals feel threatened they tend to respond by becoming more prejudiced. In the current study, subjects' relative lack of contact and interaction with minority students might impose in the subjects a feeling of being threatened by this group. Thus, more negative ratings would occur across all groups, regardless of level of self-esteem.

Several measures could have been taken in order to strengthen the current study and possibly could have resulted in different outcomes. As stated earlier, the threat condition might not have been perceived as a threat. In the future, investigators should use a method which insures the perception of threat. Another factor which could have affected the outcomes was the homogeneity of the sample. This could be remedied by drawing the sample from a more heterogeneous population.

Despite the current study's lack of replication of previous results, these contrary findings bring to light some interesting questions for future investigation. If speculations as to why no differences occurred are correct, then many aspects of these explanations warrant further examination. One possible question would be whether the lack of interaction with minority students is in itself the basis for the formation of a more negative attitude. If this is the case, will these negative attitudes be affected by increased contact and interaction. The question of why no differential ratings of groups were found among different levels of self-esteem also merits further investigation. It is possible that lack of interaction somehow affects these attitudes among all people equally, regardless of self-esteem. If so, then the question remains how these

attitudes are affected by increased contact and exposure.

Questions raised by the current study all merit attention by future investigators. It is apparent that prejudiced attitudes and ethnocentrism exist in current society, witness the resurgence of supremacy and hate groups in recent years. It is hoped that the results of this study, as well as future investigations, will contribute to the understanding of the formation, maintenance, and expression of prejudiced attitudes and ingroup bias.

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APPENDIX A

The Texas Social Behavior Inventory (TSBI)

Student ID Number \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: M F

The Texas Social Behavior Inventory is designed to gather background and social behavior data. When you decide which letter is the best answer for a particular question, circle your answer directly on the questionnaire. Be sure to fill in your social security number at the top of the page.

1. I am not likely to speak to people until they speak to me.

a	b	c	d	e
Not at all character- istic of me	Not very	Slightly	Fairly	Very much character- istic of me

2. I would describe myself as self-confident.

a	b	c	d	e
Not at all character- istic of me	Not very	Slightly	Fairly	Very much character- istic of me

3. I feel confident of my appearance.

a	b	c	d	e
Not at all character- istic of me	Not very	Slightly	Fairly	Very much character- istic of me

4. I am a good mixer.

a	b	c	d	e
Not at all character- istic of me	Not very	Slightly	Fairly	Very much character- istic of me

5. When in a group of people, I have trouble thinking of the right things to say.

a	b	c	d	e
Not at all character- istic of me	Not very	Slightly	Fairly	Very much character- istic of me

6. When in a group of people, I usually do what the others want rather than make suggestions.

a	b	c	d	e
Not at all character- istic of me	Not very	Slightly	Fairly	Very much character- istic of me

7. When I am in disagreement with other people, my opinion usually prevails.

a	b	c	d	e
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me

8. I would describe myself as one who attempts to master situations.

a	b	c	d	e
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me

9. Other people look up to me.

a	b	c	d	e
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me

10. I enjoy social gatherings just to be with people.

a	b	c	d	e
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me

11. I make a point of looking other people in the eye.

a	b	c	d	e
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me

12. I cannot seem to get others to notice me.

a	b	c	d	e
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me

13. I would rather not have very much responsibility for other people.

a	b	c	d	e
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me

14. I feel comfortable being approached by someone in a position of authority.
- | a           | b    | c        | d      | e           |
|-------------|------|----------|--------|-------------|
| Not at all  | Not  | Slightly | Fairly | Very much   |
| character-  | very |          |        | character-  |
| istic of me |      |          |        | istic of me |
15. I would describe myself as indecisive.
- | a           | b    | c        | d      | e           |
|-------------|------|----------|--------|-------------|
| Not at all  | Not  | Slightly | Fairly | Very much   |
| character-  | very |          |        | character-  |
| istic of me |      |          |        | istic of me |
16. I have no doubts about my social competence.
- | a           | b    | c        | d      | e           |
|-------------|------|----------|--------|-------------|
| Not at all  | Not  | Slightly | Fairly | Very much   |
| character-  | very |          |        | character-  |
| istic of me |      |          |        | istic of me |

## APPENDIX B

Sample Questionnaires in Nonthreat and  
Threat Conditions and  
Blank Questionnaire



## SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE IN NONTHREAT CONDITION

## Demographic Information

Student ID Number: 494-39-8643

Age: 20

Race: White

Classification: Freshman

Grade Point Average: 2.15

## Awards and Honors:

Graduated from High School

Attendance Award - Senior Year

High School Team Mascot - Senior Year

Fourth Place - Local 4-H Livestock Competition, 1989

## Activities:

High School Citizenship Committee

Residence Hall Council, alternate

High School Foreign Language Club

, 5-K Road Race, participant, 1989

## SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE IN THREAT CONDITION

## Demographic Information

Student ID Number: 494-39-8643

Age: 20

Race: White

Classification: Freshman

Grade Point Average: 3.90

## Awards and Honors:

Who's Who Among American High School Students

Valedictorian of High School Class

National Honor Society

Fourth Place - National Undergraduate

Research Paper Competition

## Activities:

Captain - High School Debate Team

Intramural Tennis Champion

President - Psi Chi Honor Society

Student Representative - Kansas Board of Regents

BLANK QUESTIONNAIRE  
Demographic Information

Student ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex:

Age:

Race

Classification:

Grade Point Average:

Awards and Honors:

Activities:

APPENDIX C

Average Emporia State Student Rating Scale and  
Average Minority Student Rating Scale

AVERAGE EMPORIA STATE STUDENT RATING SCALE

On a scale of 1 to 7 using the following scale: 7= extremely characteristic, 6 = very characteristic, 5 = somewhat characteristic, 4 = neutral, 3 = somewhat uncharacteristic, 2 = very uncharacteristic, 1 = extremely uncharacteristic, how characteristic of the average Emporia State University student, including yourself, would you rate the following attributes.

Motivated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Insensitive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Apathetic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Uninformed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Considerate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Boring	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Incompetent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Rude	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ambitious	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Stupid	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sincere	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Self-Centered	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Creative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

AVERAGE MINORITY STUDENT RATING SCALE

On a scale of 1 to 7, using the following scale: 7 = extremely characteristic, 6 = very characteristic, 5 = somewhat characteristic, 4 = neutral, 3 = somewhat uncharacteristic, 2 = very uncharacteristic, 1 = extremely uncharacteristic, how characteristic of the average minority (non-white) student would you rate the following attributes.

Motivated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Insensitive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Apathetic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Uninformed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Considerate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Boring	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Incompetent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Rude	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ambitious	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Stupid	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sincere	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Self-Centered	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Creative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**APPENDIX D**

**Informed Consent Document**

## Consent Form

Please carefully read the following paragraph and sign below if you are in agreement.

The purpose of the present study is to assess the activities, attitudes, and perceptions of Emporia State University students. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to fill out several questionnaires which will require approximately 30 minutes. Although it will be necessary to put your student ID number on the test packets, this information will only be used for matching up the questionnaires. Your answers will remain confidential. If for any reason during the session you feel uncomfortable, you may discontinue participation.

I (print name) \_\_\_\_\_ have read and understand the preceding information and agree to participate in this study.

---

Signature of Participant / Date



To: All Graduate Students Who Submit a Thesis or  
Research Problem/Project as Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for an Advanced Degree

From: Emporia State University Graduate School

I Sharon Perne, hereby submit this thesis to Emporia State University as partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree. I agree that the Library of the University may make it available for use in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I further agree that quoting, photocopying, or other reproduction of this document is allowed for private study, scholarship (including teaching) and research purposes of a nonprofit nature. No copying which involves potential financial gain will be allowed without written permission of the author.

Sharon E. Perne

Signature of Author

03 12 1990

Date

The Effects of Self-Esteem and

Threat on the Formation of

Prejudiced Attitudes and Ingroup

Bias.

Title of Thesis

[Signature]  
Signature of Graduate Office Staff

10 1 1990  
Date Received