Social comparison and the personal-group discrimination discrepancy

Muriel Dumont, Eleonore Seron, & Vincent Yzerbyt

Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium

&

Tom Postmes

University of Exeter, UK

This chapter is about the correspondence between the psychology and social reality of devalued group membership. Well-being and the subjective satisfaction with life is, at best, modestly related to the objective conditions in which that life takes place. Often, members of minorities or otherwise devalued groups experience similar levels of self-esteem as members of objectively more privileged groups (for a review, see Crocker & Major, 1989). More surprisingly, they report very low levels of personal discrimination even if they are fully aware of the extent to which their group is discriminated (Crosby, 1982). Thus, it would *appear* that they perceive themselves as less vulnerable to discrimination than the average member of their group. This discontinuity between judgments of discrimination for self and group has been called the *personal-group discrimination discrepancy* or PGDD (Crosby, 1982; Taylor, Wright & Porter, 1994). It is a very robust effect that is found in a wide variety of devalued groups (Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990).

The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on prior work examining the role of social comparison processes in personal and group judgments of discrimination. Prior work has argued that the perceptions of both are determined by the choice of comparison standards. In this chapter we also consider the hypothesis that is being tested with respect to the comparison other and we elaborate what goals and motivations are involved in the social comparison. One of the most significant consequences of social comparison activities is that they can alter what people feel they deserve, whether they feel discriminated against, and what the relevant social categories are that should be considered. This chapter highlights some cognitive and motivational factors that lead to preferring certain social comparison targets over others, the conditions leading to testing either similarity or dissimilarity hypotheses when comparing the self or the ingroup to these targets, and the consequences that this has for self- and group-evaluations in the context of discrimination. The first part of this chapter focuses on personal discrimination and examines why and how social comparison processes contribute to people's

low sense of personal vulnerability to discrimination. The second part of this chapter concentrates on group discrimination and considers why and how social comparison processes contribute to people's perception of group discrimination and to a sense of relative group deprivation.

The argument developed below is threefold. First, we draw on prior research to argue that cognitive and motivational factors lead different comparison standards to be involved in judgments of personal and group discrimination. Second, we propose that in each judgment pertaining to discrimination, the hypothesis being tested with respect to the comparison target is likely to be a dissimilarity hypothesis. This likely lead to the emergence of a contrast from the comparison standard, is likely responsible for the fact that devalued group members perceive themselves as less vulnerable to discrimination than their ingroup, and their ingroup as more discriminated against than the outgroup. Third, we propose that the goals and motivations guiding these social comparison preferences are of a different nature when personal or group evaluations of discrimination are made.

Personal and group discrimination: social comparisons of a different nature

The earliest attempts to explain the discrepancy between perceived personal and group discrimination focused on motivational aspects and centered on the hypothesis that perceived low personal discrimination results from denial, or minimization, of discrimination experiences (Crosby et al., 1989), although exaggeration of group discrimination may also result in the observed discrepancy (Taylor et al., 1994). In recent years, however, evidence has accumulated to suggest that personal and group judgments could be viewed as two cognitive processes of a different nature. Indeed, the existence of different underlying comparative judgments (Major, 1994; Postmes, Branscombe, Spears and Young, 1999), or different informational bases (Kessler, Mummendey, & Leisse, 2000) have been considered

as possible reasons for the emergence of the discrepancy (see also Quinn, Roese, Pennington, & Olson, 1999).

It is widely assumed that individuals tend to make interpersonal or intragroup comparisons between themselves and others when evaluating personal discrimination. When evaluating group discrimination, however, intergroup comparisons between a salient outgroup and one's ingroup are more likely. To illustrate the point, Postmes et al. (1999) reported empirical evidence that personal and group ratings are of a qualitatively different nature. Instead of comparing two different measures for the personal and group judgments, these authors asked women about explicit comparisons between themselves and other ingroup members (personal intragroup comparisons), between themselves and outgroup members (personal intergroup comparisons), and between their ingroup as a whole and the outgroup. By using these explicit comparative measures as predictors for the more general personal and group ratings (i.e. ratings for which the comparison target was not explicit) Postmes et al. (1999) provided evidence that, when reporting personal discrimination, members of devalued groups spontaneously compared themselves with other ingroup members, whereas group discrimination was based on spontaneous comparisons with the outgroup. Postmes et al. (1999) also showed that group, but not personal discrimination reports, were specifically sensitive to social motivations such as ingroup identification or audience concerns. The implication is that the very act of making a particular comparison activates different motives which are likely to draw upon relevant aspects of identity (personal or social) implicated in these comparisons.

A. Personal discrimination and intragroup comparisons

1. Selection of the comparison target

The very act of social comparison depends upon comparability, which implies similarity at some superordinate level (Asch, 1952; Festinger, 1954; Merton, 1957). Thus,

personal judgments of disadvantage are likely to be based, at least partly, on comparisons with ingroup others (e.g., Major, 1994). Similarly, Mussweiler (2003) argues that the choice of the comparison standard depends on a holistic assessment of the target-standard similarity. Consistent with this reasoning, shared group membership has been shown to assume a prominent role in the comparison process (Mussweiler & Bodenhausen, 2002).

However, it is not always the case that fellow ingroup members are chosen as standards of comparison. Blanton, George, & Crocker (2001) showed that women made intragroup comparisons with other women to gauge their satisfaction with a pay rate when it was framed as compensation for past work. In contrast, when it was framed as part of an offer for future employment, women made intergroup comparisons with men to gauge their satisfaction with the pay rate, and they were much less content. Thus, depending on the nature of the question (and the temporal perspective bound up in it), intragroup or intergroup comparisons were preferred. As a result, the change in the focus of comparison resulted in radically different outcomes in terms of people's satisfaction about their situation.

To sum up, intragroup comparisons seem to be preferred on a default basis because of the greater comparability with other ingroup members. However, contextual cues are likely to affect the relevance of the comparison standard and may suggest that intergroup comparisons are more appropriate.

In addition to their availability and assumed diagnosticity, intragroup comparisons may also echo some personal needs. Indeed, a large body of work has examined the relationship between social comparisons and self-esteem. Typically, social comparisons with others who are doing poorly (downward comparisons) are thought to generate positive feelings and to contribute to well-being (Taylor, Buunk, and Aspinwall, 1990; Wills, 1981; Wood, Taylor, & Lichtman, 1985), whereas comparisons with others who are doing well (upward comparisons) are thought to have negative affective consequences (Morse & Gergen,

1970). Despite the fact that members of devalued group are potentially confronted to repeated instances of upward comparisons as a consequence of the objective social position of their group, Crocker and Major's (1989) review revealed that members of devalued group manifested surprisingly undamaged self-esteem and suggested that members of devalued group use comparison processes in order to protect their self and cope with their unfavorable status. Specifically, these authors argued that preference for intragroup social comparison and avoidance of intergroup upward comparison protect self-esteem.

Martinot, Redersdorff, Guimond, and Dif (2002) provided evidence that comparisons with members of a valued outgroup harmed devalued group members' self-esteem, and further asserted the importance of group status in determining self-esteem and self-protection strategies in social comparison situations. In a series of studies, they compared members of dominant and subordinate groups as they were exposed to upward or downward social comparisons with either ingroup or outgroup members. The results showed that members of subordinate groups suffered most from upward comparisons with members of dominant outgroup, resulting in lower self-esteem. In contrast, members of dominant groups' self-esteem was lowest when they were confronted with upward comparisons with members of the dominant ingroup (see also Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). In other words, both members of subordinate and dominant groups suffer from upward comparisons with members of the dominant group. Furthermore, additional data from Martinot et al. (2002) suggested that members of subordinate groups benefit from upward comparisons with an ingroup member by associating themselves with the success of the ingroup and increasing their group identification.

Martinot et al. (2002)'s conclusions seem much more consistent with what Schmitt & Branscombe's (2002) than with what Crocker & Major (1994) have been arguing. They suggest that "*it may be difficult for women to avoid unfavourable social comparisons with*

men and dismiss them as non-self-relevant" (p. 1598). Consistent with Blanton et al. (2001) findings when women do make intergroup comparisons, they are unhappy about them. Although these comparisons are likely to be aversive and unpleasant, underprivileged groups still do seem to make them occasionally. Still, Martinot et al. (2002) findings are not necessarily incompatible with the idea of deliberately avoiding intergroup comparisons when possible. Indeed, their results show the consequences of a given (forced) comparison on self-esteem but remain uninformative about which comparison would *spontaneously* be made. Avoiding harmful decrease in self-esteem can thus not be excluded as a potential motivation for devalued group members to favor intragroup over intergroup social comparisons.

2. Hypothesis being tested, and resulting assimilation or contrast

Detailing the cognitive mechanisms involved in processes of comparative evaluation, Mussweiler (2003) considers that selecting a comparison target is only one of the steps in the process. He argues that, after the comparison standard has been selected, comparison and evaluation still have to take place. In his selective accessibility model, Mussweiler (2003) proposed that, once the standard of comparison has been selected, social comparison involves a selective search for evidence indicating similarity to the comparison other. This is the comparison in itself. This selective test of a similarity hypothesis typically increases the accessibility of consistent self-knowledge and leads to the assimilation of one's self-evaluation towards the comparison standard. In situations in which people focus on differences between themselves and the comparison standard, however, contrasted self-evaluations are more likely to occur (Mussweiler, 2001).

According to Mussweiler (2003), whether similarity or dissimilarity is tested depends on whether one is generally similar or dissimilar to the comparison standard. An initial focus on similarities and the subsequent test of a similarity hypothesis can be expected to be the default options in most situations. It is only when people are forced to use a dissimilar

standard of comparison, - i.e. because such a standard is highly accessible, particularly salient for the critical domain, or because it is the only available standard - that dissimilarity is being tested instead of the default similarity hypothesis. The evaluation stage then integrates the collected information into one's self-evaluation and results in either assimilation or contrast to the standard of comparison.

The role of group membership and social identity has also been examined in the context of social comparisons (Brewer & Weber, 1994; Hogg, 2000; Mussweiler, & Bodenhausen, 2002; Mussweiler, Gabriel, & Bodenhausen, 2000). Consistent with the idea developed above, Mussweiler and Bodenhausen (2002) provided evidence that spontaneous intragroup comparisons primarily involved the activation of individuated self-knowledge indicating similarity with the ingroup. As a consequence, subsequent self-evaluations were assimilated toward the ingroup. Spontaneous comparisons with outgroup members, however, primarily involved the activation of more categorical self-knowledge stressing difference from the outgroup. As a consequence, self-evaluations were contrasted away from the outgroup comparison targets (Mussweiler & Bodenhausen, 2002). Is it, however, always the case that intragroup comparisons lead to similarity testing and assimilation effects?

In the context of the research on perceived discrimination, the PGDD seems quite inconsistent with assimilation effects toward the ingroup. Rather, it is often argued that members of devalued group are motivated to search for dissimilarity and contrast when they evaluate personal discrimination (Crosby et al., 1989). Because personal and group ratings have been found to involve different social comparison activities (Postmes et al., 1999), examining the difference score of personal and group ratings may be an inappropriate basis to draw such conclusions from. However, there may well be some validity to the argument that members of devalued group members seek to positively differentiate from the ingroup discrimination that threatens their group. Indeed, in line with Self-Categorization Theory, one

can hypothesize that there are conditions under which people would be motivated to focus on differences with ingroup members, despite their overarching similarity deriving from the superordinate category (e.g., when personal identity is salient; Turner & Onorato, 1999).

Several pieces of evidence suggest that contrast from the ingroup may occur when people contemplate the level of personal discrimination that they experience. For instance, Quinn & Olson (2003) used specific measures that make the comparison standard explicit. This allowed a precise evaluation of "where" the discrimination experienced by the participants stood in comparison to the proposed standard. Specifically, items were anchored from "*I feel less discriminated against than other women*" to "*I feel more discriminated against than other women"*. Through the use of such a comparative measure, members of devalued group were invited to indicate very clearly whether they contrasted themselves from the ingroup, or not. As it turns out, Quinn & Olson's (2003) data mirrored the PGDD and confirmed that women reported being personally less discriminated against than other women. Contrast rather than assimilation thus seems to result from an explicit intragroup comparison.

In fact, these authors conducted two experiments in which the manipulations were expected to lead people to assimilate to the ingroup versus contrast themselves from the ingroup as a function of whether similarity or dissimilarity was suggested. In the first experiment, the framing of the questions was varied such that either the self was compared to the ingroup or the ingroup was compared to the self. The literature has shown that people more readily see the group as being similar to the self than the other way around (Codol, 1975). Results showed that when the self was compared to the ingroup, a comparison that invites contrast, women reported less personal vulnerability in comparison to the ingroup than when the ingroup was compared to the self, a comparison that invites assimilation. In a second experiment, Quinn & Olson (2003) provided external information indicating self-ingroup (dis)similarity. Results showed that when the available information suggested

dissimilarities rather than similarities, women reported less personal vulnerability in comparison to the ingroup. Again, women contrasted themselves more from the ingroup when dissimilarity rather than similarity was suggested. Importantly, the contrast between perceived discrimination of the self and perceived discrimination of the ingroup appeared robust and persisted both when the group was compared to the self and when the self was compared to the group. In fact, the divergence in perceived discrimination for the self and the group only disappeared when externally generated information made the similarity between self and ingroup unquestionable. As noted by Quinn & Olson (2003), it seems that *"the threatening nature of discrimination overrides the default tendency to test for self-ingroup similarity and instead motivates individuals to seek evidence that they will not share the plight of their group"* (p. 235).

Evidence collected in our laboratory with similar measures making the standard of comparison explicit lends further support to our reasoning. Specifically, Dumont, Postmes, Seron & Yzerbyt, (2004) tested the hypothesis that self-protective motivations lead devalued group members to contrast from the ingroup and perceive themselves as being less vulnerable to discrimination than their ingroup. We reasoned that threatening situations should foster people's self-protective motivations. Self-ingroup comparisons on discrimination issues likely is painful and threatening to devalued group members. This sense of threat, we propose, induces them to search for self-ingroup dissimilarity as a way to satisfy their self-protective needs. Of course, the more devalued their group, the greater the urgency for group members to dissociate themselves from the adverse effects of their group's disadvantage. In other words, members of devalued group should be particularly tempted to deny, or at least minimize, their personal experience of discrimination under threatening circumstances. Such denial of discrimination would manifest itself through lower levels of reported personal discrimination. Because the measures are explicitly comparative, we would expect greater

contrast between the level of discrimination people perceive for their ingroup and what they admit is applicable to themselves.

In a first study, we (Dumont et al., 2004) used a stereotype threat manipulation to enhance women's motivations to self-protect. Stereotype threat partly consists of threats to the individuals because of their social group membership (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Specifically, participants were first confronted with either a threatening or non-threatening math test. Then, unrelated to the math task, the general level of perceived discrimination was assessed. Participants made direct comparisons between themselves and their ingroup, between themselves and the outgroup, and between ingroup and outgroup. Consistent with past theorizing that considers denial to be a tendency to distance the self from the ingroup (Crosby et al., 1989), denial was evident in intragroup comparisons. As can be seen in Figure 1, the default tendency of these female participants is to consider themselves less discriminated against than their ingroup. This tendency was significantly stronger in a condition which placed participants under stereotype threat.

A second study built on Higgins' work on self-regulation to directly manipulate motives of self-protection (e.g., Higgins, 1998). We directly induced either a prevention or a promotion focus among women. Using this conceptually related but practically quite different manipulation, we perfectly replicated this pattern of data. Women with a prevention focus contrasted more strongly from their gender ingroup than women with a promotion focus. Interestingly, manipulations of personal motives has a specific impact on the self-ingroup comparisons. That is, inter-group comparisons remained totally unaffected by our manipulation of self-protection motives.

Clearly, the above empirical evidence is consistent with the idea that personal motivations affect the degree to which members of devalued group seek to differentiate themselves from those aspects of their ingroup which present personal risks to themselves.

When self-protective motives have been aroused, people are more inclined to make contrastive ingroup comparisons, testing for dissimilarity between themselves and ingroup others. As a result, very low level of personal discrimination is perceived. Interestingly, these self-protective motives do not in the least affect the level of discrimination that the ingroup as a whole is seen to endure. Group discrimination seems to be high, irrespective of the manipulations. In sum, these studies confirm that intragroup comparisons do not necessarily lead to assimilation, or to tests of similarity with the comparison standard. In fact, quite the opposite was observed in the context of discrimination, especially when self-protective motives were made salient.

To sum up, when people are led to assess their personal levels of discrimination, they are likely to make intragroup comparisons. Such comparisons are likely to be most diagnostic and relevant for both cognitive and motivational reasons. Unlike other social comparison processes, however, these judgments with essentially similar others do not elicit assimilative comparisons, but rather contrast from the ingroup. The degree to which this contrast emerges covaries with the degree of threat experienced, and the degree to which self-protection is sought. It can be inferred that the more the group in question is discriminated, the bigger the search for a self-serving contrast between ingroup and self should be.

B. Group discrimination and intergroup comparisons

1. Selection of the comparison target

In the case of group judgments of discrimination, the referent is much less ambiguous than for personal judgments. Technically speaking, group judgments may elicit comparisons with either the self, more valued outgroups – dominant groups –, or devalued outgroups. Still, asking for a judgment about the group should more readily lead people to compare at the group level since this dimension is made salient by the question.

It is notable that in the contemporary literature on social comparison, intergroup comparisons are generally ignored. In fact, the literature is almost exclusively concerned with self-evaluations and target-other comparisons (e.g., Major, 1994; Mussweiler, 2003). Still, devalued groups are part of a large social structure which likely includes at least one dominant group and several other devalued groups (Rothberger & Worchel, 1997; Tropp & Wright, 1999). That is, intergroup comparisons with each one of these groups are possible. In contrast to comparison processes underlying self-evaluations, we think that selection of the comparison group for group evaluations does not necessarily result from the standard's similarity to the ingroup. Rather, it is most likely that availability or salience of potential comparison referents determines which group is compared to the ingroup. For a devalued group such as women, the dominant group of men immediately comes to mind (see Postmes et al, 1999; Quinn et al., 1999) although other more similar devalued groups, i.e. similar in that they are discriminated against and have comparable status, could equally serve as comparison standard.

We see two main reasons for the dominant group of men to be more salient and preferred over any other group as the comparative standard. First, the gender dimension is bipolar and, as a result, one group calls for the other. Second, the issue of discrimination itself suggests that one group is being discriminated against by a specific other group. Logically thus, the dominant group is made salient because of the very aspect under judgment. The same reasoning holds for any devalued group that is specifically related to a single dominant group, i.e. blacks, immigrants, linguistic minorities. Another reason for preferring the dissimilar dominant group as the comparison standard resides in the fact that groups are partly defined through their distinctiveness with other groups (Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994). Therefore, comparisons with dissimilar groups provide more diagnostic and relevant information for ingroup evaluations. Even if, or because, it is largely dissimilar to the

devalued ingroup, the salient dominant outgroup becomes the favorite comparison standard for group judgments.

As shown by Tropp & Wright (1999), the relative status of the comparison standard may be particularly relevant for the level of deprivation that is being experienced. Specifically, these authors asked devalued group members to rate their feelings of deprivation compared to the dominant group and compared to other minorities. Results showed that people felt more deprived compared to the dominant group than compared to other minorities. This is of particular interest since collective deprivation (rather than personal or egoistic deprivation) has been shown to serve as initial impetus for actions directed at changing the status and outcomes of the ingroup (Dion, 1986; Guimond, 2003; Hafer & Olson, 1993; Kessler & Mummendey, 2002). Thus, the initiation of collective action depends on the low status group's willingness to engage in a comparison with the group that is seen to be responsible for the subordinate status of the ingroup. In other words, intergroup comparison with the dominant group may be of particular importance to elicit relative deprivation feelings, need for social changes and desire to act against the group that is to blame for the disadvantaged position of the ingroup.

Acknowledgment of group discrimination is not without consequences for people's social identity. Indeed, when asked about their ingroup standing, people's social identity becomes salient and is appraised in comparison with the outgroup on relevant dimensions (Tajfel, 1981). If the comparison is in favor of the ingroup, then the resulting identity is seen as positive. On the contrary, if the comparison is in favor of the outgroup, as it is likely to be the case for members of devalued group, the outcome of comparison reflects negatively on people’s social identity and they may try to improve the situation. For instance, when the ingroup is seen to occupy a relatively disadvantaged position, people may evaluate the ease to move from one group to another. That is, they assess whether intergroup boundaries are

permeable, taking into account whether the intergroup status hierarchy is legitimate and stable, in order to infer whether individual upward mobility is possible (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Taylor & McKirnan, 1984). Research reveals that when intergroup boundaries seem permeable, people's attention is focused on personal identities, personal outcomes, and interests. In short, people adopt an "individual mobility orientation" (Tajfel, 1981). This orientation is marked by decreased ingroup identification, that is, dissociation from the disadvantaged ingroup, and a preference for individual actions aimed at improving the individual's own position.

In a series of studies, Wright and colleagues (Wright, 1997; Wright & Taylor, 1998; Wright et al., 1990a) investigated the effects of tokenism on collective actions. Tokenism is defined as an intergroup context in which very few members of a disadvantaged group are accepted into positions usually reserved for members of the advantaged group, whereas access is systematically denied for the vast majority of disqualified disadvantaged group members. They showed that when as few as 2% of ingroup members are allowed to access to advantaged positions, individual actions become the favorite response. Wright (1997) suggested that tokenism or highly restricted boundary permeability leads to preferring individual over collective action through focusing devalued group members' attention on their personal identity and encouraging interpersonal social comparisons with the few successful tokens who now hold high status positions. As a result, egoistic relative deprivation may occur and translate into individual mobility actions.

In a similar vein, Taylor and McKirnan (1984) propose that individual mobility motivations encourage interpersonal upward comparisons with others – ingroup or outgroup members – who are similar on dimensions relevant to the requirements for entry into the advantaged group. Consistent with this view, a series of studies have provided evidence that upward comparisons may indeed be beneficial at an individual level in that it provides

positive role models, for instance in helping victimized populations to cope with their situation (Collins, 1996). The key aspect here is that such upward comparisons with outgroup members serve a self-enhancement rather than self-evaluation purpose. To be sure, by encouraging interpersonal upward social comparisons, for individual mobility and self-enhancement motivations, tokenism refocuses attention away from the intergroup comparisons, and reduces chances of perceiving group discrimination, feeling group deprivation, and undertaking collective actions.

In contrast, when intergroup boundaries are perceived to be closed, and the status hierarchy as illegitimate and unstable, attention is focused on social identities, group outcomes and interests, and people adopt a "social change orientation" (Tajfel, 1981). This orientation is marked by increased identification with the ingroup, and increase in intergroup social comparisons and a consequent enhanced motivation to improve the ingroup's position through social creativity and/or collective action (see Ellemers, 1993; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It is thus when social change is perceived as a possible solution to an undesirable situation that intergroup comparisons, at least on the part of devalued group members, are most likely.

Both external and internal barriers can affect the perception of boundary permeability (Wright & Tropp, 2002). On one hand, physical and structural factors can serve as external barriers that reduce the chances to move from the disadvantaged group to a more advantaged social group. For instance, ascribed characteristics (e.g. gender, race), norms and practices (e.g. direct or institutional prejudice or discrimination), or geographical distances between groups, can prevent members of the disadvantaged group from leaving their group and joining the outgroup. However, self-categorization theory posits that people can simultaneously hold multiple identities and that, in each context, different categorizations can be salient depending on accessibility and fit (Turner et al., 1987). Even if women would hardly become men, or Blacks become Whites, they can hope joining the group of people benefiting the higher status

social positions, jobs, and salaries. Even if both categorizations strongly covary, the relevant dimension or the intergroup boundary to cross then is not that of gender or race, but that of job status instead. This means that women, for example, are confronted with a much less firm boundary indeed. The level of self-representation, as a qualified job applicant, or as a woman, or a Black, thus affects which boundary is seen to be relevant to cross, and the perception of its permeability may elicit either interpersonal or intergroup comparisons respectively.

In the discussion above, we deliberately talk of "perceived" permeability, for one should not risk ignoring the personal and social-psychological factors which can throw up internal barriers to social mobility and which also affect preferences for making interpersonal or intergroup comparisons and behavioral strategies. For example, strong ingroup identification increases solidarity, and thereby reduces the perceived permeability of group boundaries. Thus, ingroup identification makes intergroup comparisons with the dominant group more relevant and fraternal relative deprivation and collective actions more likely (e.g. Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Ellemers, et al., 1997; Tropp & Wright, 1999; Wann & Branscombe, 1995; Wright, et al., 1990b). Similarly, Postmes et al. (1999) showed that the level of identification significantly predicts perceived group discrimination, whereas reported personal discrimination was not affected (see also Ellemers, et al., 1999; Guimond, 2003; Operario & Fiske, 2001; Petta & Walker, 1992).

However, identification should not be seen as an individual difference variable, predestining one's relation to the group (Turner, 1999). Identification is not rooted firmly in individuality, yet at the same time it is not exclusively determined by contextual factors at the inter-group level either—there are intra-group factors such as respect and acceptance which feed it (cf. Branscombe, et al., 2002; Postmes & Branscombe, 2002). There is also an important ideological dimension to identification, and ideology is (once again) not dictated by intergroup forces alone, but a product of prevailing political consensus within the group with

all its intra- and intergroup. Finally, identification is inevitably also influenced by intergroup factors: it is increased by situational factors influencing social identity salience (Turner et al., 1987) as well as long-term factors such as minority status (e.g., Lorenzi-Cioldi, in press). Our view on the matter is that identification's influence in intergroup matters is so pervasive precisely because, though taking account of the social-psychological as well as the social-structural, it reflects what level of social comparison is most meaningful to the individual within the group.

Corroborating this argument, Doosje, Ellemers and Spears (1995) provided evidence that, when compared negatively to a relevant outgroup, high identifiers perceive both ingroup and outgroup as more homogeneous than low identifiers. Furthermore, Spears, Doosje & Ellemers (1997) showed that people who identify strongly with the devalued ingroup tend to self-stereotype more. This is in contrast to low identifiers, who depend more on contextual cues in determining appropriate comparison and behaviors, and who are more strategic in adapting their behavior to take the best out of each situation (Ellemers et al., 1999, for extensive evidence and discussion; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996). Postmes and colleagues (1999) showed that this extends to low identifiers' perception of group discrimination: the nature of the audience to which reports were directed made no difference for highly identified women, but low identified womens reported more group discrimination in front of a female than a male audience. These studies suggest that highly identified group members live their life in intergroup or group-based terms, whereas low identifiers may use these terms to suit their needs in life.

It would thus appear that for highly identified group members the intergroup context is more of a given than it is for low identifiers. Possibly, highly identified group members would also hold rather more firm and extensive representations of their ingroup. In contrast, low identifiers may be more inclined to construe images of the ingroup depending on the context

and audience. Low identified group members should therefore use only a limited representation of the ingroup as a basis for their group judgment, and be more dependent on contextually-induced motives. Returning to Postmes and colleagues' (1999) study, facing a female audience should heighten low identified women' s awareness that groups of women are discriminated against. Faced with a male audience, on the contrary, low identified women may become less aware of discrimination, and they certainly seem less motivated to express this. As a result, low identifiers' perceptions of group discrimination are likely to be more unstable.

To be sure, this reasoning is speculative and it is not clear yet whether audience effects such as the ones reported by Postmes et al. (1999) are due to compliance with the audience's expected assessment of discrimination, or with activation of different informational sets (cf. Kessler et al., 2000), or both. Nevertheless, it is clear that both internal characteristics and external cues combine to affect the selection of the comparison standard. The resulting perception of disadvantage will depend on the relative weight and direction of these two forces.

2. Hypothesis being tested, and resulting assimilation or contrast

Although current empirical efforts guided by Mussweiler's selective accessibility model (2003) only speak to social comparisons devoted to self-assessment, this model should be applicable to group assessment as well. In the context of group discrimination, a comparison between the devalued ingroup and the dominant outgroup should be associated with an initial holistic assessment of dissimilarity. Actually, people might be drawn to making these comparisons as a means of indicting the outgroup. A selective search of evidence indicating that the ingroup is dissimilar to the outgroup should then be initiated, resulting in increased accessibility of knowledge that is inconsistent across both groups, i.e. instances of discrimination. The evaluation stage then consists of integrating the collected information into

the ingroup's evaluation. Then, the devalued ingroup should be contrasted to the dominant outgroup, resulting in perceiving high levels of group discrimination. Although this model has not been tested at the group level yet, its assumptions are perfectly consistent with the literature on perception of discrimination or relative deprivation studies.

Conclusion

This chapter extends prior work examining the role of social comparison processes in personal and group judgments of discrimination. Specifically, we elaborate what goals and motivations are involved in the social comparison, we examine which hypothesis is tested during the comparison process, and what consequences may result at both levels of judgment. Confronting empirical social comparison data to the PGDD literature indeed suggests that different goals and motivations guide the social comparison process at personal and group levels, resulting in different choice for a referent. Both contextual cues such as similarity salience, and motivational factors such as self-esteem maintenance, may explain devalued group members' tendency to prefer intragroup comparisons when evaluating personal discrimination. In the case of group evaluations, cognitive salience of the dominant group due to its chronic accessibility (as is the case for people highly identified with their devalued ingroup) or due to its frequent association with the devalued ingroup, especially in the context of discrimination, would lead this group to be the favorite comparison standard when judging group discrimination. Moreover, motivational factors related to social identification such as the desire for group improvement call for intergroup social comparisons, or any other distinctive referent.

We further propose that, when asked about discrimination, members of devalued group will always engage in contrasting both themselves and the ingroup to the referent. That is, contrary to what happens in many contexts in which similarity testing and assimilation are assumed to be the default option (Mussweiler, 2003), we propose that discrimination issues

lead people to seek for differentiation and result in contrasted self and ingroup evaluation. Indeed, perception of dissimilarity would undoubtedly contribute to preserving self-esteem (contrast at the personal level) and boost social identification and improve the ingroup's status (contrast at the group level).

By gathering evidence coming from both social comparison and PGDD literatures, we hoped to enlarge the view we have of and improve our knowledge of the PGDD phenomenon. Indeed, we think that shedding the light of social comparison on yet unexplored factors related to the personal-group discrimination discrepancy would help better understanding this intriguing and fascinating phenomenon.

References

Asch, S.E. (1952). *Social psychology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Blanton, H., George, G., Crocker, J. (2001). Contexts of system justification and system evaluation: Exploring the social comparison strategies of the (not yet) contented female worker. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations, 4*, 126-137.

Branscombe, N.R., & Ellemers, N. (1998). Coping with group-based discrimination: Individualistic strategies versus group-level strategies. In J.K. Swim & C. Stangor (Eds.), *Prejudice: The target's perspective*. San Diego: Academic Press.

Brewer, M.B., & Weber, J.G. (1994). Self-evaluation effects of interpersonal versus intergroup social comparison. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 66, 268-275.

Collins, R.L. (1996). For better or worse: The impact of upward social comparison on self-evaluations. *Psychological Bulletin*, *119*, 51-69.

Crocker, J.& Major, B. (1989). Social stigma and self-esteem: The self-protective properties of stigma. *Psychological-Review, 96*, 608-630.

Crosby, F.J. (1982). *Relative deprivation and working women*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Crosby, F.J., Pufall, A., Snyder, R.C., O'Connell, M., & Whalen, P. (1989). The denial of personal disadvantage among you, me, and all the other ostriches. In M. Crawford & M. Gentry (Eds.), *Gender and Thought : Psychological Perspectives* (pp. 79-99). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Dion, K.L. (1986) Responses to perceived discrimination and relative deprivation. In J.M. Olson, C.P. Herman, M.P. Zanna (Eds.)*, Relative deprivation and social comparison: The Ontario Symposium* (vol. 4;pp. 159-179). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Doosje, B., Ellemers, N., & Spears, R. (1995). Perceived intragroup variability as a function of group status and identification. *Journal of Experimental and Social Psychology*, *31*, 410-436.

Dumont, M., Postmes, T., Seron, E., & Yzerbyt, V. (2004). The motives to deny personal discrimination : The impact of stereotype threat and regulatory focus. *Paper submitted for publication.*

Ellemers, N. (1993). The influence of socio-cultural variables on identity management strategies. In W. Stroebe & M. Hewstone (Eds.), *European Review of Social Psychology* (Vol. 4, pp. 27-57). Chichester: John Wiley.

Ellemers, N., Spears, R., & Doosje, B. (1997). Stiking together or failing apart: Ingroup identification as a psychological determinant of group commitment versus individual mobility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 72,* 617-626.

Ellemers, N., Spears, R., & Doosje, B. (Eds.) (1999). Social identity: Context, commitment, content. Oxford: Blackwell.

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations, 7*, 117-140.

Guimond, S. (2003). Stigmatisation et mouvements sociaux. In J.-C. Croizet & J.-P. Leyens (Eds.), *Mauvaises réputations* (pp. 257-281). Paris : Armand Colin.

Hafer, C.L., & Olson, J.M. (1993). Beliefs in a just world, discontent, and assertive actions by working women. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, *19*, 30-38.

Higgins, E.T. (1998). Promotion and prevention: regulatory focus as a motivational principle. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, *vol.30*. pp. 1-46.

Hogg, M.A. (2000). Social identity and social comparison. In Suls, J., & Wheeler, L. (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Comparison: Theory and Research*, (pp. 401-421). Plenum: New-York.

Kelly, C., & Breinlinger, S. (1996). *The social psychology of collective action: Identity, injustice and gender.* London: Taylor & Francis.

Kessler, T., Mummendey, A. & Leisse, U.-K. (2000). The Personal-Group Discrepancy: Is there a common information basis of personal and group judgment? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *79*, 95-109.

Lorenzi-Cioldi, F. (in press). Group status and individual differentiation. In T. Postmes & J. Jetten (Eds.), *Individuality and the group: Advances in social identity*. London: Sage.

Major, B. (1994). From social inequality to personal entitlement: The role of social comparisons, legitimacy appraisals, and group membership. In M. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 26, pp. 293-355). NY: Academic Press.

Martinot, D., Redersdorff, S., Guimond, S., & Dif, S. (2002). Ingroup versus outgroup comparisons and self-esteem: The role of group status and ingroup identification. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28*, 1586-1600.

Merton, R. K. (1957). *Social theory and social structure*. New York: The Free Press.

Morse, S. & Gergen, K.J. (1970). Social comparison, self-consistency, and the concept of self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *16*, 148-156.

Mussweiler, T. (2001). ‘Seek and ye shall find’: Antecedents of assimilation and contrast in social comparison. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 31*, 499-509.

Mussweiler, T. (2003). Comparison processes in social judgment: Mechanisms and Consequences. *Psychological Review, 110,* 472-489.

Mussweiler, T., & Bodenhausen, G.V. (2002). I know you are but what am I? Self-evaluative consequences of judging ingroup and outgroup members. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82,* 19 – 32

Mussweiler, T., Gabriel, S., & Bodenhausen, G.V. (2000). Shifting social identities as a strategy for deflecting threatening social comparisons. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *79*, 398-409.

Oakes, P.J., Haslam, S.A., & Turner, J. (1994). Stereotyping and social reality.

Operario, D. & Fiske, S.T. (2001). Ethnic identity moderates perceptions of prejudice: Judgments of personal versus group discrimination and subtle versus blatant bias. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *27*, 550-561.

Petta, G., & Walker, I. (1992). Relative deprivation and ethnic identity. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 31, 285-293.

Postmes, T., & Branscombe, N.R. (2002). Influence of long-term racial environmental composition on subjective well-being in African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 83*, 735-751.

Postmes, T., Branscombe, N.R., Spears, R., & Young, H. (1999). Personal and group judgments of discrimination and privilege: Resolving the discrepancy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *76*, 320-338.

Quinn, K.A., & Olson, J.M. (2003). Framing social judgment: Self-ingroup comparison and perceived discrimination. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *29*, 228-236.

Quinn, K.A., Roese, N.J., Pennington, G.L., & Olson, J.M. (1999). The personal/group discrimination discrepancy: The role of informational complexity. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 25*, 1430-1440.

Rothberger, H., & Worchel, S. (1997). The view from below: Intergroup relations from the perspective of the disadvantaged group. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *73*, 1191-1205.

Schmitt, M.T., & Branscombe, N.R. (2002). The meaning and consequences of perceived discrimination in disadvantaged and privileged social groups. *European Review of Social Psychology, 12*, 167-200.

Spears, R., Doosje, B., & ellemers, N. (1997). Self-stereotyping in the face of threats to group status and distinctiveness: The role of group identification. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 23*, 538-553.

Steele, C.M. & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African-Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *69*, 797-811.

Tajfel H. (1981), *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Tajfel H., Turner J.C. (1979), "An integrative theory of intergroup relations", in W.G. Austin et S. Worcuel (éds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations*. Monterey, Brooks-Cole.

Taylor, D.M., & McKirnan, D.J. (1984). A five-stage model of intergroup relations. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 23, 291-300.

Taylor, D.M., Wright, S.C. & Porter, L.E., (1994). Dimensions of Perceived Discrimination: The Personal/Group Discrimination Discrepancy. In: Zanna, M.P. & Olson, J.M. (eds.): *The Psychology of Prejudice: The Ontario Symposium*, (Vol. 7., pp. 233-255). Hillsdale: Erlbaum.

Taylor, D.M., Wright, S.C., Moghaddam, F.M., & Lalonde, R.N. (1990). The personal/group discrimination discrepancy: Perceiving my group, but not myself, to be a target for discrimination. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *16*, 254-262.

Taylor, S.E., Buunk, B.P., & Aspinwall, L.G. (1990). Social comparison, stress and coping. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 16*, 74-89.

Tropp, L.R., & Wright, S.C. (1999). Ingroup identification and relative deprivation: An examination across multiple social comparisons. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 29, 707-724.

Turner, J.C. (1999). Some current issues in research on social identity and self-categorisation theories. In N. Ellemers, R. Spears & B. Doosje (Eds.), *Social identity: Context, commitment, content* (pp. 68-89). Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell.

Turner, J.C., Hogg, M.A., Oakes, P.J., Reicher, S.D., & Wetherell, M.S. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. New York: Blackwell.

Turner, J.C., & Onorato, R.S. (1999). Social identity, personality, and the self-concept: A self-categorizing perspective. In T.R. Tyler & R.M. Kramer (Eds.), *The psychology of the social self. Applied social research.* (pp. 11-46). Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Wann, D.L. & Branscombe, N.R. (1995). Influence of level of identification with a group and physiological arousal on perceived intergroup complexity. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *34*, 223-235.

Wills, T.A. (1981). Downward comparison principles in social psychology. *Psychological Bulletin, 90*, 245-271.

Wood, J.V., Taylor, S.E., & Lichtman, R.R. (1985). Social comparison in adjustment to breast cancer. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *49*, 1169-1183.

Wright, S.C. & Tropp, L.R. (2002). Collective action in response to disadvantage: Intergroup perceptions, social identification, and social change. In I. Walker & H.J. Smith (Eds.), *Relative deprivation. Specification, development and integration.* (pp. 200-236). Cambridge: Cambrige University Press.

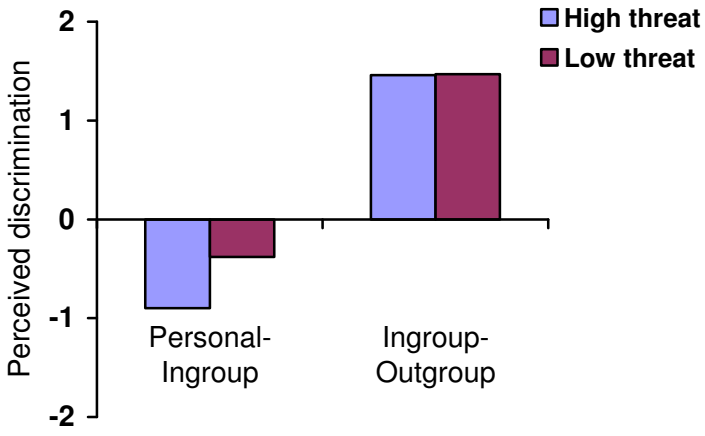
Wright, S.C. (1997). Ambiguity, shared consensus and collective action: Generating collective protest in response to tokenism. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 23*, 1277-1290.

Wright, S.C., & Taylor, D.M. (1998). Responding to tokenism: Individual action in the face of collective injustice. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *28*, 647-667.

Wright, S.C., Taylor, D.M., & Moghaddam, F.M. (1990a). Responding to membership in a disadvantaged group: From acceptance to collective action. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *58*, 994-1003.

Wright, S.C., Taylor, D.M., & Moghaddam, F.M. (1990b). The relationship of perceptions and emotions to behavior in the face of collective inequality. *Social Justice Research, 4*, 229-250.

Figure 1


High threat
Low threat
Perceived discrimination
2
1
0
-1
-2
Personal-
Ingroup
Ingroup-
Outgroup