

Evaluations and Perceptions of Self, Ingroup, and Outgroup: Comparisons Between Mexican-American and European-American Children

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The present research examined evaluations of self, ingroup members, and outgroup members among young Mexican-American and European-American children. European-American children showed a greater discrepancy between evaluations of themselves and other ingroup members, and perceived fewer ingroup members as like themselves, relative to Mexican-American children. European-American children also evaluated ingroup targets more positively than outgroup targets, and perceived substantially fewer outgroup targets to be like them, while Mexican-American children showed more balanced perceptions and evaluations of ingroup and outgroup targets. Considerations of group differences in status and culture are discussed, along with implications of these findings for research on children's self-evaluations.

Ever since the early studies of Clark and Clark (1939, 1958), researchers have expressed concern that children from ethnic minority groups would have lower evaluations of themselves and their groups than children from ethnic majority groups. In large part, this concern stems from the traditional view that members of devalued groups negatively evaluate themselves and their groups, due to the devaluation of their groups by the larger society (e.g., Cartwright, 1950; see Crocker & Major, 1989, for an extended discussion).

Perspectives on Self-Evaluation: Exploring Issues of Status and Culture

Over the last several decades, much of the empirical work in this area has focused on children's evaluations of themselves. Although there are cases where members of ethnic minority groups have self-evaluations comparable to those of the ethnic majority (e.g., Black Americans; see Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Porter & Washington, 1979; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1971), many studies do reveal differences in self-evaluations between ethnic minority and majority children (e.g., Aboud & Skerry, 1984; Corenblum & Wilson, 1982; Rice, Ruiz, & Padilla, 1974; Weiland & Coughlin, 1979). Synthesizing much of this research literature, a recent meta-analysis

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by Twenge and Crocker (2002) confirms that children from certain ethnic minority groups often report lower self-evaluations than children from of the ethnic majority group. For example, Latino Americans—and Mexican Americans in particular—generally report lower self-evaluations than European Americans, and these differences are greatest among children in the elementary school years. Yet, contrary to predictions based on group differences in status, Twenge and Crocker (2002) found that members of a minority group with particularly low social status (i.e., Black Americans) tended to report higher self-evaluations, while those from a minority group with relatively high social status (i.e., Asian Americans) reported lower self-evaluations.

In light of such findings, these and other authors have challenged the notion that devalued minority status would necessarily translate into lowered self-evaluations (see Crocker & Major, 1989; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1971). Alternatively, rather than attributing group differences in self-evaluations to status, some have proposed that the differences could reflect variation in how the self is construed in relation to others (see Twenge & Crocker, 2002, for an extended discussion). Using terms such as individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1995) and independence and interdependence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), researchers have identified differences in the degree to which people perceive the self to be connected to or separate from others across cultures. Independence and uniqueness are emphasized more strongly in some cultures (e.g., Western cultures), whereas interdependence and connectedness between self and others are emphasized more strongly in other cultures (e.g., East Asian cultures; see Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002).

Research from a cultural perspective suggests that the degree to which independence and interdependence are emphasized in a given culture may have profound implications for how people evaluate themselves. For example, Markus and Kitayama (1991) note that expressing positive self-evaluations “requires separating oneself from others and seeing oneself as different from and better than others” (p. 242). Indeed, these authors state that in more interdependent cultures, where “standing out” is less valued or accepted, individuals may show a relatively modest self-evaluation, rather than positively distinguishing themselves from others. Consistent with this perspective, Chiu (1992) found that Taiwanese students scored lower than White American students on two independent measures of personal self-esteem. Similarly, Wright and Taylor (1995) reported that Inuit children in the Canadian Arctic evaluated themselves less positively than their White Canadian counterparts. As one explanation of this trend, Wright and Taylor (1995) note that “individual recognition and public acknowledgement of personal achievement are not as central in Inuit culture as they are to White Canadian-American culture” (p. 249). Thus, there is some evidence to suggest that cultural differences in orientations between self and others may be associated with differences in reported self-evaluations.

Comparing Evaluations of Self and Others: The Relative Assessment of Positive Regard

Still, although there are some notable exceptions (e.g., Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997), many studies of ethnic and cultural differences in self-evaluation have focused on mean comparisons across groups (see Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999, and Twenge & Crocker, 2002, for recent reviews). We believe that such an approach might be problematic, as it is difficult to discern what those group differences in

self-evaluation represent, especially in cases where both a *culture* explanation and a *status* explanation might be applied. Recall Twenge and Crocker's (2002) finding that Mexican Americans, on average, have lower self-evaluations relative to European Americans. In interpreting this finding, advocates of a status interpretation might argue that Mexican Americans have lower self-evaluations due to their devalued status in society. However, the same finding might be interpreted through a cultural lens, such that Mexican Americans report lower self-evaluations because they are less inclined to differentiate themselves from others.

To aid in the interpretation of such differences, we propose that attention be paid to how group members evaluate themselves *in relation to how they evaluate others*. Clearly, the concept of social comparison is not new to research on self-evaluation. Nearly half a century ago, Festinger (1954) proposed that we learn about ourselves through comparisons with others, as they provide us with useful information regarding where we stand. Similarly, we propose that group members' evaluations should be examined in conjunction with their evaluations of others, as such comparisons may provide useful information regarding what the evaluations represent.

At the same time, we must be careful to specify the "others" with whom comparisons might be conducted, since comparisons may occur either within or across group boundaries. Specifically, people may conduct *intragroup comparisons*, where they compare themselves to other members of their groups in order to evaluate their standing relative to similar others (Brown, 1986; Suls, Lemos, & Stewart, 2002; Wood, 1989). Alternatively, people may conduct *intergroup comparisons*, where they seek to determine the standing of their group relative to other social groups (e.g., Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Mummendey & Schreiber, 1983; Tajfel, 1981).

The present research will examine both intragroup and intergroup comparisons among young Mexican-American and European-American children. Intragroup and intergroup comparisons may be particularly important to study with respect to young children, as they are in the early stages of developing a distinct sense of self (e.g., Ruble & Dweck, 1995), while also just beginning to recognize social categories and to attribute meanings to the group differences they perceive (see Aboud, 1988; Cameron, Alvarez, Ruble, & Fuligni, 2001). Additionally, these particular groups of children have been studied for a variety of reasons. Research suggests that Mexican Americans tend to have lower self-evaluations than European Americans, and these differences tend to be greatest in the younger years (see Twenge & Crocker, 2002), precisely when children become increasingly aware of ethnic group differences (Aboud, 1988). Furthermore, comparing patterns of evaluations among Mexican-American and European-American children provides a context in which both status and culture explanations might be reasonably considered. Mexican Americans, as part of the larger Latino community, are perceived as having substantially lower social status than European Americans (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). At the same time, Latino Americans tend to be higher in collectivism than European Americans (see Marin & Triandis, 1985; Oyserman et al., 2002), placing a greater value on cooperation and commitment to one's community (see Keefe & Padilla, 1987; Kagan & Knight, 1979).

Intragroup Comparisons: Evaluations of Self and Ingroup Members Across Cultural Contexts

As stated previously, research has often shown that ethnic minority children—and particularly Mexican-American children—tend to report lower mean

self-evaluations than European-American children (see Twenge & Crocker, 2002). Consistent with this earlier work, we predict that Mexican-American children will report lower mean self-evaluations relative to European-American children. However, rather than automatically interpreting this finding as an indicator of negative self-regard, we propose that more information regarding children's self-evaluations can be gained through comparing their self-evaluations to evaluations of other ingroup members. Social psychological research suggests that, in such comparisons, people generally tend to evaluate themselves more positively than they evaluate others (e.g., Brown, 1986; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Brown, 1988), and specifically when the comparison targets are other members of the same social group (e.g., Suls et al., 2002). Furthermore, other research suggests that this positive bias in self-evaluation holds for people of many ages, including even young children (e.g., Falbo, Poston, Triscari, & Zhang, 1997; Ruble, Eisenberg, & Higgins, 1994). Thus, we predict that both Mexican-American and European-American children will exhibit a positive bias in evaluating themselves, such that their self-evaluations will be more positive than their evaluations of other ingroup members.

At the same time, we might also consider how differences in cultural orientations between Mexican-American and European-American children might relate to their evaluations of self and ingroup members. For example, in cultures where independence and uniqueness are emphasized, people may be more motivated to positively distinguish themselves from others in order to enhance their own self-esteem (see Markus & Kitayama, 1991). As such, people from more independent cultures might attempt to maximize their own positive self-evaluations, by contrasting themselves with others and rating themselves more positively than they rate other members of their group (see Stapel & Koomen, 2002, for a related argument). Instead, people from more interdependent cultures might show less dramatic differences between evaluations of themselves and ingroup members, as they are less motivated to positively distinguish themselves from other members of their group (see Heine et al., 1999; Kitayama, Markus, & Lieberman, 1995). As Mexican Americans tend to be more collective in orientation, and may therefore be less inclined to differentiate themselves from others, we predict that Mexican-American children will show less dramatic differences in their evaluations of self and ingroup members, while European-American children will show more marked differences between evaluations of self and ingroup members.

Similarly, we might also expect differences in the degree to which children from the different groups would perceive other ingroup members to be like themselves. Paralleling the arguments outlined above, people from cultures that emphasize interdependence and connectedness with others (e.g., Mexican Americans) should be more inclined to see other ingroup members as similar to themselves than those from cultures that stress independence and uniqueness (e.g., European Americans). Therefore, to provide an additional test of the proposed trends, we will also examine the degree to which Mexican-American and European-American children perceive similarity between themselves and other ingroup members.

Intergroup Comparisons: Evaluations of Ingroup Members and Outgroup Members

Additionally, we will conduct comparisons of children's evaluations and perceptions of ingroup and outgroup members. Research from the social identity tradition

suggests that when group categorizations are salient, people are inclined to show various form of ingroup bias, such as perceiving ingroup members to be more like oneself, and evaluating ingroup members more positively than outgroup members (see Tajfel, 1981; Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992). Studies with young children also suggest that they not only become aware of group differences from a very young age (e.g., 4–7 years), but that they tend to grant more positive evaluations to those who are like themselves (see Aboud, 1988; Cameron et al., 2001, for reviews). Consistent with these views, we might expect children to evaluate ingroup members more positively, and to perceive more ingroup members as similar to themselves, relative to outgroup members.

Still, other perspectives have noted that differences in status or culture may accent the degree to which people respond favorably to ingroup members and outgroup members. For example, some research on status differences among children indicates that those from ethnic majority groups generally demonstrate biases in favor of their own group, while ethnic minority children are often less likely to favor their own group (e.g., Aboud & Skerry, 1984; Corenblum & Wilson, 1982; Rice et al., 1974).¹ This work would suggest that ethnic minority children might show less bias toward their groups than ethnic majority children.

However, recent research from the social identity perspective proposes that members of minority groups often find subtle ways to affirm the value of their group, even in the face of their group's devalued status (see Spears, Jetten, & Doosje, 2001). Although they may acknowledge the ingroup's lower status on dimensions that define status relationships between the groups, members of minority groups may seek to evaluate their groups positively on other dimensions, in order to maintain a positive view of their own groups (Ellemers & Van Rijswijk, 1997; Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Mullen et al., 1992; Mummendey & Schreiber, 1983). Members of the majority group may also be willing to rate the minority group positively on these alternate dimensions, as long as those ratings would not threaten the status of their own group (Spears et al., 2001). Thus, members of both minority and majority groups may evaluate both groups positively, yet ratings of the groups would be likely to vary with respect to the dimensions on which such positive evaluations are based. Consistent with this analysis, other work suggests that there are common differences in the kinds of characteristics associated with members of high status and low status groups, such that members of low status groups are often perceived to be less competent, yet more sociable, than members of high status groups (see Ridgeway, 2001; Glick & Fiske, 2001). Given this general tendency, it could be that members of both minority and majority groups would be likely to evaluate the majority group more positively on such status-relevant characteristics as competence, while rating the minority group more positively on characteristics unrelated to status, such as sociability.

At the same time, research from a cultural perspective offers varied predictions regarding the degree to which members of different cultural groups might exhibit a favorable bias toward their own groups. On the one hand, some researchers have argued that members of interdependent cultures would show greater ingroup bias than members of independent cultures, as they are more oriented toward valuing their group memberships and striving toward the goals of their groups (e.g., Chen, Brockner, & Katz, 1998; Triandis, 1991). On the other hand, some have proposed that members of interdependent cultures would be less inclined to show ingroup favoritism, as displays of positive distinctiveness should be more inhibited than in more independent cultures (e.g., Heine & Lehman, 1997).

Given these differing approaches and views, no precise predictions have been made regarding the relative evaluations of ingroup and outgroup members among ethnic minority and majority children. Nonetheless, while we expect both groups of children to show some form of ingroup bias, we also suspect that the groups may vary in the degree to which (and the dimensions on which) they show a favorable bias toward their own group.

Method

Sample

Participants were recruited as part of a larger study on classroom experiences and intergroup attitudes. Participants were young Mexican-American and European-American children (5–9 years in age) from a total of 52 kindergarten, first, and second grade classrooms in six central California schools. Student populations of two schools were predominantly European American, two were predominantly Mexican-American, and two schools had more balanced enrollments of Mexican-American and European-American students.

Mexican-American Children

A total of 484 Mexican-American children participated in the study: 244 females (50.4%) and 240 males (49.6%). Thirty-four percent of these students were enrolled in kindergarten classes, 44% were enrolled in first grade, and 22% were enrolled in second grade classes (mean age = 6.57 years).

European-American Children

A total of 366 European-American children participated in the study: 174 females (47.5%) and 192 males (52.5%). Thirty-seven percent of these students were enrolled in kindergarten classes, 35% in first grade, and 28% were enrolled in second grade classes (mean age = 6.54 years).

Materials

The materials and procedures used in the study were developed by Wright and Taylor (1995), and are similar to those from other studies with young children (e.g., Bullock & Russell, 1984). Several hundred head-and-shoulders Polaroid photographs of 5–7 year old Mexican-American and European-American children were pretested with Mexican-American and European-American adult raters. Each photograph was rated by the adults with respect to five criteria: 1) clarity of the photograph; 2) physical attractiveness of the child; 3) facial expression of the child; 4) gender of the child; and 5) ethnicity of the child. Photographs that received 100% rater agreement on gender and ethnicity were matched on the remaining 3 criteria, to create Mexican-American/European-American pairs of male and female targets. Four Mexican-American/European American pairs (2 male and 2 female) were combined to produce testing packets. Altogether, 6 testing packets were created, each containing 8 photographs.

Procedures

Each child participated individually in his or her first language with a female, co-ethnic tester. One of the 6 testing packets was randomly chosen for each testing

session. At the beginning of each testing session, the tester took a Polaroid photograph of the participating child and explained the activity as the photograph developed. The child's own photograph was then added to the testing packet. All 9 photographs (the child's own and the packet of 8 target photographs) were shuffled and placed randomly in front of the child. An empty, open box was also placed in front of the child. The tester then asked the child to sort the 9 target photographs on a series of testing trials, using the following standard request format:

“Pick all the children who are ____ and put them in this box, and leave all the children who are not ____ on the table.”

On each trial, the child was free to select all, some, or none of the 9 target photographs. Before each trial, the tester would once again shuffle the target photographs and place them randomly in front of the child. It should also be noted that testers were explicitly trained to refrain from giving children any evaluative feedback regarding their selections.

The first two requests asked the child to pick 1) the “girls” and 2) the “boys.” These first requests were used to ensure that the child understood the nature of the task, as children can readily identify gender differences by this age (see Cole & Cole, 1993).

Dependent Measures

Two basic types of sorting requests were used to assess children's responses to the photographs: *Target Evaluations* and *Perceived Similarity*.

Target Evaluations

Following the two preliminary trials, each participating child was asked to sort the target photographs in relation to six evaluative items, by picking the ones: 1) who are *good at lots of things*; 2) who are *smart*; 3) who *have lots of friends*; 4) who are *nice*; 5) who are *happy*; and 6) who *like school*.

Evaluation of Self

We calculated the number of trials in which children chose their own photographs in response to the evaluative items, to create a composite self-evaluation measure with values ranging from 0 (self not chosen for any positive items) to 6 (self chosen for all positive items). The six items were entered into separate principal components analyses (varimax rotation) for each ethnic sample. In each case, only one factor emerged, accounting for 51% of the variance in the Mexican-American sample, and 40% of the variance in the European-American sample. Factor loadings ranged from .62 to .79 among Mexican-American children, and .48 to .75 among European-American children.

Evaluations of Ingroup and Outgroup

For each item, and excluding the child's own photograph, we calculated the number of photographs chosen separately for Mexican-American and European-American targets, thereby creating two separate ratings ranging from 0 (no targets from ethnic group chosen) to 4 (all targets from ethnic group chosen). Using these ratings, separate scales for evaluations of Mexican-American and

European-American targets were created using all six evaluative items. For each ethnic sample, the six items were entered into separate principal components analyses (varimax rotation) for Mexican-American and European-American targets. In each case, only one factor emerged. For Mexican-American targets, the factor accounted for 52% of the variance among Mexican-American children (factor loadings from .67 to .77), and 51% of the variance among European-American children (factor loadings from .66 to .75). For European-American targets, the factor accounted for 51% of the variance among Mexican-American children (factor loadings from .68 to .78), and 48% of the variance among European-American children (factor loadings from .64 to .75).

Perceived Similarity

As a measure of Perceived Similarity, each child also picked targets in response to the item "Who is most like you?" Prior to this sorting trial, the child's own photograph was placed in the open box, so that each child would choose only among the remaining ingroup and outgroup target photographs. This procedure was used to minimize children's confusion about the demands of the sorting task, as well as to focus their attention on how other people may be like themselves. Children's choices were once again calculated separately for Mexican-American and European-American targets, creating two separate ratings ranging from 0 (no targets from ethnic group chosen) to 4 (all targets from ethnic group chosen).

Demographics

Information regarding the ethnicity, gender, and grade level of each participating child was also obtained, through parental consent forms and school records.

Results

Separate analyses were conducted for Target Evaluations and Perceived Similarity. Prior to data analysis, all ratings of Target Evaluations and Perceived Similarity were converted to percentages to produce a common measurement scale, thereby simplifying the presentation of results. The percentages were then grouped and analyzed by ethnicity, gender, and grade level, to examine the potential influences of these variables on children's patterns of responses.²

Comparisons of Mean Self-Evaluations

First, a *t*-test compared mean self-evaluations among children from the two ethnic groups. Although self-evaluations were quite positive among children from both groups, European-American children tended to report higher self-evaluations ($M = .92$) than did Mexican-American children ($M = .82$), $t(848) = -6.76$, $p < .001$.

Comparing Evaluations of Self, Ingroup, and Outgroup

To study children's self-evaluations in relation to their evaluations of targets from each group, a 2 (Ethnicity of Child: Mexican American/European American) \times 2 (Gender of Child: Male/Female) \times 3 (Grade Level: Kindergarten/First/Second) \times 3 (Target: Self/Ingroup/ Outgroup) mixed model analysis of variance was conducted

for Target Evaluations. No main or interaction effects involving Gender or Grade Level were statistically significant (F s ranging between .12 and 2.65, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 < .01$). However, the main effect for Target was significant, $F(2, 1676) = 308.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .27$. Overall, children evaluated themselves more positively ($M = .86$) than they evaluated either ingroup targets ($M = .72$), $F(1, 848) = 276.81$, $p < .001$, or outgroup targets ($M = .68$), $F(1, 848) = 252.78$, $p < .001$.

Furthermore, this analysis yielded a significant Ethnicity of Child \times Target interaction, $F(2, 1676) = 82.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$, indicating differences in patterns of self, ingroup, and outgroup evaluations among Mexican-American and European-American children (see Figure 1). Mexican-American children evaluated themselves more positively than ingroup targets, $F(1, 483) = 42.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$, yet this bias was significantly more extreme among European-American children,

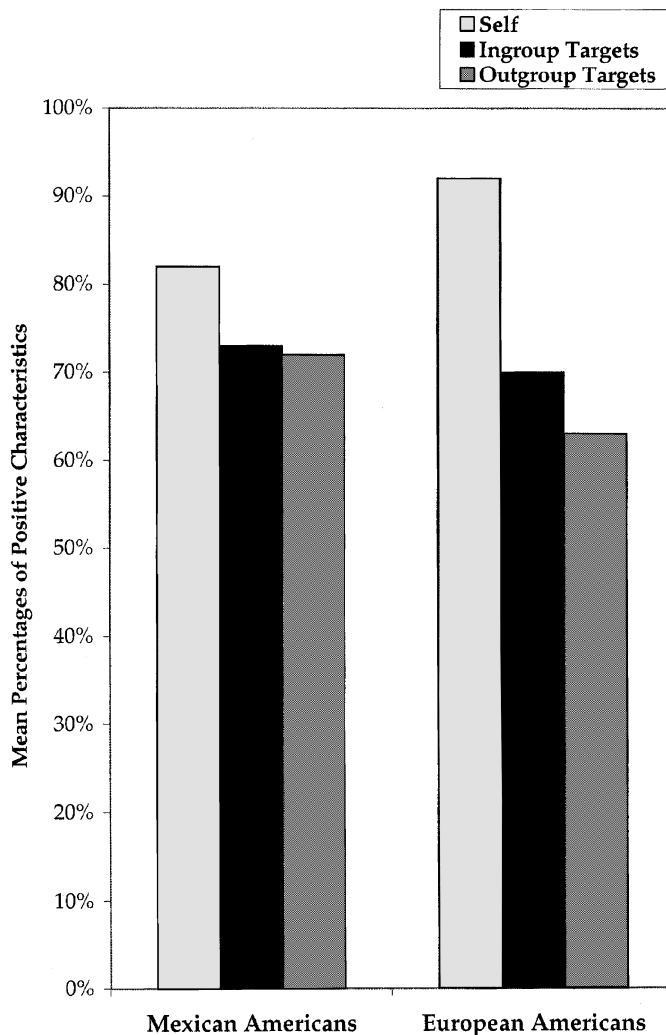


FIGURE 1 Mean percentages of positive characteristics attributed to self, ingroup targets, and outgroup targets among Mexican-American and European-American children.

$F(1, 365) = 399.98, p < .001, \eta^2 = .52$. Additionally, evaluations of ingroup and outgroup targets did not differ significantly among Mexican-American children, $F(1, 483) = 3.46, p > .05, \eta^2 < .01$, whereas European-American children evaluated outgroup targets significantly less positively than ingroup targets, $F(1, 365) = 59.96, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14$.

Evaluating Targets on Competence and Sociability

Additional comparisons were conducted to examine whether the obtained patterns of results might vary depending on the dimensions on which evaluations were assessed. From the six original evaluation items, responses to items regarding *competence* (smart, good at lots of things) and *sociability* (nice, have lots of friends) were averaged for each comparison target, and these measures were entered as dependent variables in two separate 2 (Ethnicity of Child) \times 2 (Gender of Child) \times 3 (Grade Level) \times 3 (Target) mixed model analyses of variance.

Paralleling results for the overall analysis, no main or interaction effects involving Gender or Grade Level were significant (F s ranging between .17 and 2.84, $p > .05, \eta^2 < .01$). At the same time, the Target main effect was significant for both competence, $F(2, 1674) = 213.61, p < .001, \eta^2 = .20$, and sociability, $F(2, 1674) = 111.98, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11$, and these effects were qualified by significant Ethnicity of Child \times Target interactions (competence: $F(2, 1674) = 50.19, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$; sociability: $F(2, 1674) = 64.47, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$). Table 1 provides mean scores on the two-item competence and sociability measures, as well as on the original six-item evaluation measure, for self, ingroup, and outgroup targets. Consistent with patterns obtained in the overall analysis, Mexican-American children evaluated themselves more positively than ingroup targets across both dimensions, yet these biases were more marked among European-American children. Mexican-American children also did not differ in their evaluations of ingroup and outgroup targets on either dimension, while European-American children rated outgroup targets less positively on both dimensions.

TABLE 1 Mean Evaluations of Self, Ingroup, and Outgroup Among Mexican-American and European-American Children

Items Used in Comparison	Target of Ratings		
	Self	Ingroup	Outgroup
Mexican Americans			
Competence items	.85 _a	.74 _b	.74 _b
Social items	.78 _a	.74 _b	.74 _b
All items	.82 _a	.73 _b	.72 _b
European Americans			
Competence items	.95 _a	.75 _b	.64 _c
Social items	.92 _a	.74 _b	.63 _c
All items	.92 _a	.70 _b	.63 _c

Note. Means in the same row that do not share the same subscript differ at the .01 level of significance. Means in the same row that share the same subscript do not differ at the .05 level of significance.

Perceived Similarity

A 2 (Ethnicity of Child: Mexican American/European American) \times 2 (Gender of Child: Male/Female) \times 3 (Grade Level: Kindergarten/First/Second) \times 2 (Target: Ingroup/Outgroup) mixed model analysis of variance was conducted for Perceived Similarity.

No main or interaction effects involving Gender were statistically significant, F s ranging between .00 and 1.69, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 < .01$. Additionally, no interaction effects involving Grade were significant, F s ranging between .20 and 2.06, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 < .01$. However, the main effect for Grade Level was significant, $F(2, 838) = 30.05$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .07$, indicating that older children perceived fewer targets as like them than did younger children ($M = 41\%$, 31% , and 25% for kindergarten, first-, and second-grade children, respectively).

The main effect for Ethnicity of Child was significant, $F(1, 838) = 36.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Overall, Mexican-American children tended to choose more targets as like them ($M = .38$) than did European-American children ($M = .27$). The main effect for Target was also significant, $F(1, 838) = 161.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$, indicating that children generally perceived more ingroup targets as like them ($M = .40$) than outgroup targets ($M = .26$).

These effects were further qualified by a significant Ethnicity of Child \times Target interaction, $F(1, 838) = 32.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$, indicating differences in perceived similarity with ingroup and outgroup targets among Mexican-American and European-American children (see Figure 2). While both groups of children perceived more ingroup targets as like themselves, European American children showed a much greater difference in their perceptions of similarity with ingroup and outgroup targets than did Mexican-American children.³

Discussion

Findings from this study reveal many interesting similarities and differences between Mexican American and European American children, in terms of their perceptions and evaluations of themselves, ingroup members, and outgroup members.

Intragroup Comparisons: Examining Evaluations of Self and Ingroup Members

While children's self-evaluations were generally positive, the results revealed that European-American children reported higher mean self-evaluations than Mexican-American children. At first glance, we might be inclined to interpret the finding as indicating that Mexican-American children have low self-evaluations. This view would be consistent with status explanations that have often been employed in the past, suggesting that children from lower-status groups would report lower self-evaluations because they and their groups are devalued by society (see Aboud, 1988; Crocker & Major, 1989). However, on the basis of this finding alone, it remains difficult to discern whether differences between the groups are due to differences in social status, or whether they may represent differences in cultural orientations among Mexican-American and European-American children.

At the very least, other findings from this study suggest that a status explanation cannot fully account for the observed pattern of effects. In particular, the inclusion of both self- and ingroup-evaluations allows us to examine how children evaluate themselves in relation to how they evaluate other members of their groups. These

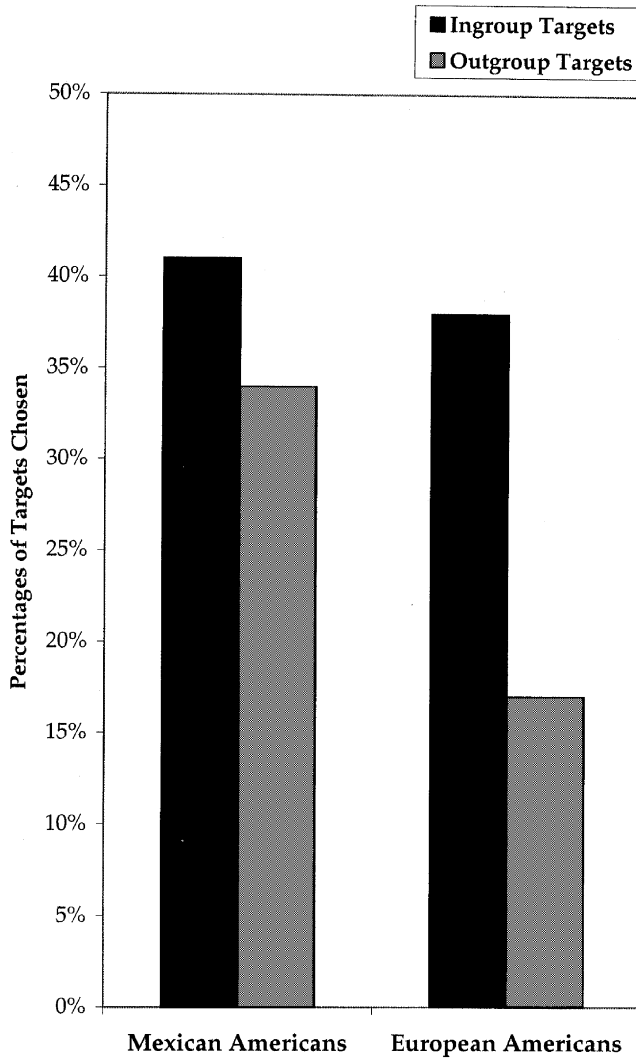


FIGURE 2 Mean percentages of ingroup and outgroup targets perceived as similar to self among Mexican-American and European-American children.

additional comparisons revealed that children from both groups evaluated themselves significantly more positively than they evaluated other ingroup members. Given that people tend to evaluate themselves more positively than they evaluate others (e.g., Brown, 1986; Taylor, 1983), this finding is perhaps not surprising. However, this pattern might not be expected for Mexican-American children if they are generally thought to have low self-evaluations.

At the same time, other results lend some support for a culture-based interpretation. Relative to Mexican-American children, European-American children showed a more extreme difference between their evaluations of self and ingroup members, rating themselves much more positively than they rated ingroup targets. European-American children also perceived fewer targets as like themselves than did Mexican-American children. Both of these findings are consistent with the view that

children's perceptions and evaluations would be associated with differences in cultural orientations between the groups. As Mexican-American culture emphasizes connectedness with others, while European-American culture places a greater emphasis on independence and uniqueness (cf. Marin & Triandis, 1985; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), it is understandable that European-American children would perceive fewer targets as like themselves, and would show greater differences between evaluations of themselves and other ingroup members, compared to Mexican-American children.

Still, we must acknowledge that the present research only provides additional comparisons with which group differences in self-evaluation can be examined, rather than finding conclusive support for one interpretation over another. Although other studies have shown that children are aware of group differences in status at these very young ages (e.g., Foster, 1994; Ramsey, 1991), we did not directly test children's awareness of status differences in the present study. Also, while other work suggests that Mexican Americans tend to be more interdependent whereas European Americans tend to be more independent in orientation (see Oyserman et al., 2002; Kagan & Knight, 1979), we did not assess the cultural orientations of children on an individual basis. Future research should examine children's evaluations of self and ingroup members in relation to their cultural orientations and awareness of group differences, in order to test these relationships more directly. Nonetheless, findings from the present research suggest that status cannot fully account for the observed group differences in self-evaluations, and that other explanations for these effects should be explored further.

Intergroup Comparisons: Perceptions and Evaluations of Ingroup and Outgroup Targets

The research also yielded some interesting findings regarding children's perceptions and evaluations of ingroup and outgroup targets. Overall, children from both ethnic groups perceived more ingroup targets as like them than outgroup targets, and children in the latter grades perceived fewer targets as like them than children in the younger grades. These findings illustrate developmental changes that commonly occur in children at these ages (Brown, 1998; Harter, 1983), as they develop a better understanding of social categories (Aboud, 1988).

At the same time, differences in perceptions and evaluations of the targets emerged between children from the two ethnic groups. Relative to Mexican-American children, European-American children perceived substantially fewer outgroup targets as like them than ingroup targets. European-American children also evaluated outgroup targets significantly less positively than ingroup targets, while Mexican-American children evaluated ingroup and outgroup targets in an equally positive manner. These findings are important, because they demonstrate that the perception of difference between ingroup members and outgroup members does not necessarily intimate a negative evaluation of the outgroup. Although we did not directly assess children's knowledge of ethnic categories, we find that both Mexican-American and European-American children readily perceived differences between ingroup and outgroup targets, such that they perceived more ingroup targets as like them than outgroup targets. Yet, we also find that Mexican-American children evaluated outgroup targets as positively as ingroup targets, and these results were consistent across all three grade levels. Indeed, Mexican-American and European-American children's patterns of evaluations remain strikingly similar across the three

grades,⁴ precisely during those years when children should become increasingly aware of ethnic group differences (Aboud, 1988). As such, these findings challenge the likelihood that the differences between Mexican-American and European-American children's evaluations of targets are simply due to their failure to recognize or understand ethnic group differences.

Still, it is somewhat surprising that Mexican-American children did not demonstrate a more marked bias toward their own group, even while perceiving differences between members of the two groups. At least in part, the relative social status of Mexican-American and European-American children might account for the observed patterns of evaluations. Indeed, it could be that while evaluations of self and ingroup are guided largely by cultural differences, ingroup-outgroup comparisons are more likely to pertain to differences in status between the groups.⁵ Here, it is important to note that, although people are generally motivated to favor their own groups over other groups (Tajfel, 1981), both groups of children live in a society where European-American culture is clearly dominant. As such, Mexican Americans' opportunities to evaluate their group positively are likely to be constrained by realities of the social context (Ellemers, Van Dyck, Hinkle, & Jacobs, 2000; Ellemers & Van Rijswijk, 1997; Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Spears et al., 2001), where Mexican Americans are generally perceived to be of lower social status than European Americans (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Under these conditions, Mexican-American children may be more inclined to evaluate European Americans positively, while European-American children may be less inclined to evaluate Mexican Americans positively. Together, these forces could serve to minimize expressions of ingroup favoritism among Mexican-American children, while maximizing ingroup favoritism among European-American children, thereby paralleling patterns of results from the present study, as well as those from other research (e.g., Weiland & Coughlin, 1979).

One potential limitation to a status-based interpretation involves the patterns of children's evaluations across different dimensions. As stated previously, research from the social identity perspective suggests that while members of minority groups may concede their group's lower status on status-relevant dimensions, they should attempt to boost evaluations of their group on dimensions unrelated to those that serve to establish high status for the majority group (see Ellemers & Van Rijswijk, 1997; Mullen et al., 1992; Mummendey & Schreiber, 1983). But, findings from the present study revealed that the patterns of children's evaluations were virtually identical across the dimensions of *competence* and *sociability*—dimensions that are commonly associated with high and low status groups, respectively (see Ridgeway, 2001; Glick & Fiske, 2001). In other words, children's evaluations of ingroup and outgroup targets did not vary depending on the evaluative dimension, as would be predicted by this work.

One might therefore argue that we should be cautious in accepting these children's responses at face value, as they may somehow reflect self-presentational concerns, rather than representing accurate assessments of children's evaluations of ingroup and outgroup targets (see Ellemers et al., 2000). However, there are two points that might make such an analysis seem unlikely in the present case. First, great efforts were taken to minimize features of the testing context that could induce biased responding, including testing the children individually by a co-ethnic tester who was carefully trained to refrain from providing evaluative feedback following children's responses. Additionally, other research suggests that young children generally do not have a well-developed understanding of self-presentational processes, and that they are relatively unlikely to be selective or strategic in how they

present themselves to others (Aloise-Young, 1993; Bennett & Yeeles, 1990). Nonetheless, future research on these issues should be conducted with older samples, to examine further the degree to which self-presentational concerns might play a role in evaluations of ingroup and outgroup members, while also allowing for more in-depth explorations of how self-evaluations relate to intragroup and intergroup comparisons.

Alternatively, it may well be that the obtained patterns of evaluations are associated with differences in cultural orientations among Mexican-American and European-American children. As suggested previously, Mexican Americans tend to be more communal and collective in orientation than European Americans (Kagan & Knight, 1979; Marin & Triandis, 1985; Oyserman et al., 2002), and results from this study showed that Mexican-American children differentiated less between evaluations of themselves and others than did European-American children. It is conceivable that the tendency to minimize differences in evaluation might extend beyond self-ingroup comparisons, such that Mexican-American children would also be less likely to differentially evaluate members of their own and other groups. To test this possibility, future research might examine Mexican-Americans' evaluations of the ingroup in comparison with a variety of outgroup targets, and in relation to their exposure to differing sets of cultural norms (see Kagan & Knight, 1979).

Conclusions

Differences in self-evaluation among ethnic minority and majority children have commonly been attributed to differences in status between their groups, such that ethnic minority children would feel less positively about themselves and their groups because of their lower status in society. We contend that such mean comparisons across groups might be misleading, and that additional comparisons should be included to explore the nature of these group differences. Results from this study revealed that both Mexican-American and European-American children evaluated themselves significantly more positively than they evaluated ingroup members, yet European-American children showed greater differentiation between evaluations of themselves and ingroup members, as well as between ingroup and outgroup members, than Mexican-American children. Although more research is needed to determine the degree to which these trends reflect differences in culture or status, this research indicates the need for more complex conceptualizations regarding ethnic minority and majority children's perceptions and evaluations of themselves, their groups, and other groups.

Notes

1. A clear exception to this general trend exists among Black Americans, where some studies have found them to favor their own group, the White outgroup, or to show equal preferences for members of each group (see Porter & Washington, 1979; Twenge & Crocker, 2002).
2. Since responses to proportion-based measures are often not normally distributed, parallel sets of analyses were conducted using log-transformed and arcsin-transformed scores (see Winer, Brown, & Michels, 1991). In each case, the patterns of results were virtually identical to those obtained using the

- original, non-transformed scores. Thus, to simplify the presentation of results, only those for the original, non-transformed scores have been reported.
3. Using a difference score (M_{diff}) created by subtracting perceived outgroup–target similarity from perceived ingroup–target similarity, post-hoc comparisons were conducted to statistically compare the magnitude of the differences across Mexican-American and European-American children. Results showed that the difference between perceived similarity with ingroup and outgroup targets was significantly greater among European-American children ($M_{\text{diff}} = .21$) than among Mexican-American children ($M_{\text{diff}} = .08$), $F(1, 849) = 34.05$, $p < .001$.
 4. Mean evaluations of ingroup and outgroup targets were .73 and .72 among Mexican-American children in kindergarten, .74 and .72 among Mexican-American children in first grade, and .73 and .73 among Mexican-American children in second grade. By contrast, mean evaluations of ingroup and outgroup targets were .68 and .62 among European-American children in kindergarten, .69 and .62 among European-American children in first grade, and .74 and .64 among European-American children in second grade.
 5. The authors would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for offering this interpretation.

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