INTERNALIZED DEVALUATION AND SITUATIONAL THREAT

Fifty years ago, social scientists generally assumed that targets of stigma and negative stereotypes internalized negative images and that this internalization could alter or even damage the personality of the stigmatized person (Scott, 1997). Allport for example, began his analysis of the psychological consequences of prejudice by asking, “What would happen to your personality if you heard it said over and over again that you are lazy and had inferior blood?” (Allport, 1954, p. 42).

In this chapter, we consider research and theory on the idea that prejudice and discrimination lower the self-esteem of people with stigmatized identities. We describe how studies of the effects of stigma on self-esteem progressively evolved to (a) examine moderators of the effects of social stigma on self-esteem; (b) examine how situational variables shape the meaning of prejudice, stereotypes, and stigma; (c) frame social stigma as a situational predicament with which targets of stigma actively cope; and (d) view the stigmatized as caught between protecting self-esteem at the cost of learning, relationships, and/or motivation versus sustaining learning, motivation, and relationships at the cost of self-esteem. We argue that situational cues, personal beliefs, and collective representations trigger a self-focused motivational orientation, which has undesirable consequences. Initial evidence shows that shifting from self-image goals to compassionate goals can protect the self-esteem of targets of stigma, and help create positive relationships between people with stigmatized and nonstigmatized identities.

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, we consider research and theory on the idea that prejudice and discrimination lower the self-esteem of people with stigmatized identities. We describe how studies of the effects of stigma on self-esteem progressively evolved to (a) examine moderators of the effects of social stigma on self-esteem; (b) examine how situational variables shape the meaning of prejudice, stereotypes, and stigma; (c) frame social stigma as a situational predicament with which targets of stigma actively cope; and (d) view the stigmatized as caught between protecting self-esteem at the cost of learning, relationships, and/or motivation versus sustaining learning, motivation, and relationships at the cost of self-esteem. We argue that situational cues, personal beliefs, and collective representations trigger a self-focused motivational orientation, which has undesirable consequences. Initial evidence shows that shifting from self-image goals to compassionate goals can protect the self-esteem of targets of stigma, and help create positive relationships between people with stigmatized and nonstigmatized identities.
involves protecting self-esteem at the cost of learning, relationships, and/or motivation; the hard place involves sustaining learning, motivation, and relationships at the cost of self-esteem. We conclude with suggestions for the next phase in the evolution of this research, arguing that situational cues, personal beliefs, and collective representations trigger a self-focused motivational orientation, which has a number of predictable and undesirable consequences. We suggest that shifting from goals focused on constructing, protecting, and enhancing desired self-images to goals focused on learning, contributing, and supporting others empower targets of stereotypes and prejudice.

HISTORY OF RESEARCH ON STIGMA AND SELF-WORTH

Internalization of devaluation, prejudice, and discrimination shapes beliefs about the self and the world. Stigmatized people sometimes decide that negative stereotypes of their group are valid, and stereotype themselves (e.g., Biernat, Vescio, & Green, 1996; Hogg & Turner, 1987; Lewin, 1948). For example, on average overweight people believe that overweight people lack self-discipline and dislike other overweight people just as much as thin people do (Crandall, 1994; Quinn & Crocker, 1999). Stigmatized people sometimes accept that they deserve their devalued status, and legitimize and defend the system that devalues them (Jost and Banaji, 1994; Sidanius, 1993).

Most research and theory on the internalization hypothesis, however, focuses on self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to personal and global feelings of self-worth, self-regard, or self-acceptance (Rosenberg, 1979). Both pragmatic and theoretical concerns contribute to the wide interest in self-esteem. Pragmatically, several measures of self-esteem with excellent psychometric properties have been available since the 1960s, and researchers include these measures in many studies, resulting in a large number of data sets on which to test hypotheses about self-esteem. Theoretically, psychologists widely regard self-esteem as a central indicator of mental health or psychological well-being (Taylor & Brown, 1988); self-esteem influences life satisfaction (Diener, 1984), the emotional experience of daily life (Pelham & Swann, 1989), and represents a broad psychological consequence of stereotyping, prejudice, and stigma. Social stigma spoils not only one’s social identity in the eyes of others, but also one’s experience of the self.

Most social psychological theory suggests that stigmatized people should have low self-esteem. Symbolic interactionists articulated this idea in the looking-glass self hypothesis. Sociologists such as Mead (1934) and Cooley (1956) argued that the self is a social construction; people develop their sense of who and what they are by observing and interpreting the responses they receive from others. Other people provide the looking-glass in which people see themselves reflected. People then incorporate that reflection into their own self-views. This analysis implies that social stigma and devaluation of one’s identity distorts personality, creating internalized, stable, low trait self-esteem.

By the 1950s, social psychologists widely accepted this view as fact. In 1950, Dorwin Cartwright argued that, ‘groups to which a person belongs serve as primary determinants of his self-esteem. To a considerable extent, personal feelings of worth depend on the social evaluation of the group with which a person is identified. Self-hatred and feelings of worthlessness tend to arise from membership in underprivileged or outcast groups.’ (p. 440) Erik Erikson claimed in 1956 that ‘There is ample evidence of inferiority feelings and of morbid self-hate in all minority groups’ (p. 155). And in his classic book, The Nature of Prejudice, Allport (1954) recognized that responses to oppression vary widely, but suggested that a common consequence was low self-esteem: ‘Group oppression may destroy the integrity of the ego entirely, and reverse its normal pride, and create a groveling self-image’ (p. 152).

Evidence for this proposition is mixed at best. The studies the Supreme Court cited in the Brown v Board of Education decision banning school segregation showed

Crocker and Major (1989) speculated that resilient self-esteem was not unique to Blacks, but might also characterize many other stigmatized groups. They reviewed studies showing that stigmatized groups as varied as people with facial disfigurements, learning disabilities, mental retardation, physical handicaps, or who are obese do not have low self-esteem. Subsequent quantitative reviews generally support this conclusion. For example, meta-analyses of gender differences in self-esteem typically find small differences favoring males (Kling, Hyde, & Showers, 1999; Major, Barr, Zubek, & Babey, 1999). Studies comparing self-esteem in obese and nonobese populations also typically find no differences or very small differences (Friedman & Brownell, 1995; Miller & Downey, 1999). One recent study examined implicit self-esteem and found no differences between underweight, normal weight, overweight, and obese participants (Karpinski, Griffin, & Clabaugh, 2007).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON THE LINK BETWEEN STIGMA AND SELF-ESTEEM

In light of theory suggesting that the stigmatized incorporate others’ negative views of them into their self-concepts, the failure to find low self-esteem among many stigmatized groups begs for explanation. Researchers suggest four explanations, positing that the effects of social stigma on self-esteem depend on: 1) moderator variables, 2) how targets of stigma construe the situation, 3) how targets of stigma cope with threats to their self-esteem, and 4) the goals or motivations of the stigmatized person.

The moderator solution

Perhaps the hypothesis that stigma causes low self-esteem applies only to some people. In other words, characteristics of the stigmatized could moderate the effect of stigma on self-esteem. Meta-analytic investigations support this view. For example, race differences in self-esteem depend on the gender, age, and education of the sample (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Twenge & Crocker, 2002); gender differences depend on the age, race, and other characteristics of the sample (Kling et al., 1999; Major et al., 1999), and body weight differences depend on gender and ethnicity (Miller & Downey, 1999).

Unfortunately, meta-analytic investigations tend to focus on demographic moderator variables of the effects of stigma on self-esteem, because these are most consistently included in the published studies summarized in meta-analyses. Psychologists, however, care more about the psychological variables that might explain these effects. Researchers have proposed and studied several psychological moderators. The impact of a stigmatized identity on self-esteem depends, for example, on the importance or centrality of the identity to a person’s self-concept (McCoy & Major, 2003), how contingent on others’ approval the person’s self-esteem is (Quinn & Crocker, 1998), and how much the person endorses system-justifying ideologies such as the Protestant Ethic (Quinn & Crocker, 1999) or belief in a just world (Major et al., 2002a). This research is reviewed in detail elsewhere (see Major & O’Brien, 2005; Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002b, for reviews).

These psychological moderators suggest that the effect of prejudice or stigma on self-esteem depends on the meaning people make of their devalued status. In other words, rather than passively accepting and incorporating
negative views that others may hold of them, people may interpret and attempt to make sense of prejudice in the context of central beliefs, values, and self-concepts (Crocker, 1999).

The situational construction of self-esteem
In the past two decades, conceptualizations of self-esteem have shifted from viewing self-esteem as a stable trait to viewing it as a state. We briefly consider the evidence for this conclusion in research on self-esteem and constructing meaning from prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes and the implications for self-esteem among targets of prejudice and discrimination. Psychologists typically construe self-esteem as a trait – a characteristic that is relatively stable over time and across situations (Rosenberg, 1979). But self-esteem varies from day to day or even moment to moment, depending on events such as success and failure, or acceptance and rejection (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995); in other words, self-esteem is a state as well as a trait. Studies assessing self-esteem repeatedly (daily or several times a day) in the same people indicate that about two-thirds of the variance in self-esteem is between-person variance (i.e., reflects a trait), and about one third is within-person variance, reflecting situational constraints or even random fluctuations (Crocker, Karpinski, Quinn, & Chase, 2003). In other words, although people have an average or characteristic level of self-esteem, situations, events, and information available at the moment cause fluctuations in self-esteem around that typical level (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001).

Whether a particular social identity or characteristic is stigmatized depends on meanings derived from cues in that context (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). Consequently, the effects of stigma on self-esteem depend on the meaning given to that situation (Crocker, 1999). Meaning is partly shaped by personal experiences and beliefs, collective representations, and features of the situation itself – often very subtle features (Crocker, 1999).

Crocker and Major (1989) proposed that the effect of prejudice and discrimination on self-esteem depends on whether stigmatized people (a) attribute negative outcomes to prejudice and discrimination, rather than to their own difficulties; (b) compare their outcomes with those of ingroup members, who are similarly disadvantaged, rather than to the outcomes of advantaged outgroup members, and (c) place less importance or value on domains in which their group is disadvantaged. The impact of events on self-esteem, then, depends on both the beliefs that stigmatized people bring them (for example, whether they believe that prejudice against their group is widespread or rare, and whether they believe prejudice is justified or not), and features of the situation (for example, whether others are aware of their stigmatized identity, availability of ingroup and outgroup comparison information) that shape their attributions, social comparisons, and valuing of domains.

Since Crocker and Major’s review, a great deal of research has examined these hypotheses. We do not review these findings here as extensive reviews are available elsewhere (see Crocker et al., 1998; Major & O’Brien, 2005; Major et al., 2002b, for reviews). Rather, we aim to underscore the meta-perspective underlying this research and theory. Specifically, in this research both attributions to prejudice and self-esteem constitute social judgments constructed in the situation from available information. In this research, stigmatized people do not have damaged psyches; rather, like everyone else, they attempt to make sense of their world, their experiences, and themselves, and they use the information at hand to do so. In some situations, this results in lower self-esteem; in many situations, it does not.

Coping with the predicament of stigma
Whereas the social judgment perspective on stigma and self-esteem views stigmatized people as more or less passive processors of the beliefs and information available to them, who arrive at a situation-specific judgment of self-worth, the coping perspective views
stereotypes and prejudice as a situational threat with which stigmatized people actively cope (Kaiser & Miller, 2004; Major & O’Brien, 2005; Miller & Kaiser, 2001). Goffman (1963) first proposed that stigmatized people actively cope, by managing or negotiating their identity, in his seminal monograph. The evidence Goffman cited was largely anecdotal, and although a few researchers pursued the implications of Goffman’s analysis (e.g., Kleck & Strenta, 1980), only recently have social psychologists enthusiastically taken up Goffman’s ideas in research.

Prejudice, discrimination, and stigma potentially threaten many important goals of stigmatized people (Swim & Thomas, 2006). For example, prejudice and discrimination might threaten (a) the ability to obtain important resources (such as housing or jobs); (b) the sense of control over events; and (c) the need to belong and be included in social groups (Swim & Thomas, 2006). At its core, social stigma threatens the goal to maintain, protect, and enhance self-esteem (Crocker et al., 1998). In this framework, stigmatized people face a situation-specific predicament – devaluation of their personal and collective identity – toward which they may direct a variety of coping resources.

The stress and coping approach to stigma emphasizes the primary and secondary coping strategies that stigmatized people use to protect themselves from these threats, or disengaging from the threat (Major & O’Brien, 2005). Primary coping strategies involve efforts to influence events or conditions to reduce the harm. Secondary coping strategies involve efforts to adapt, perhaps by changing how one thinks or feels about the event. Disengagement involves avoiding the threat.

Coping with self-esteem threats could involve actively proving or demonstrating that one does not fit the stereotype (Steele & Aronson, 1995), such as acting in a charming manner to avoid social rejection (Miller, Rothblum, Felicio, & Brand, 1995), passively disengaging from the situation or domain (Schmader, Major, Eccleston, & McCoy, 2001; Steele, 1997), or attributing the problem to others, such as the racism of an evaluator (Major & Crocker, 1993). In fact, almost any active, motivated response (even a cognitive response) to a self-esteem threat fits under the umbrella of ‘coping.’

For self-esteem, the active coping framework views cognitive processes such as attributions to prejudice, ingroup versus outgroup comparisons, and domain devaluation as motivated. From a social judgment perspective, one arrives at a conclusion that an evaluator is prejudiced or not via an unmotivated (albeit imperfect) consideration of relevant information, such as beliefs about the prevalence of prejudice against one’s group, inferences about evaluator biases, and beliefs about evaluation procedures. The desired conclusion is not determined in advance. In a coping process, on the other hand, people have a goal they want to achieve, a conclusion they want to reach, or a belief they want to defend. Consequently, their evaluation of the available information changes to support the desired conclusion (Kunda, 1990).

The coping perspective on stigma and self-esteem suggests that people could be motivated to perceive prejudice as a strategy to maintain or protect self-esteem. Attributing setbacks to negative stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination can protect self-esteem when it frames the negative outcomes as unfair and undeserved, and caused by others’ prejudice rather than mistakes or inadequacies of the self (Major et al., 2002b). If stigmatized people are motivated to maintain, protect, and enhance their self-esteem, they may prefer attributing negative outcomes to others’ prejudice rather than to themselves. On the other hand, if stigmatized people are motivated to maintain and protect their beliefs that the world is just and people get what they deserve, they may prefer attributing negative outcomes to their own lack of deserving rather than to unfair prejudice (Kaiser & Major, 2004). The coping perspective emphasizes that stigmatized people actively cope with threats; the specific coping response depends, in part, on what goals have been threatened (Swim & Thomas, 2006).
ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

Research on stigma and self-esteem has changed a great deal in the last 50 years; targets of stigma are no longer viewed as passive victims who inevitably internalize their devaluation and suffer from low self-esteem. Instead, they are viewed as active agents who perceive, interpret, and make meaning of their experiences of stigmatization, and cope with those experiences. Recently, researchers have focused on the trade-offs involved in coping with the situational self-threat of stigma. Some coping responses protect self-esteem but create other problems. As Miller (2006) notes, ‘coping with stigma often involves hard choices between imperfect options’ (p. 38).

For example, efforts to protect self-esteem by attributing negative outcomes to prejudice and discrimination may have side-effects that can be either costly or beneficial. Pointing out prejudice can help to reduce it (Shelton & Stewart, 2004), yet people dislike those who claim to be victims of discrimination (Kaiser & Miller, 2001), and smooth social interaction often requires that people accept other’s definitions of reality, including their views of the self (Sinclair, Hardin, & Lowery, 2006). Not confronting prejudiced people can cause targets of prejudice, especially those who think they should directly confront prejudice, to feel angry and disappointed in themselves (Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Hill, 2006).

Disidentification provides another example of the costly trade-offs involved in protecting self-esteem for the stigmatized. Stigmatized people may protect self-esteem by devaluing the domains in which they or their group fares poorly (Schmader et al., 2001). Specifically, they may decide that success is impossible (for example, because tests are biased against them) or they may disengage their self-worth from achievement in the domain. Disidentification involves a trade-off between persistence and self-esteem protection; people who decide a task or a domain is unimportant or biased against them may withdraw effort, or simply quit (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2007). Giving up and withholding effort increase the likelihood of failure, which may create a downward spiral of self-threat, disengagement, and failure, which creates further self-threat, disengagement, and failure.

The idea that targets of prejudice are caught between a rock and a hard place, forced to choose between alternatives both with undesirable consequences, runs through a number of contemporary accounts of the experience of stigmatized people (Kaiser, 2006; Miller, 2006; Shelton, et al., 2006; Sinclair, et al., 2006; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). This perspective paints a less depressing picture of the experience of the stigmatized than the view held by most social scientists half a century ago. However, the current view still conveys a sense of being stuck with no discernable way forward. In the current zeitgeist, the stigmatized remain at the mercy of the stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination that surround them, with no satisfying alternatives. Pursuing one goal, such as self-esteem, may require sacrificing another, such as persistence, interpersonal relationships, or confidence that justice will prevail. We think this view is grim – perhaps unnecessarily so.

Goals and motivations of the stigmatized person

As we have seen, the coping perspective raises the question of what the targets of stigma want – what goals do they pursue? We have proposed that the effects of stigma on self-esteem depend on the interpersonal goals and motivations of the stigmatized person (Crocker & Garcia, 2006; Crocker, Garcia, & Nuer, 2008a). Research has only recently begun to examine this hypothesis; initial findings suggest it is a promising direction for future research.

Egosystem motivation and self-image goals

Stigmatized and nonstigmatized people alike often want to maintain, enhance, and protect self-esteem and specific desired self-images
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Self-esteem and self-image are inextricably linked to beliefs about how others see the self (Cooley, 1922; Mead, 1934). Constructing desired images therefore requires doing things to ensure that other people see and acknowledge those qualities in the self (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Attributing negative feedback to prejudice and disidentifying with domains in which one’s group is negatively stereotyped, may sometimes reflect motivated pursuit of self-esteem and efforts to protect desired self-images, both in one’s own eyes and in the eyes of others (Crocker, Garcia, & Nuer, 2008a).

We propose that the effects of stigma on self-esteem depend on how much people are driven by egosystem motivation and self-image goals. Egosystem motivation has negative consequences for relationships, achievement, and mental health (Crocker, 2008). This motivation may be particularly problematic for members of stigmatized groups, because the negative images of their group can threaten self-image goals. Thus, in our view, egosystem motivation creates or contributes to many predicaments experienced by the stigmatized. For example, both stereotype threat (see Quinn, Kallen, & Spencer, this volume, for a review) and identity threat involve concerns about threats to desired images of the self and/or the groups. Stereotype threat (Steele, 1997) and identity threat should be problematic precisely when, and because, targets of stigma are driven by egosystem motivation. People with relatively low levels of egosystem motivation should be less vulnerable to the negative effects of stigma on self-esteem.

Ecosystem motivation and compassionate goals

Fortunately, egosystem motivation is not the only possible motivational framework for the self. Drawing on the biological notion of an ecosystem, we use the term ‘ecosystem motivation’ to refer to a motivational perspective in which people see themselves as part of a larger whole, a system of individuals whose needs are equally important, and whose actions have consequences for others, with repercussions for the entire system, that ultimately affect the ability of the individual to satisfy his or her own fundamental needs (Crocker, 2008). From an ecosystem perspective, people focus on how they can contribute or support others as they pursue their important goals; they have what we call compassionate goals. Ecosystem motivation is not altruistic in the sense that people act at the expense of the self; it is nonzero sum—good for the self and others (Crocker & Canevello, 2008b). Ecosystem motivation has considerable benefits for relationships, mental health, and achievement (Crocker, 2008; Crocker & Canevello, 2008b).

We propose that ecosystem motivation can protect and even increase the self-esteem and well-being of stigmatized people without the trade-offs noted by stigma researchers. For the stigmatized, ecosystem motivation involves shifting from concerns about the images or stereotypes others hold of them or their group, to concerns about how they can act constructively to create the relationships they want, or contribute to something that transcends the self. Shifting to ecosystem goals does not mean sacrificing one’s own well-being for the sake of others. Rather, it involves searching for goals that are good for the self as well as others. Sometimes this might involve challenging others’ prejudice, not as a judgment or criticism, but to create a mutually supportive relationship. In an ecosystem framework, people raise their concerns about possible prejudice and discrimination in a constructive, learning-oriented way, rather than accusing others or withdrawing (Crocker et al., 2008a).

In our view, people who are stigmatized have a lot to gain from shifting their motivational framework from egosystem to ecosystem goals. Such a shift not only benefits others, it also ultimately benefits the self by creating social support, fostering learning, and improving well-being. Shifting from egosystem to ecosystem goals could reverse the downward spiral of intergroup relations, and potentially create an upward spiral in its place (Crocker et al., 2008a).
Three studies provide initial evidence of the costs of egosystem motivation and the benefits of ecosystem motivation for targets of stigma.

**Motivations for disclosing stigma**

A daily report study of the effects of egosystem and ecosystem motivations for disclosing or concealing a concealable stigma supports the idea that ecosystem motivations have benefits for stigmatized people (Garcia & Crocker, 2008). Forty-eight depressed college students completed a measure of motivations to disclose or conceal their identity to others. For the next two weeks, at the end of each day participants were asked if they had an opportunity to disclose their depression that day. If they did have an opportunity to disclose, they were asked to report their reasons for or against disclosure and how they felt when they disclosed. After two weeks, they completed measures of how much they disclosed, and well-being. Although the well-being measure did not specifically include self-esteem, it was a composite of measures that correlate strongly with self-esteem, including low levels of depression, anxiety, and negative affect, and high levels of life satisfaction.

We measured motivation to disclose or conceal a concealable stigma with a modified version of a scale developed by Derlega, Winstead, and Folk-Barron (2000), originally designed to assess disclosing one’s HIV-status to an intimate partner. In addition, participants completed measures of how much approval validation goals, identity validation goals (i.e., desire to be seen as depressed for depressed participants or a sexual minority for those who were nonheterosexual), and growth goals influenced their disclosure decisions.

Factor analyses indicated that disclosure goals loaded on two uncorrelated factors, consistent with our theoretical conceptualization of egosystem and ecosystem motivations. The egosystem factor included reasons both for disclosure and against disclosure: communication difficulty, conflict avoidance, fear of rejection, desire for others’ approval, test other’s reactions, catharsis, and duty to inform. The ecosystem factor only included reasons to disclose: personal growth, educating the other, similarity with the other, and being authentic.

We examined the effects of egosystem goals and ecosystem goals on disclosure and psychological well-being both in daily disclosure decisions and at the end of two weeks. In line with predictions, we found that participants from both groups disclosed more in daily disclosure decisions when they disclosed with ecosystem goals compared to egosystem goals. Egosystem goals predicted greater concealment in daily disclosure decisions. Counter to predictions, over two weeks, disclosure increased most when participants had both high egosystem and ecosystem goals. Consistent with predictions, participants in both groups experienced greater positive affect in daily disclosure decisions when they disclosed with ecosystem goals compared to egosystem goals. Counter to predictions, over two weeks, having both high egosystem and ecosystem goals predicted greater well-being exclusively for depressed participants. Taken together, these findings suggest that it is also important to consider the reactions of others’ and the ramifications of disclosure for the self (i.e., have egosystem motivations), particularly for depressed people. This may be due, in part, to depression symptoms. People who are depressed have a heightened self-focused state (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Hamilton, & Nix, 1991, 1987) and tend to perceive, themselves, others, and the world negatively (Beck, 1967). Thus, it may be difficult for people with depression to both have and implement ecosystem goals because they may seem particularly risky. As depressive symptoms wane, and ecosystem motivations increase, the influence of egosystem goals on well-being might decrease.

It is also important to note that perceptions of stigma affected goal endorsement. Perceptions of stigma were uncorrelated with ecosystem goals, but positively correlated with egosystem goals. Although the direction of effects are unclear, these findings could suggest that when a person has ecosystem goals such as supporting others and being authentic, perceptions of stigma do not...
derail those objectives and are therefore uncorrelated. However, when a person has egosystem goals such as fearing rejection, they may be more vigilant for signs of rejection and may perceive stigma even when it may not be there.

Perceptions of stigma also affected disclosure rates. Reports of disclosure were lowest among participants who perceived stigma (i.e., they expected to be rejected if they disclosed their stigma), but only if they lacked ecosystem goals; perceived stigma did not predict lower disclosure for participants who had ecosystem goals. These findings support previous research indicating that perceived stigma is a barrier to revealing depression, yet suggests that regardless of perceived stigma, ecosystem goals can lead to increased disclosure.

**Egosystem and ecosystem goals in African-American college students**

A study of first-semester African-American students provides additional support for the costs of egosystem motivation and the benefits of ecosystem motivation for targets of stigma (Crocker, Canavello, & Webb, 2008b). Because racial and ethnic minority students on predominantly white campuses are often devalued and stereotyped, we suspected that self-image goals may be particularly problematic for them, and compassionate goals particularly helpful. Forty-eight African-American students completed 22 surveys over their first semester of college. On days these students had high self-image goals, they felt significantly more anxious and stressed, and marginally more depressed. On days they had higher compassionate goals they were significantly more likely to feel that they belonged at the University of Michigan, and were less anxious, depressed, and stressed; they also self-regulated better (e.g., procrastinated less, got their work done on time).

Although only 42 African-American students completed both the pre- and post-test surveys, we found several significant effects of chronic self-image goals (averaged across the 20 reports) on changes from the start to the end of the first semester. Students with chronic self-image goals marginally decreased in self-esteem, and significantly increased in anxiety, depression, and stress. They also became significantly less learning-oriented and more ego-involved in academics, that is, more motivated to prove their ability. Although not significant, chronic compassionate goals predicted increased learning orientations, decreased ego-involvement in academics, decreased anxiety, and decreased imposter feelings. These results suggest that self-image goals negatively affect African-American students’ well-being, including their self-esteem, whereas compassionate goals have benefits (although the effects on self-esteem did not reach significance).

We also received students’ permission to obtain their first- and second-semester grades from the registrar. Chronic compassionate goals in the Fall semester predicted higher grades at the end of both Fall and Winter semesters of the freshman year, controlling for high school GPA (although these effects were only marginally significant, the effects were as strong as the effect for high school grades). At the same time, chronic self-image goals predicted lower grades at the end of both semesters of the freshman year, again controlling for high school GPA, and this effect was significant for second-semester grades. The predicted value of GPA for African-American students with the optimal combination of goals – low self-image and high compassionate goals – was 3.6, whereas the predicted value of GPA for students with the most detrimental combination of goals – high self-image and low compassionate goals – was 2.4, again controlling for high school GPA (SAT/ACT scores did not predict freshman year grades for this sample, so we did not control for them).

These two studies suggest that the effects of stigma on well-being in general, and self-esteem in particular, depend on the motivational orientations of targets of stigma. We think this approach has value for the study of stigma beyond its implications for self-esteem. Recent research in our laboratories suggests that ecosystem motivation creates positive cross-race relationships.
Egosystem and ecosystem goals in same- and cross-race roommate relationships

Interactions between people from different racial or ethnic groups are notoriously problematic, characterized by intergroup anxiety and tension (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, Lickel, & Kowai-Bell, 2001; Mendes, Blascovich, Major, & Seery, 2001; Stephan & Stephan, 1985). People sometimes cope with these tensions by avoiding intergroup contact (Plant & Devine, 2003). In some situations, however, people cannot avoid contact, and tension escalates into seemingly intractable conflict, with potentially destructive personal, interpersonal, and societal consequences (Prentice & Miller, 1999).

Although the fundamental problem of cross-group relationships is relational, researchers rarely study the dynamics of cross-group relationships as they unfold over time (but see Shelton, Trail, & West, in press; West, Shelton, & Trial, in press). We assume that the fundamental problem in many cross-race interactions is not racial antipathy, but perceived threats to desired self-images (Crocker & Garcia, 2006; Crocker et al., 2008a; Shelton & Richeson, 2006). People want to believe they are valuable and worthy (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004; Steele, 1988). Sustaining this belief is difficult in cross-race interactions, in which people have different backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences, and different ideas about what makes people valuable and worthy. People in cross-race interactions have desired images relevant to their identities as members of valued or devalued groups (e.g., fair, unprejudiced, deserving of respect, intelligent). For disadvantaged group members, cross-race interactions raise concerns about devaluation and negative stereotypes, which threaten desired images (Steele et al., 2002), and concerns about the image consequences of confronting prejudice (Shelton & Richeson, 2006). Likewise, for advantaged group members, cross-race interactions raise concerns about being seen as unfair and prejudiced, or unfairly benefitting from privileged status (Richeson & Shelton, 2007). Thus, for both people, cross-race interactions can threaten desired images.

Self-image goals may be particularly detrimental in cross-race relationships because they create anxiety. Our previous research has repeatedly shown that self-image goals elicit anxiety (Crocker, Canevello, Breines, & Flynn, 2008a). Anxiety is particularly problematic in intergroup interactions because the nonverbal behaviors associated with anxiety overlap with those associated with dislike, and are interpreted as dislike in cross-race but not same-race interactions (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002). Consequently, compared to students in same-race interactions, students in cross-race interactions have more self-image goals, which create anxiety, which their relationship partners interpret as dislike.

Whereas self-image goals predict negative relationship dynamics and outcomes, compassionate goals predict positive dynamics and outcomes. Compassionate goals focus on supporting others, not to obtain something for the self, but out of caring and consideration for the well-being of others (Crocker & Canevello, 2008b; Crocker & Canevello, 2008c). When people have compassionate goals they want to be a constructive force in their interactions with others, and avoid harming others.

Compassionate goals may be particularly helpful in cross-race relationships. Compassionate goals elicit calm, positive, other-directed affect, and reduce anxiety (Crocker & Canevello, 2008b; Crocker et al., 2008c). When students have compassionate goals, they report that their most important academic and relationship goals make them feel clear, peaceful, connected, loving, and empathic. These feelings, in turn, predict increased trust, empathic concern, support given, responsiveness, disclosure, understanding responses to conflict, constructive communication, and esteem for roommates. Furthermore, compassionate goals attenuate the effects of self-image goals on feeling afraid, confused, ambivalent, and pressured (Crocker & Canevello, 2008b).
When compassionate goals increase, state anxiety decreases, and students with chronic compassionate goals decrease in trait anxiety in the first semester of college (Crocker et al., 2008c). Because cross-race relationships are fraught with anxiety, which is easily misinterpreted, compassionate goals should particularly help these relationships.

Roommate relationships are an ideal laboratory to investigate these processes. Students are randomly assigned to same- or cross-race roommates, creating a natural experiment. Given the importance of roommate relationships to many students’ college experience, and the potential for roommate relationships to be a source of support or a source of stress, the poor quality of different-race roommate relationships may significantly affect not only relationship experiences, but also academic success and distress.

Crocker and Canevello (2008a) conducted a study of 65 roommate dyads (33 same-race dyads and 32 cross-race dyads). Roommate pairs were unacquainted prior to college, and were recruited early in the first semester of college, when their relationship was new. Each member of the dyads completed pretest measures of their relationship quality (satisfaction, commitment, and closeness), then completed online measures of their compassionate and self-image goals for their roommate relationship each day for 21 days. At the conclusion of the daily reports, they completed posttest measures of relationship quality. Analyses of change in relationship quality from pre- to post-test as a function of students’ chronic goals (averaged across the 21 reports) and the racial match or mismatch of the dyad found self-image goals had stronger negative effects in different-race than same-race roommate pairs on change in relationship satisfaction, commitment, and closeness. In contrast, compassionate goals had significantly stronger positive effects in cross-race than in same-race dyads. Because supportive relationships can increase self-esteem (Crocker et al., 2008c), these findings suggest that compassionate goals may improve self-esteem for both participants in cross-race dyads.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Research on egosystem and ecosystem motivation, and self-image and compassionate goals, is very new. Few studies have examined the effects of these goals in the context of stigma, prejudice, and intergroup relationships. In the context of this chapter, one intriguing issue for future research is the effects of these goals on the self-esteem of people with different stigmatized identities. Compassionate goals might provide an alternate means of maintaining and even increasing self-esteem for members of stigmatized groups, who may be less inclined to attribute negative outcomes to prejudice and use other problematic methods of maintaining their self-worth. Initial research is promising, but whether self-image goals are problematic and compassionate goals helpful for members of all stigmatized or devalued groups in all contexts is unknown at present. Furthermore, research has not attempted to intervene by manipulating compassionate and self-image goals; strong conclusions about the causal effects of self-image and compassionate goals for people with stigmatized identities must await experimental evidence.

CONCLUSION

Social science research and theory have evolved over the past 50 years from the view that stigma is internalized by its targets, creating low self-esteem, to the view that stigma is a situational predicament, posing threats to self-esteem with which the stigmatized actively cope. Despite this evolution, psychologists continue to focus on the obstacles and barriers that stigma poses. The current zeitgeist views the stigmatized as caught between a rock and a hard place, in which protecting self-esteem has costs for motivation, achievement, and relationships.

This focus on problems and trade-offs leaves members of racial and ethnic minority groups with few tools to manage their self-esteem along with their relationships in these contexts. Without denying or diminishing the
evidence that stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination are hurtful to members of racial and ethnic minority groups, we believe it is useful to ask what individual members of these groups can do to minimize the negative consequences of stigma, including consequences for their self-esteem, and create close supportive relationships with people both within and outside their own identity group. We think it is also useful to ask what individual members of majority or nonstigmatized groups can do to create close, supportive relationships with people outside their own identity group, which can foster self-esteem, a sense of belonging, and ultimately the achievement of targets of stigma (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

We envision a future in which researchers study how targets of stigma can shift from being at the mercy of their stigma, reacting to or defending the self from devaluation and making hard choices between competing goals, to being the source of what they want to experience, proactively creating situations in which they are valued and feel valuable. In this imagined future, researchers would investigate the leverage that both stigmatized and nonstigmatized people have to create positive interactions that challenge negative assumptions others have of them, create meaningful connections with ingroup and outgroup members, and build self-esteem while satisfying their and others’ fundamental need to belong.

The cynical reader may dismiss this vision as hopelessly Pollyanna-ish, naively ignoring the hard realities of deeply engrained attitudes toward stigmatized groups that help maintain the privileged position of a few. However, we believe such cynicism is unwarranted and unhelpful. In our view, this envisioned future is the next exciting challenge for research on stigma more generally, and stigma and self-esteem in particular.

REFERENCES


