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## Rollerbladers, Luthiers, and Self-Loathing: Questions on Using the IRM

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We are grateful for the chance to engage with this paper. We both liked it very much for its ambition, elegance, and power. In trying out the model and thinking through its implications, we found it to be intriguing and sometimes surprising, and are excited to have it as a tool for generating predictions and insights. Below, we express a mix of critiques, inquiries, and confusions that arose as we used and thought about the model. We invite the authors to correct us, clarify arguments, and speculate further. We wish to caveat that we know the authors have written extensively on this idea, and established some building blocks in other papers listed in the main text, but we have only read and considered the current article. Our commentary first explores the model as it applies to ingroup favoritism, and then highlights broader observations and questions about the model as a whole.

### Using the Model to Understand Ingroup (and Outgroup) Favoritism

We took the parameters described in the paper and then simulated what the model does when different inputs are varied. We focused on ingroup favoritism because it is the area in which we have the most expertise. As we changed the parameters of the model [ $rS,D * (rS,I - rS,O)$ ], we saw clearly how the model suggests there are two necessary ingredients to ingroup favoritism. First, a person needs to see themselves positively. Second, they need to see themselves as more similar to the ingroup than to the outgroup (which could be considered identification with the ingroup).<sup>1</sup> The average person is likely to see themselves positively and to identify with their ingroup, as described in the model's starting parameters, so the average person will show ingroup favoritism. However, because ingroup favoritism is a product of self-positivity and ingroup identification, the model anticipates that if either ingredient is absent ( $r=0$ ), there will be no ingroup favoritism. So, people who do not see themselves positively ( $rS,D=0$ ) are predicted to show little or no ingroup favoritism, no matter how strongly or weakly they identify with an ingroup. Perhaps this would characterize people with low self-esteem, or who are depressed.

If we were to go even further, and consider someone who sees themselves so negatively that they have a negative  $rS,D$ , this person would in fact tend to see the *outgroup* more positively than the ingroup (i.e., display outgroup favoritism). Curiously, for this person, the more they identify with the ingroup, the stronger their outgroup favoritism will be. This leads to the odd but intriguing prediction that people who show the most outgroup favoritism will be those who see themselves extremely negatively, and at the same time identify strongly with the ingroup. Perhaps this particular combination of self-loathing coupled with strong identification would be observed for some members of extremely derogated groups perceived to be highly amoral, such as pedophiles. But we find it difficult to come up with multiple reasonable examples of where this might occur, so despite its mathematical plausibility, this may be rare (consistent with the model's positive default value for self-positivity).

### Attitudes toward Outgroups with No Clear Ingroup

The psychological literature conceptualizes ingroup favoritism as the difference between evaluative ratings of the ingroup and the outgroup, consistent with the IRM, and sometimes uses ingroup favoritism synonymously with “bias” or “prejudice” (e.g., Bergh & Brandt, 2022; Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). Most classic prejudice research has focused on groups for which there are clear ingroups and outgroups, such as groups based on race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. Yet there are many groups toward which people have attitudes (e.g., politicians, nurses, rollerbladers) that have no clear ingroup counterpart (e.g., Crandall et al., 2002). How can we apply the IRM to understand attitudes toward groups lacking a corresponding ingroup?

We see several possibilities still consistent with the present model. The first is that the ingroup is conceptualized as “not-[group].” That is, perhaps people estimate how similar they are to both rollerbladers and not-rollerbladers, thereby enabling the same formula for calculating ingroup favoritism. Yet it is not clear to us that most people would have an understanding of a group defined as “not-” another group, or that they could validly estimate how similar they are to this group. Another possibility is that, when there is

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<sup>1</sup>We note the exception that if the person sees themselves negatively *and* sees themselves as more similar to the outgroup than the ingroup, they should still show ingroup favoritism, presumably because they are projecting their negative self-image more to the outgroup than ingroup.

no clear ingroup, people instead compare directly to the self. In other words, the self may be a stand-in for the ingroup. Thus, the formula for Ingroup Favoritism (or perhaps more appropriately given the absence of an ingroup, Outgroup Derogation) would be  $[r_{S,D} - r_{S,D} \times r_{S,O}]$ , which can be simplified to  $[r_{S,D} * (1 - r_{S,O})]$ , rather than the IRM's existing formula of  $[r_{S,D} * (r_{S,I} - r_{S,O})]$ . (Interestingly, we note that  $[r_{S,D} * (1 - r_{S,O})]$  is the same as the IRM formula for self-enhancement,  $[r_{S,D} * (1 - r_{S,I})]$ , only with the outgroup substituted for the ingroup). We are curious what the authors would expect in a scenario where there is no clear ingroup.

### Attitudes toward Multiple Outgroups

What predictions would the model make about relative preference for two groups to which one does not belong, given that the self is not explicitly related to either group? Suppose Fletchers and Luthiers are both groups in society, and we belong to neither. Can this model be used to predict which group we will prefer? Given that the paper states that ingroup and outgroup are only two of many possible types of groups that vary on social distance and which the model can describe, we will call Fletchers "Target Group 1 (T1)," and Luthiers "Target Group 2 (T2)." In this case, we believe the Ingroup Favoritism formula would predict our relative preference, subbing in the two target groups for ingroup and outgroup, resulting in  $[r_{S,D} * (r_{S,T1} - r_{S,T2})]$ . We are curious whether this formula would predict preference between these two groups, given that the self may be only distally related to evaluations of these groups, and as noted in the paper, projection to distal groups is low. If we do not identify strongly with either group, this model proposes no preference between the groups. Yet one can envision a situation in which there is in fact strong preference between the groups. For example, if we need to repair a violin, but have no need for arrows, we would likely see Luthiers more positively than Fletchers—not because of seeing ourselves in that group, but because the group poses positive affordances to help fill our needs (Lasseter et al., 2021). That is, the functional relevance of a group to oneself may be a necessary factor in evaluating groups to which one does not belong, and it is not currently represented in the IRM. Given that self-projection weakens with social distance, do the authors propose that the IRM only applies for social perceptual phenomena with at least some socially proximate element? We are curious what the authors think of these possibilities.

### Multiple Ingroups

We wondered what the model would imply for people's multiple ingroups. People typically identify with multiple groups, and will identify more strongly with some ingroups than others (Brewer, 1991). For any particular person, how positively they see themselves ( $r_{S,D}$ ) is constant and independent of their multiple group memberships. Therefore, the model suggests that the *only* thing that would determine which of a person's ingroups they most strongly favor would

be the strength of their identification with the ingroup (and not, say, the normative desirability of being a part of the group). The model suggests, then, that factors like desirability of the ingroup only contribute to ingroup favoritism indirectly, to the extent that they augment or reduce identification—that is, people come to identify more strongly with groups that are seen positively, and it is through this identification, and not seeing the group positively per se, that leads to ingroup favoritism. Perhaps this framing offers one way to incorporate a functional perspective on ingroup favoritism into this model: people's identification with a particular ingroup may be driven by the extent to which that group is perceived to fulfill important and current needs, and this motivated identification in turn produces favoritism toward one ingroup over another.

### Understanding the Model's Position on the Self

The model aims to see how far one can get by using self-projection and self-positivity in predicting outcomes like differential accuracy, ingroup favoritism, etc. As we began to use the model, though, we were unsure of the model's position about what is the best way to both conceptualize and operationalize ingroup favoritism. The paper notes two potential, competing formulas for calculating ingroup favoritism from S, D, I, and O: one that involves the self  $[r_{S,D} * (r_{S,I} - r_{S,O})]$ , and one that does not and is more direct  $[r_{I,D} - r_{O,D}]$ . Our simulations confirmed that these formulas will often predict different values for ingroup favoritism given the same inputs. It seems that the authors propose that people mentally represent and use  $r_{S,D}$ ,  $r_{S,I}$ , and  $r_{S,O}$  in a way that they do not represent  $r_{I,D}$ , and  $r_{O,D}$ , and thus that their ingroup favoritism will be more similar to the Self-related formula's prediction than the latter formula's prediction. Then the question becomes, what data will adjudicate between the formulas? Starting from participants' ratings on S, D, I, and O would seem to only produce competing outputs for ingroup favoritism, rather than helping to determine which formula is correct. Are there effect sizes that would better match each of them, or would it instead be a pattern of effects that would be anticipated across different conditions? We were curious to hear what kind of data one could collect to test between these two possibilities—not for assessing the accuracy of these social perceptions (as discussed in the paper), but for assessing how well the model accounts for the subjective experience of ingroup favoritism.

### What Traits/Attributes Are Input into the Model?

At the core of this model is a vector of traits. This vector is rated for Desirability, Self, Ingroup, and Outgroup to create all the model predictions. Given the importance of this vector, we are curious about the traits or attributes that constitute the vector. And when might variability in the traits, or types of traits, change the model's predictions? For those wishing to use this model, this seems a critical issue. Presumably, the vector will more accurately represent self-

projection etc. to the extent that the sampling of the traits is broad enough to capture extant variability in desirability and applicability to the self, ingroups, and outgroups, and therefore representative enough to generalize to all traits.

### How Can Researchers Improve the Model?

The authors say that the model can and should be improved. We are curious what concrete steps they would recommend to do so. Identifying better starting parameters, based on data? How could additional variables beyond D, S, I and O be incorporated? Likewise, the IRM's parsimony is appealing and we love the idea of seeing how far one can get without assuming motivation, etc. Yet, given how important motivation and other variables can be, we wonder whether the IRM is providing a proximate model that is the end result of processes that could include motivation etc. For example, people may be more likely to identify with ingroups that serve some need, or to see themselves positively when it is strategic to do so. Both of these processes would influence existing parameters in the model (rS,I and rS,D).

In conclusion, we greatly appreciate this work. While conceptually we find the ideas compelling, practically we were still left with some questions regarding how to actually incorporate these ideas into a research program. Further elucidating the ideas and providing practical suggestions would help us engage with this theory as we study intergroup

biases and seek to understand phenomena across social psychology.

### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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