

# How is Self-esteem Conditioned with the Number of Groups to Which People Belongs and Aspires to Belong?

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## Introduction

Conventional research on group identification has mainly dealt with identification with specific groups, and these studies have clarified specific identification processes and the formation of attitudes towards external groups. However, the effects of identification with multiple in-groups have been overlooked (Graham-Bailey, Richardson Cheeks, Blankenship, Stewart, & Chavous, 2019). It has been suggested that identification with multiple in-groups at the same time influences attitudes and behavioural tendencies towards in-groups and out-groups (Graham-Bailey et al., 2019; Yip, Kiang, & Fuligni, 2008). Yip et al. (2008) suggested that those who identify strongly with all are more likely to feel negatively about their stress experiences than those who identify less strongly with all. It has been shown that people for whom all internal groups (e.g., gender, social class) are important to their self-concept are more likely to perceive that their internal group is treated unfairly than those for whom they are not (Graham-Bailey et al., 2019). Matsuki and Shimotsukasa (2020) developed the scale thorough which individual differences of general group identification tendency: general group identification was defined as 'the degree to which they are likely to identify with more than one in-group in general, regardless of the type of group.' Matsusaki et al. (2020) emphasized that researches should focus on not only social identification with ascribed groups but also with acquired groups.

In research streams on purchasing behavior, sometimes reference is drawn to the concept of "aspirational groups". The concept of aspirational groups was mentioned in contrast to reference groups. People purchases something by which they perceived or identified with ideal social status. In the context, the ideal social status was seen as being stem from ideal social groups and the groups was named as reference group. Escalas (2004) showed the theoretical framework in that people purchased something to defined their self-concepts or individual identity. A symbolic character of reference group or celebrity functioned as ideal traits in consumers and consumers perceived the symbols as ideal icons to enhances their self-esteem, confirm self-image and satisfy self-needs which were self-concept required by culture or society to be identified with. Escalas (2004) classified two type of reference group. One is the type of reference group which people identify with and which contains "in-group" and "aspiration group". In-group are the group which people perceives as the group they are member of the group. Aspirational group are the group which they hope to belong to. The other types of reference group are "out-group" of which people do not feel they are a member and "segregated group" to which people feel they do not want to belong. Escalas and Bettman (2003) revealed that consumers with self-assurance goals rate their self-brand associations highly for brands used by their affiliation group, while consumers with self-

elevation goals rate their self-brand associations highly for brands used by their aspirational group. It was suggested that people showed tendency to avoid identification with the brand utilized in segregated group strongly than the brand utilized in out-group (White and Dahl, 2007).

The previous studies in the line of purchasing behavior suggested that social identification or social reference was motivated with self-enhancement or self-confirm, and reference groups should be classified into two positive groups (ingroup and aspirational group) and two negative groups (out-group and segregated group) because the typology was so meaningful to lead suggestive findings about the relations between self-perception motivation and social referencing. On the other hand, previous studies which dealt with social identification with multiple in-groups did not examine the effect of identification with aspirational group on self-recognition. The present study investigated how identification with aspirational group effects on self-esteem by questionnaire survey. Concretely we examined mainly the relation between the number of the aspirational group and the level of self-esteem controlling the number of in-group and identification for the in-groups.

## Method

### *Participants and procedure*

96 males and 33 females were participated in the study. The average score of age was 20.0 ( $SD=0.60$ ) in male and 20.21 ( $SD=1.19$ ) in female. Participants were asked to response to the questionnaire from any of their device in web forms.

### *Items*

Group-Identity scale (GI): developed by Ozeki et al. (2009) consisted of 12 items and structured in 2 factors, membership and pride for group which they belonged to. To reduce the load of response to the scale, items which participants had to respond was selected: three items from membership factor ("I am a valuable member in this group," "I think I am a typical type of person for this group," "I am at the centre of this group,") and three items from pride factor ("How I feel about this group is important," "I take pride in belonging to this group," "I think it gives me a good reputation to be part of this group.") Before responding the items of GI, participants answered the question "Can you think of one group to which you are currently most strongly committed? What group is it?" and responding by free-text description. After the above procedure, such instruction succeeded as "For the groups you listed above, how much of the following applies to you?" All items were responded by 5-point Likert scale "1 not applicable" - "5 applicable."

Number of the groups participants belongs to (N of belonging): the question text was that "In everyday life, we belong to various social groups and are classified into various social categories (types of people). These social groups and categories include, for example, gender, nationality, family, friend groups, schools, clubs and so on. How many groups or social categories do you consider to be your group?" Participants responded the question by reporting a number.

Number of the group participants desire to belong to (N of aspiration): the question text was that “How many groups do you not yet belong to but would like to belong to or be part of? Please indicate the number.” Participants responded the question by selecting one option of five (0 group, 1 group, 2 groups, 3 groups, 4 groups, 5 groups and more).

Self-esteem: self-esteem was measured by single-item scale. Before responding the target item, participants responded the 12 items which measure personality traits (Sun et al., 2020). Participants responded the target single item: the question text was that “How much do you like your own personality?” Responding was collected by 5-point Likert scale “1 not applicable” - “5 applicable.”

### *Analyses*

To reveal how self-esteem was conditioned by Group membership status, desire to belong to other groups, and identity with respect to the group to which they belong, a multiple regression analysis was performed: self-esteem was entered as response variable and the other variables were entered as explanatory variables.

## **Results**

### *Demographics*

Tab1 showed the demographics of participants.

**Tab 1 demographics of participants**

	Level	n	%
Number of belonging group	0-5	42	34%
	6-10	66	54%
	11-15	8	7%
	15-	6	5%
Number of aspiration group	0	33	28%
	1	31	26%
	2	35	29%
	3	12	10%
	4	1	1%
	5	8	7%
Compliant group	family	40	31%
	other groups	10	8%
	school	11	9%
	part-time job	9	7%
	athletics	35	28%
	friends	22	17%

### *EFA for Group Identity scale*

To explore the optimal number of factors of GI (Group Identity scale), MAP, parallel analysis and SMC

parallel analysis were performed. All methods proposed one-factor solution. EFA (maximum-likelihood estimation, promax rotation) specifying one-factor showed good factor loadings ( $\lambda_s=.82-.59$ ), acceptable CFI ( $=.929$ ), bad RMSEA ( $=.127$ ) ( $\alpha=.825$ ) (Tab2). Although RMSEA suggested bad fit between EFA model and covariation matrix of the data, we decided to utilize the scale score of one-factor model, based on good factor loadings and good CFI.

**Tab 2 Pattern matrix of EFA for GI (Group Identity scale)**

Item	Factor1	h2
I am a valuable member in this group.	<b>.82</b>	.67
How I feel about this group is important	<b>.74</b>	.55
I take pride in belonging to this group	<b>.66</b>	.44
I think it gives me a good reputation to be part of this group	<b>.62</b>	.39
I think I am a typical type of person for this group	<b>.59</b>	.35
I am at the centre of this group	<b>.59</b>	.35
Factor contribution	2.75	

#### *Regression analysis*

To examine how self-esteem was conditioned by group membership status and commitment to the group. Specifically, to reveal the effects of group membership and psychological commitment on the compliant group on their self-esteem, the number of groups participants belongs to and group identity were entered in the regression model as explanatory variables. Additionally, as the indicator of the desire for changing their social back ground, the number of groups participants aspire to belong to was entered in the model as the explanatory variable.

Multiple models were estimated using the hierarchical input method. In step 1, main effects were estimated. In step 2, main effects and second order interactions were estimated. In step 3, main effects, second order interactions and third effect were estimated. When the significance of the change in  $R^2$  was tested, there was no difference of  $\Delta R^2$  between step 1 and step 2, while the change in  $R^2$  was significant for step 2 and step 3 (Tab3).

Based on GI showed the significant positive coefficient on self-esteem, it was suggested that the higher the psychological commitment on the compliment group was, the higher their self-esteem aroused ( $b=0.42, p<.05$ ). N of belonging  $\times$  N of aspiration showed the significance coefficient ( $b=0.04, p<.05$ ), but, the simple slope analysis did not reach the significant level of simple main effects of N of belonging  $\times$  N of aspiration on self-esteem (Tab4).

The third interaction term reached the significant level ( $b=-0.07, p<.05$ ). To checked the details about simple main effects, we compared the interaction effect of GI  $\times$  N of aspiration on self-esteem among two groups: one was the group in which N of belonging was higher than average of N of belonging (H-

group), and the other was the group in which N of belonging was lower than average of N of belonging (L-group). In L-group interaction GI × N of aspiration reached the significant level ( $b=0.43$ ,  $SE=0.22$ ,  $p<.05$ ). When GI was +1SD, N of aspiration did not relate with self-esteem ( $b=0.06$ ,  $SE=0.15$ ,  $p=.668$ ), but self-esteem tend to decrease with increasing N of aspiration when GI was -1SD ( $b=-0.52$ ,  $SE=0.24$ ,  $p<.05$ ). On the other hand, in H-group, GI × N of aspiration did not reach significant level ( $b=-0.30$ ,  $SE=0.23$ ,  $p=.208$ ), only the main effect of GI on self-esteem reached significant level ( $b=0.62$ ,  $SE=0.29$ ,  $p<.05$ )(Fig1).

**Tab 3 Amount of change in F-value**

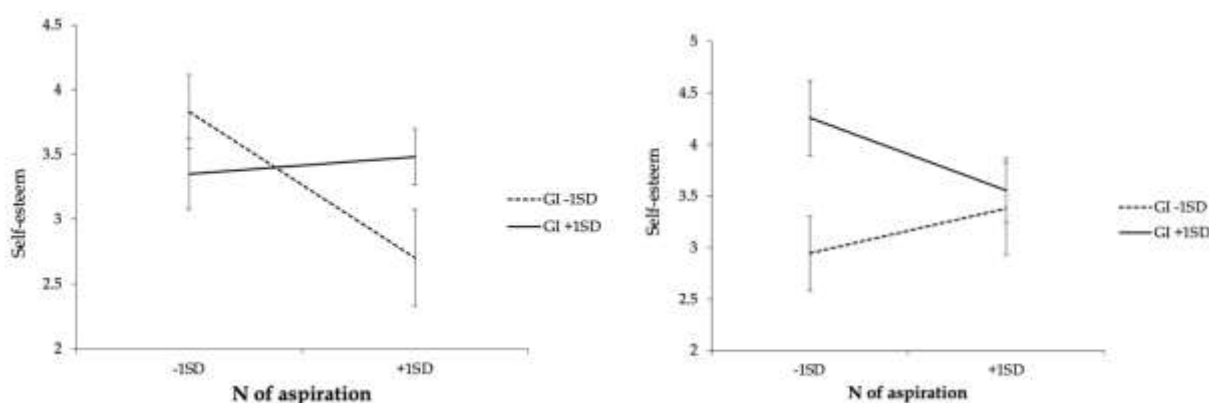
	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\Delta df$	SE df	$\Delta F$	$p$	AIC	BIC
Step1	.036	.036	3	108	1.330	.269	343.50	357.09
Step2	.059	.024	3	105	0.880	.454	346.72	368.47
Step3	.097	.037	1	104	4.294	.041	344.19	368.65

**Tab 4 Regression analysis, response variable = self-esteem**

	Step1	Step2	Step3
Intercept	3.42 **	3.35 **	3.31 **
N of belonging	0.00	-0.02	-0.02
N of aspiration	-0.09	-0.14	-0.13
GI	0.33 +	0.35 +	0.42 *
N of belonging * N of aspiration		0.02	0.04 *
N of belonging * GI		0.04	0.04
N of aspiration * GI		0.07	0.15
N of belonging * N of aspiration * GI			-0.07 *
	0.04	0.06	0.10

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , +  $p < .10$

Note. GI represents the average score of Group Identity scale. All explanatory variables was centered by grand mean.



**Fig 1 the simple main effects of GI × N of aspiration on self-esteem sliced by N of belonging**

Note Left figure represents the simple main effects GI × N of aspiration of the group in which the N of belonging was under

the average score (L-group); right figure represents the simple effects  $GI \times N$  of aspiration of the group in which the N of belonging was above the average score (H-group).

## Discussion

The number of groups people belongs to and aspirate to belong to did not show effects on their self-esteem. It was suggested that belonging to many groups or aspiring to belong to many other groups did not lead to either elevation or dilution of self-esteem. The strength of social identity towards the group to which one is most strongly psychologically committed is also not considered a robust factor, as it did not show a main effect in step1 and step2. On the other hand, a third-order interaction between the number of groups to which one belongs, the number of aspirational group and group identity for most committing group showed significant effects on self-esteem. When the number of groups to which one belonged was low, self-esteem was lower when social identity with the group to which one was most strongly committed was weak and when the desire to belong to other groups was high. On the other hand, when the number of groups to which one belonged was high, group identity for most committing group was positively associated with self-esteem and there was no interaction between group identity and the number of aspirational groups.

To summarize these results. Self-esteem does not simply covary with the number of groups to which one belongs or the number of aspirational groups. Nor is a sense of social identity in the group to which one is most strongly committed a robust factor. The situation is a little more complex. If one belongs to many groups, GI to the group to which one is most strongly committed conditions self-esteem. On the other hand, when belonging to a small number of groups, group identity to the most strongly committed group did not show a main effect. The lowest self-esteem was observed when the number of groups to which one belonged was small, the group identity to the most strongly committed group was low and the aspirational group was large. Maybe the increasing number of the aspirational group was the representative indication for attitude for disgust on current essential group of him/her in the context.

Previous research suggested the negative effects of multiple group identification on adaptive social and self-cognition (e.g. Graham-Bailey et al., 2019). This study suggested the no effect of the number of the belonging groups and the aspirational groups, and the weak effect of group identity for the most committing group on self-esteem. Whether a few studies mentioned above indicated maladaptive function of multiple group identification and aspiring to out-group, the researches should be performed to examine how and when multiple group identification or aspiring for out-group promotes or enhances psychological or social adaptability.

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