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The impact of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem: A normative perspective☆

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ABSTRACT

The present research examines the impact of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem. According to the self-esteem hypothesis (Abrams & Hogg, 1988), favoring the ingroup over an outgroup should lead to higher self-esteem. However, empirical tests of this hypothesis have revealed mixed results. In light of the heterogeneity of these findings, we investigate the moderating role of ingroup norms regarding intergroup discrimination. According to this normative perspective, we hypothesize that believing one has favored the ingroup increases personal self-esteem to the extent that such behavior is congruent with the ingroup norm. Three studies showed a positive impact of perceived ingroup favoritism (vs. intergroup fairness) on personal self-esteem when the ingroup norm was pro-discriminatory (Studies 1–3). However, this effect disappeared when the pro-discriminatory ingroup norm was attenuated (Study 1), and was even reversed when the ingroup norm was clearly anti-discriminatory (Studies 2–3). Further, this moderation was primarily observed when the ingroup norms were injunctive (rather than descriptive; Study 2), and among participants who highly value conformity (Study 3). These findings are discussed with regard to the classical understanding of the self-esteem hypothesis.

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The history of humanity abounds with situations in which people's interactions have been determined by the social category they belong to. Wars, holocausts, and everyday discrimination are examples depicting differential (and hostile) treatment that people inflict upon others who do not belong to the same social group. The dynamics regulating these intergroup relations are at the heart of social identity theory (SIT; *Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986*), which remains to this day a dominant approach in social psychology to explain such derogatory tendencies. According to SIT, people have a fundamental need for a positive self-esteem, which can be fulfilled through ingroup favoritism. However, mixed findings in the literature suggest that this link is not as straightforward as expected, and that further research is needed in order to fully understand the processes underlying this effect (if any). The present research investigates the moderating role of ingroup norms regarding intergroup behavior, arguing that ingroup favoritism

increases self-esteem to the extent that such behavior is congruent with one's ingroup norms.

1. Social identity theory and the self-esteem hypothesis

SIT was developed about four decades ago and continues to be one of the most influential theories in social psychology. Indeed, SIT is considered by many as the model that best predicts intergroup behaviors (e.g., *Huddy, 2004; Reicher, 2004; Rubin & Hewstone, 2004*). One of the main elements SIT focuses on is the motivational antecedents of intergroup behavior. In particular, SIT hypothesizes that ingroup favoritism is rooted in a fundamental need for a positive self-esteem; it is assumed that people have a basic motivation to enhance or maintain self-esteem, which can be satisfied by achieving or maintaining a positive social identity. Theoretically speaking, this could be obtained by creating or sustaining a favorable comparison between the ingroup and a relevant outgroup, and this would be one of the functions of ingroup favoritism. Put in other terms, ingroup favoritism would enhance people's self-esteem for they would therefore be members of a good (i.e., advantaged) group.

From this basic assumption, known as the self-esteem hypothesis (SEH), two corollaries can be derived (*Abrams & Hogg, 1988*). One corollary is that people striving for a more positive view of themselves (i.e.,

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those with low self-esteem) should display higher levels of ingroup favoritism than people with a satisfying level of self-esteem. The other corollary, which is the focus of this paper, is that when people engage in a behavior favoring the ingroup, their self-esteem should be heightened (as compared to people who do not engage in ingroup favoritism).

Since the emergence of SIT and the self-esteem hypothesis, many scholars have tried to empirically validate these two corollaries. However, as reasonable as these propositions appear, there have been contradictory findings in the literature, suggesting that the link between self-esteem and ingroup favoritism is not so clear (for a review, see Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). Indeed, some studies show that ingroup favoritism increases self-esteem (e.g., Lemyre & Smith, 1985; see also Fein & Spencer, 1997), while others show a null effect (e.g., Hunter, Stringer, & Coleman, 1993) or even that ingroup favoritism decreases self-esteem (e.g., Vickers, Abrams & Hogg, 1988, as cited in Abrams & Hogg, 1988). These inconsistent findings have contributed to the recent formulation of a complementary perspective which considers the impact of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem through a normative lens (see Martiny & Rubin, 2016).

2. Ingroup norms and ingroup favoritism

Social norms refer to a set of rules and standards indicating what type of behaviors are socially tolerable and appropriate. These norms are shared within social groups (Sherif, 1936), and based on what people actually do (descriptive norms) as well as on what is socially approved or disapproved (injunctive norms; Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). Given that people are motivated to conform to ingroup norms and to be accepted by the other members of the group (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Turner, 1991), these norms have proven to be potent determinants of attitudes and behaviors (Asch, 1956; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Hornsey, Jetten, McAuliffe, & Hogg, 2006). Accordingly, research has shown that people take ingroup norms into account when expressing discriminatory tendencies. For instance, people are more likely to show ingroup favoritism when the ingroup norm is pro-discriminatory than when the ingroup norm is anti-discriminatory (Crandall, Eshleman, O'Brien, 2002; Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1996; Nesdale, Maass, Durkin, & Griffiths, 2005). Thus, it appears that ingroup norms are strong determinants of people's intergroup attitudes and behaviors, and that people often conform to pro- or anti-discriminatory norms when expressing ingroup favoritism.

Nevertheless, the impact of norms on intergroup outcomes depends on a number of contextual and individual parameters. First, social norms seem particularly potent when they are injunctive in nature (e.g., Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Reno, Cialdini, & Kallgren, 1993; but see Manning, 2009). Indeed, research demonstrates that injunctive norms exert a unique influence on attitude and behavior, while this is not the case for descriptive norms (which work better in conjunction with injunctive norms; Smith & Louis, 2008). Moreover, it has been demonstrated that, under certain conditions, injunctive norms even override contradictory descriptive norms (Crane & Platow, 2010). Second, research has also shown that interpersonal differences exist in the extent to which conformity to social norms is likely to occur. Indeed, people who value social conformity (e.g., people with high levels of Right Wing Authoritarianism) have a greater tendency to comply with social norms prescribing intergroup attitudes (Oyamoto, Fisher, Deason, & Borgida, 2012).

3. The self-esteem hypothesis: a normative perspective

Interestingly, conformity to ingroup norms does not only have implications for intergroup behaviors. It also impacts the way people consider and feel about themselves. Indeed, conformity to ingroup norms and values increases people's sense of belongingness and commitment to the group, thereby satisfying one of their most important needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Sheldon & Bettencourt, 2002). According

to sociometer theory (Leary, 2005), maintaining satisfying levels of self-esteem per se is not a motivation, it is rather a marker of people's relational value and social acceptance. As a result, conformity to ingroup norms leads to higher levels of well-being (Sassenberg, Matschke, & Scholl, 2011), to more positive affect (Christensen, Rothgerber, Wood, & Matz, 2004), and to higher levels of self-esteem (Leary & Baumeister, 2000).

Drawing on these elements, the normative perspective postulates that the link between perceived ingroup favoritism and self-esteem might also rely on normative processes. Indeed, given that one's expression of ingroup favoritism depends on ingroup norms (e.g., Jetten et al., 1996), and that positive self-esteem is derived from the extent to which one complies with ingroup norms and other group members' expectations (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), the link between perceived ingroup favoritism and self-esteem should vary as a function of the ingroup norms dictating intergroup behavior.

This normative perspective is complementary to the rationale underlying the self-esteem hypothesis in the sense that positive self-esteem is not only considered as the by-product of the positive gap between the ingroup and a relevant outgroup (such as created by the discriminatory behavior). Positive self-esteem might additionally derive from the compliance with ingroup norms regarding intergroup discrimination. Put in other terms, while the "classic" perspective considers positive self-esteem to be the result of being a member of a good group, the normative perspective suggests that being a good group member (via behaving in favor of the ingroup) also fosters positive self-esteem.

In itself, this could help explain the inconsistent findings in the literature on the self-esteem hypothesis. Indeed, in line with the normative perspective, the positive impact of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem should be limited to contexts in which the ingroup norm is perceived as prescribing ingroup favoritism. It is therefore possible that the normative context in which past studies were conducted varied from time to time and led to null or even contradictory findings. That said, we should however point that the majority of studies on the self-esteem hypothesis have found a positive relationship between ingroup favoritism and self-esteem (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). Looking at these findings through a normative lens could suggest that some sort of "default" ingroup norm prescribing ingroup favoritism probably prevails in most intergroup contexts (see Assilaméhou & Testé, 2013; Castelli, Tomerelli, & Zogmaister, 2008; Rutland, Hitti, Mulvey, Abrams, & Killen, 2015).

4. Current state of research on the normative perspective

Despite the potentially crucial role of ingroup norms in the link between ingroup favoritism and self-esteem, very little research has directly tested the validity of this normative perspective. Partial evidence in favor of this perspective first comes from Vickers et al. (1988; as cited in Abrams & Hogg, 1988), whose research showed that people who expressed intergroup discrimination despite the local "co-operative" norm experienced lower self-esteem. Second, Hertel and Kerr (2001) showed that the relationship between ingroup favoritism and self-esteem was found after priming participants with loyalty, whereas a negative relationship was found when priming them with fairness. Finally, Scheepers, Spears, Manstead, and Doosje (2009) showed that increasing intergroup equity tendencies led to a decrease in collective self-esteem following ingroup favoritism.

Although enlightening, these findings only offer a limited account in favor of the normative perspective and suffer from several limitations. First, ingroup favoritism and self-esteem have generally been only measured, which questions the causal relationship between these two variables (Hertel & Kerr, 2001; Vickers et al., 1988; as cited in Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Indeed, given ingroup favoritism might stem from one's need to increase self-esteem (see Corollary 2 of the SEH, Abrams & Hogg, 1988), the link observed between these two variables might as

well be interpreted as such. This impedes sound conclusions regarding the effect of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem. Second, the only study that manipulated ingroup favoritism (i.e., [Scheepers et al., 2009, Study 2](#)) did not consider the effects of ingroup favoritism on one's personal self-esteem (the global evaluation of the value of the self, [Leary & Baumeister, 2000](#)), but rather on collective self-esteem (the evaluation of the value of the social identity, [Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992](#)). We believe that assessing collective self-esteem makes sense when testing the rationale underlying the classic self-esteem hypothesis, which implies that ingroup favoritism contributes to increasing the ingroup status, and thus the social identity's value (i.e., being a member of a good group). However, measuring personal self-esteem appears to us more relevant when testing the normative perspective under study here. Indeed, we hypothesize that conforming to ingroup norms would impact people's perceived value as group members (i.e., being a good group member), and thus as persons. Finally, regarding ingroup norms, research led by [Hertel and Kerr \(2001\)](#) and by [Scheepers et al. \(2009\)](#) did not directly vary the content of the ingroup norm (the extent to which it supports intergroup discrimination or equality). The conclusions one could draw from these studies are therefore limited and a systematic manipulation of these norms is still necessary to clearly understand their potential effects on personal self-esteem.

5. The present studies

The present set of studies was therefore designed to provide a direct and empirical test of the normative perspective, according to which the impact of perceived ingroup favoritism on personal self-esteem is contingent on discriminatory norms. In order to do this, we experimentally manipulated people's beliefs about their tendency to favor the ingroup and assessed people's personal self-esteem. Further, we directly manipulated the content of the norm (pro- vs. anti-discriminatory) in order to show that the effects of ingroup favoritism on personal self-esteem were contingent on the normativity of such behavior (Hypothesis 1; H1). Further, we considered the moderating role of the nature of the norm (i.e., the extent to which this norm was descriptive or injunctive). Since injunctive norms are more powerful than descriptive norms in shaping people's attitudes and behaviors ([Reno et al., 1993](#); [Smith & Louis, 2008](#)), we expected this effect to emerge primarily when ingroup favoritism is upheld by an injunctive ingroup norm, rather than by a descriptive norm (Hypothesis 2; H2). A final test of this normative perspective has been offered by taking into account interpersonal differences regarding conformity to social norms. In particular, people who value social conformity have a greater tendency to comply with social norms prescribing intergroup attitudes ([Oyamot et al., 2012](#)). We therefore hypothesized that the moderating role of social norms should increase along personal valorization of conformity increases (Hypothesis 3; H3).

Three studies were designed to test these specific hypotheses. In all studies, participants completed distribution matrices, and ingroup favoritism was manipulated by presenting participants with bogus feedback concerning their allocation of resources between their ingroup and a relevant outgroup (ingroup favoritism vs. no ingroup favoritism). Thereby, participants did not actually act differently, but were rather led to believe that they had or had not shown ingroup favoritism, according to the experimental condition. Such a procedure has been used in previous studies (i.e., [Scheepers et al., 2009, Study 2](#)), and it is appropriate for testing our hypotheses, since self-esteem is likely to be mainly affected by people's beliefs about their own behaviors and less so by the behavior per se.

In Study 1, we manipulated the normative context in which the resources were to be divided (using contexts in which the default discriminatory norm is strong vs. weak), in order to show that the positive impact of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem would be stronger when the ingroup norm resolutely prescribes ingroup favoritism (H1). Study 2 directly manipulated the norm's content (pro- vs. anti-

discriminatory) and nature (descriptive vs. injunctive), in order to show that the moderating effect of ingroup norms would primarily appear when the norm is injunctive (H2). Finally, in Study 3, we manipulated the norm's content (pro- vs. anti-discriminatory) while keeping its nature constant (with an injunctive norm), and we tested the moderating effect of participants' valorization of conformity in order to show that the moderating effect of ingroup norms would be stronger as valorization of conformity increases (H3).

6. Study 1

The aim of Study 1 was to test H1. We manipulated the normative context and participants' ingroup favoritism, and assessed their personal self-esteem. We hypothesized that the positive impact of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem would appear primarily in a context in which the default discriminatory norm is rather strong, as compared to a context in which the default discriminatory norm is rather weak.

6.1. Method

6.1.1. Participants

The study was conducted in 2013. Participants were American citizens recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk, which has been shown to be a valid and reliable source of data collection (e.g., [Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012](#); [Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011](#)). They were compensated for their time with 0.25 US dollars, and we aimed at recruiting at least 25 participants per experimental condition (in line with standards at the time; see [Hogg & Tanis, 2009](#)). The final sample consisted of 139 participants (57 women and 82 men; *M* = 34.77 years, *SD* = 12.22). They were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions in a 2 (favoritism: ingroup favoritism vs. no ingroup favoritism) by 2 (social context: academia vs. sports) experimental design.

6.1.2. Procedure

Through a short introductory message, participants were informed that a transnational American-Canadian institution aiming to promote both countries' achievements decided to provide extra-financial funds to the US (i.e., to participants' ingroup) and to Canada (i.e., to a relevant outgroup). The discrimination norm was manipulated by varying the social context in which these resources were to be allotted, which was either in academia or in sports. Such manipulation was based on the reasoning that, while in the academia context, intergroup competition would lead ingroup favoritism to be considered as the default norm, the sports context would diminish this assumption and, following, attenuate the default ingroup favoritism norm. Indeed, despite a competitive inter-group backdrop, there are strong ideological principles advocating fair play, and equity has long played a crucial role in sports ([Loland, 2002](#); see also [Scheepers et al., 2009](#)). More specifically, people are motivated to assess which team or player has the best aptitudes in a particular sport (see [Zanna, Goethals, & Hill, 1975](#)). In order to do that, the competing teams or players should have the same a priori chances of winning the game or competition. The equity principle proscribes acts of unfairness or treachery (e.g., doping) that would affect the conclusions of the game. In line with the equity principle that prevails in sports, we expect that normative expectations of intergroup discrimination are reduced in such context (e.g., [Crandall & Eshleman, 2003](#)).

Participants were told that no consensus had been reached yet about the best way to allocate the extra-financial resources between the two countries and that, as social science scholars, we were interested "in the US population's opinion about how these financial resources should be divided". Participants were thus asked to indicate their opinion about the way these funds should be divided and received a bogus feedback about their answers. This procedure allowed us to manipulate participants' beliefs about their tendency to favor (or not) the ingroup. Finally, they were invited to answer a series of questions about various aspects

of the situation and about themselves. This is where the context manipulation checks and the dependent variable were measured. Unless otherwise mentioned, answers to all questions in this study were collected on 7-points scales ranging from 1 (“Not at all”) to 7 (“Absolutely”)¹.

6.1.3. Independent variables

6.1.3.1. Favoritism. Participants were asked to complete a task allowing us to subsequently provide them with a bogus feedback about their behavior. More specifically, this task consisted in having them divide the funds between the US and Canada across different fields (six in total). In order to do so, they were presented, for each field, with a matrix inspired by Tajfel and colleagues' research (e.g. Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). These matrices were composed of ten boxes representing different ways to allocate the resources between US and Canada (see Fig. 1), and participants were asked to choose which of the ten ways to allocate the resources (i.e., which of the ten boxes) best represented their opinion. In order to increase the credibility of the bogus feedback, the matrices were built in such a way that two of them did not have an option to favor Canada over the US (A-type matrices), while two others did not have an option to favor the US over Canada (B-type matrices), and two others allowed to favor one of the two countries over the other (C-type matrices). Hence, across the six matrices participants' were to complete, it was difficult for them to assess if they actually displayed ingroup favoritism or not.

After participants completed this task (and regardless of the options they chose), they were led to believe that their answers had been analyzed and, depending on the experimental condition, they were told that they had either “favored the US over Canada (allocating most of the money to the US)” (ingroup favoritism condition) or “displayed no favoritism (allocating about fifty percent of the money to each country)” (no ingroup favoritism condition).

6.1.3.2. Social context. The context in which participants were asked to divide the funds between the US and Canada varied according to the ingroup norm. In the academia context condition, we expected the default ingroup favoritism norm to be strong, while in the sports context condition, we expected the default ingroup favoritism norm to be weaker. Accordingly, the six fields across which the participants had to distribute the funds depended on the experimental manipulation. In the academia context condition, these fields were: natural sciences, social sciences, economics, law, medicine and humanities. In the sports context condition, participants had to decide how to divide the resources in bobsleigh, curling, ice-hockey, biathlon, alpine skiing and figure skating.

6.1.4. Perception of the norm

Given that our manipulation of the social norm was rather indirect, we included in this study two measures of perceived social norms regarding ingroup favoritism to check for the effectiveness of this manipulation. Thus, after the ingroup favoritism feedback, two questions assessed participants' perceptions of the ingroup norms. The first one regarded the perceived *descriptive* norm (“To what extent do you think that other US participants have favored the US over Canada?”; $M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.69$) while the second one regarded the perceived *injunctive* norm (“To what extent do you think that most of the other US participants think it is OK to favor US over Canada?”; $M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.53$). Even though these two variables were strongly correlated, $r(139) = 0.64$, $p < 0.001$, they were treated separately as they could each provide information on the content and the nature of the norms participants perceived.

¹ For this study and the following studies, we report all manipulations, measures and exclusions.

6.1.5. Dependent variable

Participants' level of personal self-esteem was then assessed using the 10-items Rosenberg (1979) scale (e.g., “I feel that I have a number of good qualities”). As we expected participants' level of self-esteem to vary across the experimental conditions, and following Rubin and Hewstone's (1998) recommendations, we chose to measure participants' state (rather than trait) personal self-esteem. This was done by instructing them to determine the extent to which each of the ten statements reflected their “present state of mind”. After proper recoding, a self-esteem score was computed such as a higher score would indicate higher levels of self-esteem ($\alpha = 0.93$, $M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.22$).

6.2. Results

6.2.1. Perception of the norm

We performed a 2 (ingroup favoritism) $\times$ 2 (social context) full-factorial ANOVA on both the descriptive norm and the injunctive norm measures. Regarding the perceived *descriptive* norm, the analysis only showed an unexpected main effect of favoritism: Participants in the ingroup favoritism condition believed that the other US participants had shown ingroup favoritism to a higher extent ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.49$) than those in the no ingroup favoritism condition ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.80$), $F(1,135) = 7.30$, $p = 0.008$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.10, 0.66]. This might reflect the consequences of a false consensus effect (Marks & Miller, 1987): Faced with a feedback indicating that they have displayed ingroup favoritism, participants might have inferred to a higher extent that it is the most frequent behavior among their peers. The social context effect, in turn, was not statistically significant, $F(1,135) = 1.54$, $p = 0.22$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$, 95% CI [−0.45, 0.10].

Regarding the perceived *injunctive* norm, results indicated a main effect of social context according to which participants in the academia condition believed that the other US participants supported ingroup favoritism to a higher extent ($M = 5.45$, $SD = 1.36$) than participants in the sports condition ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.61$), $F(1,135) = 5.78$, $p = 0.02$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$, 95% CI [−0.57, −0.06]. As expected, this suggests that the general injunctive pro-discriminatory norm is lowered in the sports context, as compared to the academia context. No other effect was statistically significant, all $ps > 0.24$.

6.2.2. Self-esteem

In order to test for our hypothesis, we performed the same analysis on the personal self-esteem measure. Analysis of the results only showed a significant favoritism $\times$ social context interaction, $F(1,135) = 5.91$, $p = 0.02$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$, 95% CI [−0.45, −0.05] (see Fig. 2). As expected, simple slope analyses indicated that, in the academia context condition, participants led to believe that they had favored their ingroup had higher levels of self-esteem ($M = 6.03$, $SD = 0.99$) than participants led to believe that they had not ($M = 5.39$, $SD = 1.38$), $F(1,135) = 4.26$, $p = 0.04$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.62]. However, in the sports context condition, there was no significant difference between participants who were led to believe that they favored the ingroup ($M = 5.32$, $SD = 1.33$) and those led to believe that they had not ($M = 5.69$, $SD = 1.11$), $F(1,135) = 1.79$, $p = 0.18$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$, 95% CI [−0.45, 0.09].

6.3. Discussion

The aim of Study 1 was to examine the assumption that the impact of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem was contingent on the ingroup norm and that self-esteem would only be heightened by ingroup favoritism in a context where social norms promote such behavior (Hypothesis 1). Accordingly, we tested the link between ingroup favoritism and self-esteem in two specific domains (in academia and sport contexts) that varied in the extent to which the default ingroup favoritism norm could be considered as prominent. In support of our contention, we observed that ingroup favoritism only increased participants' self-esteem

A.

US	17,000 \$	18,000 \$	19,000 \$	20,000 \$	21,000 \$	22,000 \$	23,000 \$	24,000 \$	25,000 \$	26,000 \$
Canada	3,000 \$	5,000 \$	7,000 \$	9,000 \$	11,000 \$	13,000 \$	15,000 \$	17,000 \$	19,000 \$	21,000 \$

B.

US	40,000 \$	38,000 \$	36,000 \$	34,000 \$	32,000 \$	30,000 \$	28,000 \$	26,000 \$	24,000 \$	22,000 \$
Canada	42,000 \$	41,000 \$	40,000 \$	39,000 \$	38,000 \$	37,000 \$	36,000 \$	35,000 \$	34,000 \$	33,000 \$

C.

US	34,500 \$	37,000 \$	39,500 \$	42,000 \$	44,500 \$	47,000 \$	49,500 \$	52,000 \$	54,500 \$	57,000 \$
Canada	15,000 \$	20,000 \$	25,000 \$	30,000 \$	35,000 \$	40,000 \$	45,000 \$	50,000 \$	55,000 \$	60,000 \$

Fig. 1. The matrices used for the ingroup favoritism induction (Studies 1 and 2). A-type: the matrix does not allow to favor Canada over the US. B-type: it does not allow to favor the US over Canada. C-type: it allows favoring the US or Canada.

in the academia context. In the sport context, no variation in self-esteem was observed as a function of ingroup favoritism.

Furthermore, the effects observed on the perception of the norm point to the importance of the processes at play in the link between ingroup favoritism and self-esteem, and to the central role of the social norm. Indeed, results observed on the measure of the perceived *injunctive* norm suggest that, in the academia context, participants inferred that ingroup favoritism is strongly supported and encouraged by other ingroup members. Moreover, in the sport context, ingroup favoritism was perceived as less important. It is thus probable that the fairness principle did not reverse the default ingroup favoritism norm, but rather attenuated it, such that the norm was not perceived to fully promote equality, but moderate levels of ingroup favoritism. As a consequence, the effect of ingroup favoritism did not reverse in this condition, but was merely nullified. All in all, it is likely that the variations we observed were due to the degree to which the (perceived) social norm indeed supported ingroup favoritism or not.

Finally, it is interesting to note that no difference according to social context was observed on the measure of perceived descriptive norm, which suggests that the two contexts do not differ in the way other

people are believed to act, but rather in the way they are expected to act. Far from constituting a limitation, this suggests that the link between ingroup favoritism and self-esteem precisely depends on peoples' (non-)compliance with what they believe is expected from them (i.e., on injunctive norms), which is in line with our reasoning.

That said, Study 1 still suffers from a number of limitations. First, social norms were only indirectly manipulated (by the social context manipulation), and a more direct manipulation of such norms would be more convincing. Second, given the fact that participants were given no direct information about the content of the norm, it appears that, in addition to the normative context, they also based their evaluation of the ingroup norm on the feedback concerning their own intergroup behavior (as indicated by the unexpected findings on the perceived descriptive norm). Thus, in order to override these limitations and to provide a clear-cut evidence of our contention, Study 2 directly manipulated both the nature and content of the social norms regarding intergroup discrimination.

7. Study 2

Study 2 aimed at providing further evidence of the fact that ingroup favoritism will only increase self-esteem when people believe this is the behavior they are expected to display. Thus, in this study, we focused on the academia context and, in addition to the manipulation of participants' favoritism (ingroup favoritism vs. no ingroup favoritism), we directly manipulated the content of the ingroup norm (pro-discriminatory vs. anti-discriminatory), and the nature of the ingroup norm (descriptive vs. injunctive). Study 2 therefore follows a 2 (favoritism) by 2 (content of the norm) by 2 (nature of the norm) experimental design.

According to H2, we expected that the effect of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem would be moderated by the content of the norm, such that ingroup favoritism would increase self-esteem when the social norm was pro-discriminatory. On the contrary, when the norm was anti-discriminatory, participants' self-esteem would only increase when they had been led to believe they had not favored the ingroup. Further, this interaction effect should be moderated by the nature of the norm: The effect of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem would depend

Fig. 2. Means and standard deviations of personal self-esteem according to context and ingroup favoritism (Study 1). Error bars represent ± 1 SD.

on the content of the norm primarily when the norm is injunctive, rather than descriptive.

7.1. Method

7.1.1. Participants

The experiment was conducted in 2013. Participants were American citizens recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk and asked to take part to an online survey "about the North American Universities' situation". They were compensated with 0.25 US dollars. Since we aimed at having 25 participants per experimental condition at least, we recruited a total of 210 participants (99 women and 111 men; $M_{age} = 35.36$ years, $SD = 12.36$).

7.1.2. Procedure

Apart from the details provided below, the procedure of Study 2 was similar to that of Study 1. Here, participants were presented with a transnational American-Canadian institution that had extra-financial funds to allocate to US and Canadian Universities. They were then asked to allocate the funds to the two countries using the six matrices described in Study 1. Before receiving the bogus feedback about their own answers (i.e., before the favoritism manipulation) and answering the Rosenberg's self-esteem scale ($\alpha = 0.93$, $M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.28$), they were provided with some information about the other US participants' answers, which allowed us to manipulate both the norms' content and nature.

7.1.3. Independent variables

7.1.3.1. Content and nature of the norm. After the resource allocation task, participants were informed about the other US participants' answers (i.e., the other ingroup members' answers). Specifically, participants received one of four descriptions of these answers, corresponding to all possible combinations of the norms' content (pro-discriminatory vs. anti-discriminatory) and nature (descriptive vs. injunctive) orthogonal manipulations.

In the descriptive norm condition, participants were informed that the other US participants have a general tendency to favor the US over Canada (i.e., that they allocate most of the money to the US) in the pro-discriminatory norm condition, or a general tendency to show no favoritism (i.e., that they allocate about 50% of the money to each country) in the anti-discriminatory norm condition. In the injunctive norm condition, participants were informed that the other US participants think that US citizens should favor the US over Canada (i.e., that they should allocate most of the money to the US) when the norm was pro-discriminatory, or that the other US participants think that US citizens should show no favoritism (i.e. that they should allocate about 50% of the money to each country) when the norm was anti-discriminatory.

7.1.3.2. Favoritism. Participants then received the same bogus feedback about their own answers as in Study 1, leading them to believe they showed themselves some form of ingroup favoritism (or no ingroup favoritism) in the resource allocation task.

7.2. Results

To test for H2, we performed a 2 (favoritism) $\times$ 2 (content of the norm) $\times$ 2 (nature of the norm) full-factorial ANOVA on the personal self-esteem measure. As expected, this analysis only revealed a significant three-way interaction effect (see Fig. 3), $F(1,202) = 10.62$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$, 95% CI $[-0.46, -0.11]$. Simple slope analyses revealed no favoritism $\times$ content of the norm interaction when the norm was descriptive, $F(1,202) = 2.39$, $p = 0.12$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$, 95% CI $[-0.41, 0.05]$. However, a significant favoritism $\times$ content of the norm interaction was observed when the norm was injunctive, $F(1,202) = 8.94$, $p =$

Fig. 3. Means and standard deviations of personal self-esteem according to ingroup favoritism, content of the norm and nature of the norm (Study 2). Error bars represent ± 1 SD.

0.003, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$, 95% CI $[0.13, 0.64]$. Specifically, when the norm was injunctive and pro-discriminatory, personal self-esteem was higher among participants in the ingroup favoritism condition ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 1.27$) than among those in the no ingroup favoritism condition ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.61$), $F(1,202) = 4.26$, $p = 0.04$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$, 95% CI $[0.02, 0.71]$. By contrast, when the norm was injunctive and anti-discriminatory, personal self-esteem was higher among participants in the no ingroup favoritism condition ($M = 5.82$, $SD = 1.24$) than among those in the ingroup favoritism condition ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.32$), $F(1,202) = 4.69$, $p = 0.03$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$, 95% CI $[-0.79, -0.04]$.

7.3. Discussion

Study 2 sought to provide further evidence of the role played by social norms in the impact of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem. To this end, we manipulated participants' beliefs about their tendency to favor (or not) the ingroup, and both the content of ingroup norms (pro-discriminatory vs. anti-discriminatory) and their nature (descriptive vs. injunctive). As expected, ingroup favoritism only increased self-esteem when the norm was pro-discriminatory. By contrast, when the norm was anti-discriminatory, only participants who were told that they had not favored their ingroup showed an increase in self-esteem. Importantly, these differences were observed only when the norm was injunctive, but not when it was descriptive.

These results indicate that the relationship between ingroup favoritism and self-esteem is strongly contingent on the extent to which individuals feel that they are doing the right thing while (not) favoring their own group over others. Indeed, it appears that self-esteem is higher when ingroup favoritism is socially prescribed (i.e., when the ingroup norm is pro-discriminatory), than when it is proscribed (i.e., when the ingroup norm is anti-discriminatory). Taken together, these results suggest people's self-esteem depends on them feeling they are good group members and comply to prescriptive norms regarding intergroup discrimination.

8. Study 3

Studies 1 and 2 provided strong evidence for the normative hypothesis. Indeed, they showed that self-esteem is increased when people's beliefs about their propensity to favor (or not) the ingroup over the outgroup is congruent with the ingroup (injunctive) norm. Study 3 aimed at providing additional evidence of this normative hypothesis

by showing that this effect should be emphasized for people who highly value conformity (Hypothesis 3). Hence, we introduced in the present study a measure of participant's tendency to value conformity prior to the norm and the ingroup favoritism manipulations.

Five other minor modifications were introduced relative to Study 2. First, Studies 1–2 have tested the normative hypothesis among American citizens. The present study aspires at extending the findings to a different population (Genevan citizens, Switzerland). For that reason, the language of administration was also modified from English to French (we provide only English translations hereafter). Second, in order to ascertain that the previous findings are not contingent on the particular context of academia, Study 3 devised a different context for dividing money between the ingroup and a relevant outgroup. Third, since Study 2 showed that the normative effect was more likely to occur when norms were injunctive (vs. descriptive), the present study focused on injunctive norms. Fourth, manipulation checks were absent from Study 2. The ingroup favoritism and ingroup norm manipulations were very direct, so we thought manipulation checks could induce suspicion among participants and eventually be deleterious (see Ellsworth & Gonzalez, 2003). However, in order to be certain that the manipulations were accurately perceived, we added manipulation checks in this third study. Finally, in order to ascertain that participants paid careful attention to the questionnaire, we also included an attention check.

8.1. Method

8.1.1. Participants

The study was conducted in 2015. Participants were people living in, working in and/or native from Geneva. Since Studies 1–2 were underpowered according to the criteria in use at the time of Study 3 (see Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2011), we aimed at approaching 50 participants per experimental condition. Participants were recruited through social networks to participate in an online survey about the Swiss society. After several recruitment rounds, we reached a total of 184 participants (128 women and 56 men; $M = 24.82$ years, $SD = 7.45$). We considered the sample size as satisfactory since there were approximately 45 participants in each cell of the experimental design.

8.1.2. Procedure

First, we introduced a pre-test scale measuring the extent to which participants value conformity, in order to investigate the moderating role of this variable. Participants were then informed that a national institution aiming to ease the traffic flow in large Swiss cities had decided to provide extra financial funds to Geneva (i.e., the ingroup) and to Basel (i.e., the outgroup). We chose Basel as a basis for comparison since its size is almost equal to that of Geneva. Moreover, Geneva is situated in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, while Basel is situated in the German-speaking part, which likely enhanced the salience and relevance of the intergroup context to our participants. Participants were then asked to indicate their opinion about the way these funds should be divided. They provided their opinion about eight different domains (e.g., development of highways, extension of the railroad network, development of cycle lanes, etc.) using the same kind of matrices as in the previous studies. Unlike the previous studies though, four of them were A-type matrices and four of them were B-type matrices. No C-type matrices were included in this study. Participants then received a bogus information about the norm and their own behavior (regardless of the options they chose in the matrices). In the present study, the injunctive norm was kept constant across conditions (removing the descriptive norm condition from the design), while the norm content (anti- vs. pro-discriminatory) was manipulated in the same way as in study 2. Ingroup favoritism was manipulated as in studies 1–2. Participants were then invited to answer two manipulation checks and the measure of personal self-esteem. At the end of the questionnaire, we introduced an attention check in order to verify that participants were

paying careful attention to the content of the questionnaire. Answers to all questions in this study were collected on 7-points scales ranging from 1 ("Not at all") to 7 ("Absolutely").

8.1.3. Independent variables

8.1.3.1. Valorization of conformity. In order to assess the extent to which participants valued conformity, we used two subscales of the Schwartz et al. (2012) values inventory tapping in dimensions related to compliance to social norms. Specifically, three items came from the "conformity-rules" subscale (e.g. "Obeying all the laws is important"), and three items came from the "conformity-interpersonal" subscale (e.g. "It is important to avoid upsetting other people"). A value-of-conformity score was created by aggregating the answers to these six items ($\alpha = 0.75$, $M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.11$).

8.1.3.2. Content of the norm. Participants then went through the resource allocation task after which they were told about the other Genevans' opinion regarding ingroup favoritism. In the pro-discriminatory norm condition, participants read that their fellow ingroup members thought that people from Geneva should favor their city over Basel (i.e., that they should allocate most of the money to Geneva). In the anti-discriminatory norm condition, they read that the general expectation was to show no favoritism (i.e., that they should allocate about 50% of the money to each city).

8.1.3.3. Favoritism. Participants then received a bogus feedback about their own tendency in the resource allocation task. Following the procedure used in the preceding studies, they were either led to believe that they had displayed some form of ingroup favoritism (or no ingroup favoritism) in the resource allocation task. This was done independently of their actual choices in the matrices they were presented with.

8.1.4. Manipulation checks

After the norm and the ingroup favoritism inductions, participants answered two manipulation checks. The first one checked for the perceived content of the norm ("According to previous surveys, to what extent did the participants from Geneva think that people from Geneva should allocate more money to their city?"; $M = 4.24$, $SD = 2.07$), and the second one checked for participants' perceived ingroup favoritism ("According to the analysis of your answers, to what extent did you favor Geneva in the funds allocation?"; $M = 3.56$, $SD = 2.02$).

8.1.5. Dependent variable

In this study, self-esteem was assessed through the single-item: "I have a positive opinion about myself" ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.47$; see Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001).

8.1.6. Attention check

In order to make sure participants were paying attention to the questionnaire, they were presented with the following item: "This question is aimed at detecting participants who are not paying attention to the questions. Please tick the second box from the left and continue as if nothing". Twelve participants did not tick the appropriate box and were removed from the analyses². Thus, the final sample included 172 participants (121 women and 51 men; $M = 24.97$ years, $SD = 7.63$).

8.2. Results

8.2.1. Manipulation checks

We performed a full-factorial Favoritism (coded -1 for ingroup favoritism and 1 for no ingroup favoritism) $\times$ norm (coded -1 for pro-discrimination and 1 for anti-discrimination) $\times$ conformity (centered

² The results were not significantly different when these twelve participants were included in the analyses.

continuous variable) linear regression analysis on the norm manipulation check. The analysis revealed the expected main effect of the norm manipulation, $\beta = -1.18$, $t(164) = -9.00$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI $[-1.44, -0.92]$. Participants perceived the social norm to favor ingroup favoritism as higher in the pro-discrimination condition than in the anti-discrimination norm condition ($M_{pro-d} = 5.52$, $SE_{pro-d} = 0.20$ and $M_{anti-d} = 3.17$, $SE_{anti-d} = 0.18$). The analysis also produced an unexpected Favoritism $\times$ Norm interaction, $\beta = -0.31$, $t(164) = -2.37$, $p = 0.02$, 95% CI $[-0.57, -0.05]$: The discrepancy between the pro-discriminatory norm and the anti-discriminatory norm conditions was larger in the no favoritism condition ($M_{pro-d} = 5.68$, $SE_{pro-d} = 0.26$ and $M_{anti-d} = 2.70$, $SE_{anti-d} = 0.25$, respectively) than in the favoritism condition ($M_{pro-d} = 5.37$, $SE_{pro-d} = 0.29$ and $M_{anti-d} = 3.63$, $SE_{anti-d} = 0.25$, respectively). No other effects were significant, $ps > 0.21$.

The same analysis was performed on the favoritism check. Only the favoritism main effect was significant, $\beta = -0.84$, $t(164) = -6.00$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI $[-1.11, -0.56]$. Participants believed they had favored their ingroup relatively more in the favoritism condition ($M = 4.45$, $SE = 0.21$) than in the no favoritism condition ($M = 2.77$, $SE = 0.19$). The results confirmed the efficiency of the experimental manipulations.

8.2.2. Self-esteem

To test for H3, we performed the same analysis on the self-esteem measure. The analysis first revealed a significant favoritism $\times$ norm interaction, $\beta = 0.24$, $t(164) = 2.18$, $p = 0.03$, 95% CI $[-1.11, -0.56]$. In the pro-discriminatory norm condition, self-esteem was marginally higher when participants were told they had favored the ingroup ($M = 5.68$, $SE = 0.25$) than when they were told they had not ($M = 5.11$, $SE = 0.22$), $\beta = -0.29$, $t(164) = -1.74$, $p = 0.08$, 95% CI $[-0.61, 0.04]$. The reverse tendency was observed in the anti-discriminatory norm condition: Self-esteem was lower when participants were told they had favored the ingroup ($M = 5.05$, $SE = 0.21$) than when they were told they had not ($M = 5.45$, $SE = 0.21$), even though this difference was not statistically significant, $\beta = 0.19$, $t(164) = 1.34$, $p = 0.18$, 95% CI $[-0.10, 0.49]$.

Moreover, and in line with H3, the analysis revealed the three way favoritism $\times$ norm $\times$ conformity interaction, $\beta = 0.31$, $t(164) = 3.10$, $p = 0.002$, 95% CI $[0.11, 0.51]$. Among participants who ascribe relatively low value to conformity (-1 SD), all effects were non-significant, all $ps > 0.50$. However, as predicted, the favoritism $\times$ norm interaction appeared among participants who ascribe relatively high value to conformity ($+1$ SD), $\beta = 0.59$, $t(164) = 3.77$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI $[0.28, 0.90]$. More specifically, in the pro-discrimination norm condition, self-esteem was higher in the favoritism condition ($M = 6.00$, $SE = 0.32$) than in the no favoritism condition ($M = 4.71$, $SE = 0.35$), $\beta = -0.64$, $t(164) = -2.73$, $p = 0.007$, 95% CI $[-1.11, -0.18]$. Conversely, in the anti-discrimination norm, self-esteem was higher in the no favoritism condition ($M = 5.48$, $SE = 0.27$) than in the favoritism condition ($M = 4.41$, $SE = 0.31$), $\beta = 0.54$, $t(164) = 2.61$, $p = 0.01$, 95% CI $[0.13, 0.95]$ ³ (see Fig. 4).

8.3. Discussion

Study 3 provided further evidence of the normative processes involved in the impact of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem. Indeed, we have shown that personal self-esteem was the highest when participants were led to believe that their behavior (favoring or not the ingroup) was congruent with the ingroup norm (discriminatory vs. egalitarian). Furthermore, this study showed that this effect increased according to participants' tendency to value conformity. Not only do these results replicate and extend the findings of Studies 1 and 2, they do so among a different population (i.e., people from Geneva), and using a different intergroup context (i.e., easing the cities' traffic flow)

Fig. 4. Means and standard deviations of personal self-esteem according to ingroup favoritism, content of the norm and valorization of conformity (Study 3). Error bars represent ± 1 SE.

which adds to the validity of our contention. All in all, these results point at the important role played by social norms (and to motivation to comply with them) in the link between ingroup favoritism and self-esteem.

At this point, it is noteworthy to mention that this and the previous studies compared self-esteem in the ingroup favoritism condition to a condition in which participants are led to believe that they have been fair. In the absence of a baseline condition (in which self-esteem is assessed without any experimental induction), we are not able to conclude whether self-esteem is increased following conformity to the ingroup norm or it is decreased due to the non-conformity to the ingroup norm (or both).

9. General discussion

The present research aimed at testing the general hypothesis according to which the positive impact of perceived ingroup favoritism on self-esteem is contingent on ingroup norms. In particular, we argued that ingroup favoritism might only enhance self-esteem when such behavior is normative. To demonstrate this is the case, we examined in Study 1 self-esteem variations as a function of the extent to which respondents believed they exhibited ingroup favoritism, and of the normative context: one in which ingroup favoritism norms were presumed to be highly prevalent (i.e., in academia), and one in which intergroup discrimination norms would be attenuated by an intergroup fairness principle (i.e., in sports). Consistent with our first hypothesis, the positive impact of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem was observed in the academia context, but not in the sports context. This effect seemed driven by the fact that ingroup favoritism injunctive norms were reduced in the sports context. Study 2 was conducted in order to provide a more stringent test of our general hypothesis, and we directly manipulated the ingroup norm regarding intergroup behavior. Thus, in addition to participants' ingroup favoritism, we also manipulated both the content (pro-discriminatory vs. anti-discriminatory) and the nature (descriptive vs. injunctive) of the ingroup norm. The findings revealed a boosting impact of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem when the norm was pro-discriminatory, but a deleterious impact when the norm was anti-discriminatory. In this latter case, participants' self-esteem was increased when they thought they performed a non-discriminatory behavior. Moreover, this was only the case when the norm was injunctive (rather than descriptive). Finally, Study 3 provided further evidence of our normative perspective by showing that the increase in

³ Results were similar when using only the conformity-rules subscale or the conformity-interpersonal subscale as independent variables.

self-esteem resulting from the congruence between one's own behavior and the injunctive norm was mainly observed among people who highly value conformity to social norms. Altogether, these findings have broad theoretical implications for intergroup relations research that we shall now discuss.

9.1. The normative perspective: theoretical implications and future directions

The present set of studies calls for a consideration of normative processes at play in the relationship between ingroup favoritism and self-esteem, and provides strong support for the normative perspective. The findings thus complement the SEH, by showing ingroup favoritism leads to higher self-esteem only when such behavior is perceived as being congruent with the ingroup norm. Examining the mixed results in SEH research through the lens of this normative perspective leads to an interesting conjecture. Given that most of past studies show a positive impact of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem, it is possible that results have shown this tendency because the ingroup norm is often perceived as promoting ingroup favoritism. Thus, we could imagine the existence of some sort of “default” ingroup favoritism norm (or is at least inferred) in numerous social contexts (e.g., Hammond & Axelrod, 2006). This general tendency to infer an ingroup favoritism norm may be functional, in the sense that it is reassuring for people to believe that they can rely on and benefit from other ingroup members' support. Indeed, following reciprocity rules, people know that if they favor other ingroup members, they might also favor them back (Yamagishi & Kiyonari, 2000). As an illustration of this functional belief in generic ingroup favoritism norms, it appears that ingroup trust and favoritism are attenuated in situations in which people are aware that other ingroup members have no knowledge about people's group membership (thus, breaking the reciprocal expectations; Platow, Foddy, Yamagishi, Lim, & Chow, 2012; Yamagishi, Mifune, Liu, & Pauling, 2008).

Interestingly, this conjecture was present in Tajfel's early work (see Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel et al., 1971), where he stated that:

The need to bring some kind of order into our ‘social construction of reality’ [...] combines with the hostility inherent in many of the intergroup categorizations to which we are continually exposed to develop a ‘generic norm’ of behavior toward outgroups. Whenever we are confronted with a situation to which some form of intergroup categorization appears directly relevant, we are likely to act in a manner that discriminates against the outgroup and favors the ingroup. (Tajfel, 1970, pp. 98–99).

This normative hypothesis was abandoned in the final formulation of SIT in favor of the “need for a positive social identity”, because the idea was accused of being circular (see Spears & Otten, 2012). We believe this accusation of circularity may be legitimate as long as the inferred norm is descriptive in nature (i.e., people are biased in favor of the ingroup because the other ingroup members are perceived to be biased in favor of the ingroup). However, it seems less legitimate when the inferred norm is injunctive in nature (i.e., people are biased in favor of the ingroup because they think other ingroup members would encourage them to behave in such a way). This perceived encouragement by other ingroup members is indeed based on the functional value of ingroup favoritism. This conjecture would benefit from being properly tested in future research. For instance, future studies examining the impact of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem should add a control condition, in which the content of the ingroup norm is not specified. According to the hypothesis of a default pro-discriminatory ingroup norm, we should expect ingroup favoritism to lead to higher self-esteem in the pro-discriminatory and the control conditions, while ingroup favoritism should lead to lower self-esteem in the anti-discriminatory norm.

The normative perspective on the link between ingroup favoritism and self-esteem also points at the potential for other variables to affect

the strength and pervasiveness of ingroup favoritism norms. Indeed, we have shown here that this link depends on the social context such as the norms' content (as more or less discriminatory), and nature (descriptive vs. injunctive). Study 3 also points at interpersonal differences that might moderate the link between ingroup favoritism and self-esteem, such as one's valorization of conformity to social norms. As a matter of fact, we believe other variables could moderate this link, such as ingroup identification (see Verkuyten, 2007), superordinate categorization (as mentioned before), intergroup boundaries (e.g. Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993), the groups' common fate (e.g. Rabbie & Horwitz, 1969), or the level of realistic or symbolic of intergroup threats (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). More broad determinants of intergroup behavior might as well be of interest, such as intercultural differences in terms of collectivistic and individualistic societies (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1989). In fact, most of the determinants of intergroup discrimination identified in previous research might act as moderators of the link under study here, given they might affect the inferences people draw about the normative behaviors such contexts imply, and specifically what is expected from them in terms of ingroup favoritism. Future research should therefore test the moderating role of these variables and demonstrate that these variations are due to differences in the norms people perceive regarding intergroup behavior, thereby providing further evidence of the normative perspective we have presented here.

9.2. One effect, many processes?

The present research supports a normative perspective on the SEH, by showing that self-esteem can stem from conformism to the ingroup norms relative to intergroup behaviors (i.e., from being a good group member). Though enlightening, it provides no evidence about the relationship between this process and the one proposed by the “classic” understanding of the SEH, according to which self-esteem derives from the positive gap between the ingroup and the outgroup created by the discriminatory behavior (i.e., from being member of a good group). It is thus plausible that conformity to ingroup norms and increased ingroup status are two independent predictors of self-esteem. A close look at our results suggests however that the normative process is more powerful than the one involving a higher ingroup status. Indeed, if the two processes were simultaneously at play, we should have observed the positive effect of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem to be attenuated when the ingroup norm was clearly anti-discriminatory (the conflicting influence of conformity and ingroup status cancelling each other out). Nevertheless, the findings show that the effect of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem is completely reversed, and that the amplitude of self-esteem variations is somewhat equivalent in both normative conditions (i.e., under anti- vs. pro-discriminatory norms). Such reasoning remains obviously speculative and should be examined in future research directly pitting these two possible processes against one another.

In this set of studies, we have used measures of personal self-esteem because of their ability to reflect one's feeling of being a good group member. We have done so because we believe they offered the most adequate way of investigating the normative processes at play in the determinants of self-esteem. That said, scholars working in the field of the SEH have suggested that collective (rather than personal) self-esteem would be more relevant (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). Notwithstanding the value of PSE in this line of research, we believe future research should also include a measure of collective self-esteem and, in particular, focus on the mediating role of its sub-dimensions. Indeed, one of these sub-dimensions reflects individuals' concern over personal inclusion in the group and their worth as a group member (i.e., the “membership” sub-dimension), while others reflect individuals' concern over the ingroup's social status (i.e., the “public” and “private” sub-dimensions, Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). To the extent that the effect of ingroup favoritism on self-esteem is based on the feeling of being a good group member (in line with the normative perspective

we defend here), the membership sub-dimension should mediate the effect of ingroup favoritism on personal self-esteem. Should the effect of ingroup favoritism be based on the feeling that one is a member of a good group (in line with the more “classic” perspective), then the public and private sub-dimensions should mediate the effects of favoritism on personal self-esteem.

9.3. Conclusion

Taking the present findings together, we can conclude that ingroup favoritism enhances personal self-esteem only when the ingroup norm promotes ingroup favoritism. However, when the ingroup norm promotes fairness, self-esteem is increased by the fact of having not favored the ingroup (i.e., by having treated both groups equally). Thus, the present findings support the normative perspective and suggest that ingroup favoritism may stem from a motivation to conform to the default ingroup norm that promotes ingroup favoritism. Although this paper does not seek to position itself at odds with SIT, our findings suggest that the self-esteem hypothesis should be refined by including a normative perspective (see also Martiny & Rubin, 2016). Thus, the present research serves merely as one building block, and we believe it has the potential to serve as a foundation that could eventually help understanding the very source of ingroup favoritism.

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