

**Mackinnon, S. P.,** Jordan, C., & Wilson, A. (2009). *The moderating role of implicit self-esteem on seating choice*. Poster presented at the American Psychological Association convention at the Metro Toronto Convention Center in Toronto, ON, August 6, 2009.

**Title: The Moderating Role of Implicit Self-Esteem on Seating Choice**

*Introduction:* Self-report measures of explicit self-esteem, such as Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item measure, have been studied extensively in the psychological literature. Comparatively, implicit-self esteem is a relatively new concept. A universal definition of implicit self-esteem has proven elusive, but broadly speaking, implicit self-esteem can be conceptualized as preconscious, positive associations with the self-concept.

There are similarities between implicit and explicit self-esteem (despite the fact that both measures are largely independent). The literature has shown that people with low explicit self-esteem tend to be sensitive to rejection (c.f. Nezlek, Kowalski, Leary, Blevins & Holgate, 1997), thus, people with low implicit self-esteem might also be rejection sensitive and socially cautious. One consequence of this may be that people with low implicit self-esteem may be more inclined to associate with others who resemble themselves, because such individuals are often assumed to share one's values and attitudes. This might be such an ingrained tendency that it might be observed for even fairly trivial physical similarities, such as whether or not another person is wearing glasses.

There is some evidence that implicit measures of self-esteem are better than self-report measures at predicting indirect behavioural measurements, such as apparent anxiety (Spalding & Hardin, 1999). Thus, the current study uses seating choice as an indirect measurement of liking and/or attraction towards persons wearing glasses. The current study hypothesizes that persons with low implicit self-esteem will tend to sit beside persons similar in glasses wearing status.

*Sample.* A table was set up in public areas on campus at Wilfrid Laurier University. The sample was 48.7% male, with a mean age of 23, with ages ranging from 18 to 67. Only 28.2% of participants ( $N = 11$ ) were wearing glasses at the time of the experiment, though 66.7% ( $N = 26$ ) of the participants said they wore glasses at least "rarely." The participants wearing glasses at the time of the experiment they have required prescription glasses for a mean of 9.14 years.

*Procedure.* Four chairs were present, two of which were occupied by female confederates. The confederates were selected to be the same sex (female) and skin color (Caucasian) as well as similar in age and clothing style. However, on any given trial, one confederate was wearing non-prescription glasses and the other was not. Glasses wearing for the confederates, as well as the side each confederate sat on were counterbalanced across trials. Participants were asked to sit down beside one of the confederates to have their picture taken, and to fill out a short questionnaire. Participants were given a chocolate bar as compensation for their time. We were interested primarily in which seat the participant chooses to sit, and the moderating role implicit self-esteem plays in seating choice.

*Materials.* The Name Letter Preference Task (Jones, Pelham, Mirenberg & Hetts, 2001) was used as a measure of implicit self-esteem. It asks participants to rate how much they like each letter of the alphabet on a 9-point scale. Participant initials were collected in the demographic section, at the end of the study. People high in implicit self-esteem indicate that they like the letters in their own initials (first and last name only) more than people without those letters in their initials do. For example, Aaron will like the letter A more than Dan, Scott and John. A difference score was calculated for the Name Letter Preference Task for each participant by taking the rating given to their first and last name initials, and subtracting the mean rating given to that letter by all other participants without that initial in their name.

*Results.* First, a dichotomous “similarity” variable was calculated. Persons who sat by a similar person (i.e. glasses with glasses, no-glasses with no-glasses) were coded as 1 ( $N = 27$ ). Persons who sat by a dissimilar person (i.e. glasses with no-glasses or no-glasses with glasses) were coded as -1 ( $N = 12$ ). A participant was only considered to be a glasses wearer if wearing glasses at the time of the experiment. A simple binomial test revealed that people were less likely to sit by a confederate of similar glasses wearing status (31%) than by a confederate of dissimilar glasses wearing status (69%),  $p = .024$ . This effect was not driven by glasses-wearing participants or non-glasses wearing participants exclusively; a simple test of proportions shows that 63.6% of glasses wearers sat beside a dissimilar person while 71.4% of non-glasses wearers sat beside a dissimilar person, a nonsignificant difference,  $z = 0.09$ , *ns*.

A stepwise logistic regression analysis was employed to predict the probability that a participant would sit beside a dissimilar person using implicit self-esteem as a predictor. A test of the implicit self-esteem model versus an intercept only model was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 39) = 6.757, p = .009$ . This model was able correctly to classify 92.6% of persons who sat by a dissimilar person and 50.0% persons who sat beside a similar person, for an overall success rate of 79.5%, an improvement of 10.3% over the intercept only model. Each one-unit decrease in implicit self-esteem indicates that the respondent is approximately 1.75 times more likely to sit beside a similar person. Exploratory analyses revealed that this relationship was stronger for females, than for males.

*Discussion:* The logistic regression analysis revealed that implicit self-esteem moderates the tendency to sit beside a dissimilar person. That is, as implicit self-esteem decreases, the tendency to sit with a similar person increases, as hypothesized. We speculate that persons low in implicit self-esteem are more rejection sensitive, and as a result, they tend to sit beside persons who have a stronger physical resemblance. However, most people tend to have positive implicit self-associations (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995); thus, because most people tend to have high levels of implicit self-esteem, we find an overall tendency for people to sit with a dissimilar person. Further research is needed to make definitive conclusions.