

The Status-Regulating Role of Self-Esteem

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1. Why do we possess self-esteem?

An evolutionary approach to self-esteem

Self-esteem or how we feel about ourselves is one of the most popular topics in psychology.

But what evolutionary function does it serve?

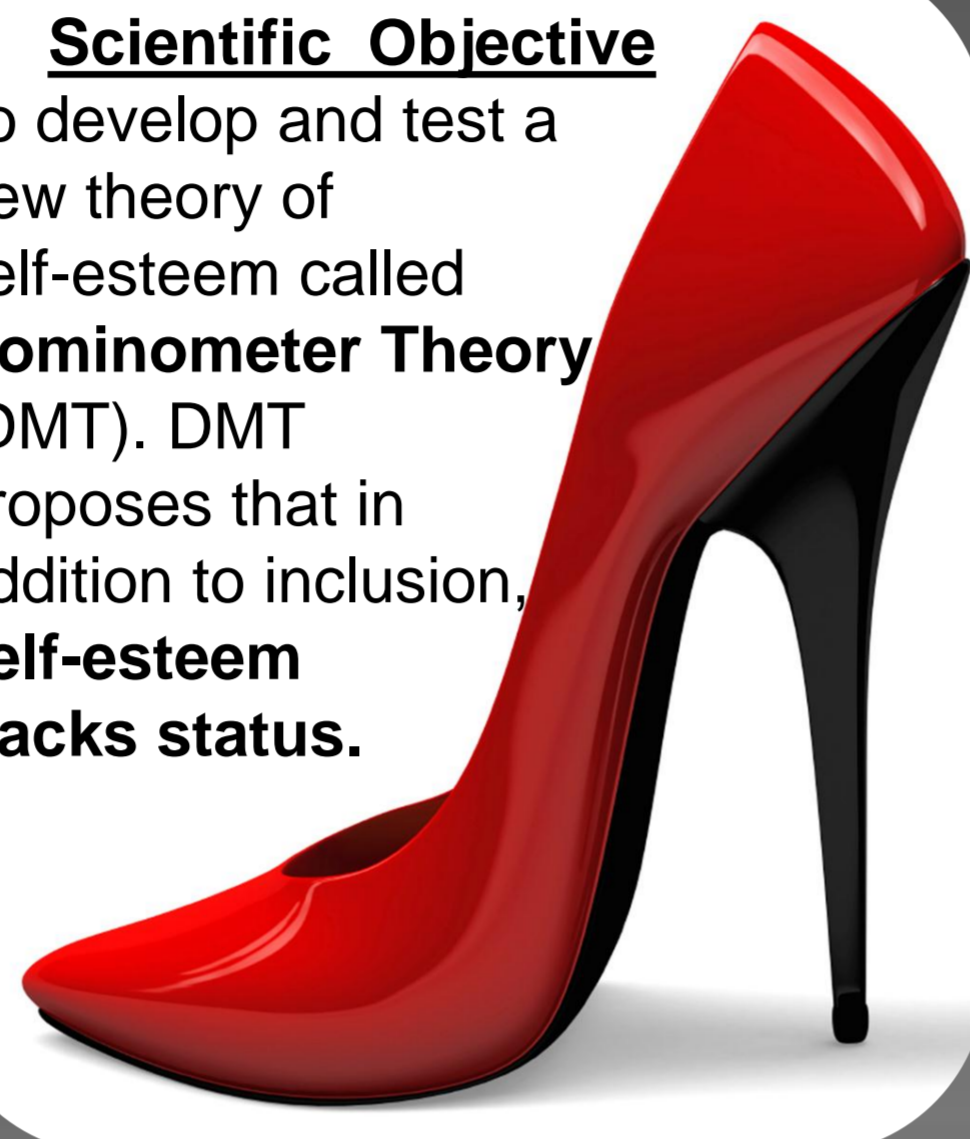
One theory, namely, **Sociometer Theory (SMT)** (Leary, 1999) proposes that because inclusion in social groups was crucial to our ancestors' survival, self-esteem evolved to track our level of inclusion in social groups, and raise this level of inclusion when it got too low.

In support of SMT, being included raises self-esteem and being excluded lowers it (e.g. Leary, Cottrell, & Phillips, 2001).

2. Dominometer Theory

Scientific Objective

To develop and test a new theory of self-esteem called **Dominometer Theory (DMT)**. DMT proposes that in addition to inclusion, **self-esteem tracks status**.



DMT proposes that people developed self-esteem in order to track their position in the social hierarchy, and to motivate behaviour suitable to their social role.

Most primate and human societies possess **social hierarchies and competition**:

Apes fight for status



Human beings desire and pursue status



3. Hypotheses

- Higher status predicts higher self-esteem.
- Higher self-esteem predicts more assertive behaviour.
- Manipulating status will affect self-esteem: raising/lowering status will raise/lower self-esteem, respectively.
- The links between status and self-esteem, and self-esteem and assertive behaviour, will be maintained after controlling for inclusion and agreeable behaviour, respectively, thus empirically distinguishing DMT from SMT.

4. Method & Results

Study 1

Correlation Study (Conducted Online)

Participants:
N=853
(424 ♂, 429 ♀;
Mean Age=30.47;
From Europe, USA).

Perceived Status	"Respect my achievements" "See me as an important person"
Perceived Inclusion	"Like me as a person" "Are willing to be friends with me"

Method:
Assessed correlation between perceived status and self-esteem.

Measures:
Self-esteem (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965),
Perceived Status & Perceived Inclusion (adapted from Huo, Binning, & Molina, 2010) questionnaires.

Partial Correlations:
(controlling for Perceived Status and Perceived Inclusion, respectively)

	Self-esteem
Perceived Status	.32**
Perceived Inclusion	.31**

*p < .05; **p < .001.

Perceived status and self-esteem were positively correlated, even after controlling for perceived inclusion

Study 2

Correlation Study (Conducted Online)

Participants:
N=620
(235 ♂, 385 ♀;
Mean Age=34.59;
From Europe, USA).

Assertive Behaviour	"I make suggestions" "I speak in a clear firm voice"
Agreeable Behaviour	"I compliment and praise other people" "I smile and laugh with others"

Method:
Assessed correlation between self-esteem and social behaviour.

Measures:
Self-esteem (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965),
& Social Behaviour (SBI; Moskowitz, 1994) questionnaires.

Partial Correlations:
(controlling for self-reported Assertive Behaviour and Agreeable Behaviour, respectively)

	Self-esteem
Assertive Behaviour	.49**
Agreeable Behaviour	.31**

*p < .05; **p < .001.

Self-esteem and assertive behaviour were positively correlated, even after controlling for agreeable behaviour

Study 3

Experimental Study (Conducted at University of Southampton)

Participants:
110 undergraduates
(19 ♂, 91 ♀;
Mean Age=19.81;
From UoS).

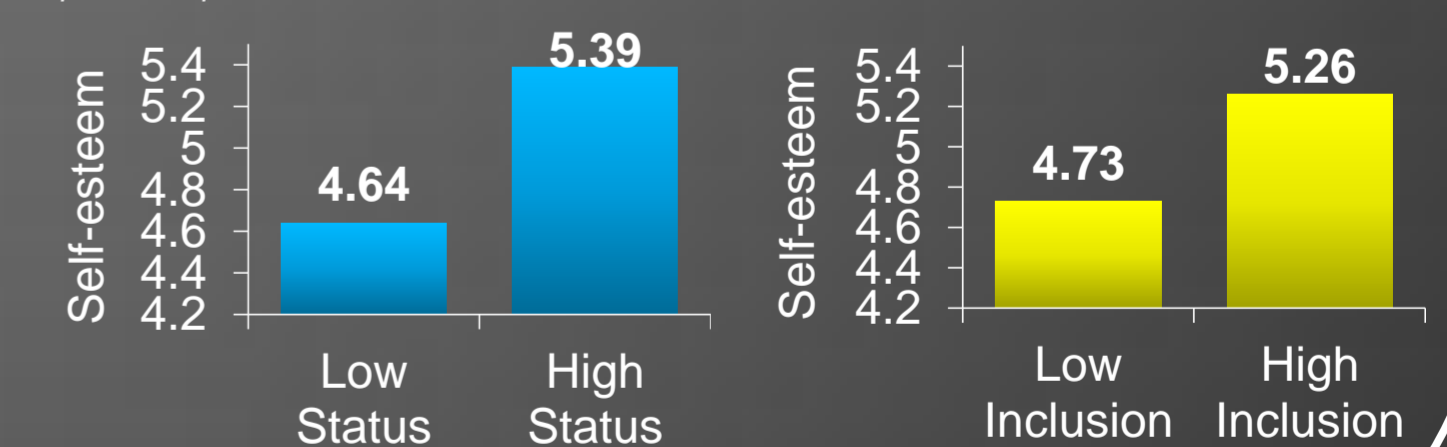
Method:
Participants completed a bogus test & received false feedback

indicating they had either **high or low potential to achieve status**, and either **high or low potential to be included**, in life. Their self-esteem was measured in response to this feedback.

Analysis of Variance (2X2):
(IVs: Status & Inclusion; DV: Self-esteem)

	Self-esteem
Status	$F(1,106) = 8.60^{**}$
Inclusion	$F(1,106) = 3.86^*$

*p < .05; **p < .005.



Raising/lowering anticipated status raised/lowered self-esteem, respectively

5. Conclusions and Impact

- Studies 1 and 2 establish positive correlations between status and self-esteem, and between self-esteem and assertive behaviour, showing that these links hold even controlling for inclusion and agreeable behaviour.
- Study 3 establishes, for the first time, a **causal link** between status and self-esteem: changes in status, even controlling for inclusion, cause changes in self-esteem.
- Future studies should establish the second part of the causal chain, that changes in self-esteem **cause** changes in assertive behaviour, and that self-esteem **mediates** the link between status and assertive behaviour.

Impact on the field:
Experimentally establishes causality for the first time
Status → Self-esteem

6. References

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- Leary, M. R., Cottrell, C. A., & Phillips, M. (2001). Deconfounding the effects of dominance and social acceptance on self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81, 898-909.
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