Facing social identity change: Interactive effects of current and projected collective identification on expectations regarding future self-esteem and psychological well-being

Dominic J. Packer[1]*, Alison L. Chasteen[2] and Sonia K. Kang[2]

[1]Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, USA
[2]University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada

We hypothesized that prospective changes in social identity that involve transitioning out of a currently valued group would be associated with negative expectations regarding future states, but that this effect would be mitigated among individuals who expect to belong to a future in-group of similar importance. Consistent with predictions, strongly identified young adults in two studies projected significantly lower self-esteem/psychological well-being in old age than weakly identified young adults. Critically, however, this effect was fully attenuated if they expected to identify with their future aged in-group when they were old. Study 2 showed that the capacity for projected identification to buffer projected well-being among strongly identified young adults was contingent on their membership in the future in-group being highly salient. Analyses of participants' written descriptions of old age (Study 1) and a valence manipulation (Study 2) indicated that these effects were not attributable to the anticipated valence of future selves/states, but rather to the value placed on current and future group memberships.

Humans have a fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), which is met not only by close interpersonal relationships but also by stable and enduring group memberships (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Belonging to groups can help individuals satisfy other needs, both psychological (e.g., Brewer, 1991; Hogg & Abrams, 1993; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and material, and it is likely that the ability of collectives to provide their members with benefits that they would have difficulty attaining on their own played a significant role in the evolution of belongingness motives in the human species (e.g., Brewer, 2004; Caporael, 2001; Wilson, 2007). Given the importance of groups, prospective changes in group memberships may sometimes be threatening and associated with negative expectations for the future, especially when they are involuntary (e.g., Ellemers, 2003; Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Wohl & Branscombe, 2009). Critically, however, whether changes involving particular group memberships are anticipated

*Correspondence should be addressed to Dr Dominic J. Packer, Department of Psychology, Lehigh University, 17 Memorial Drive East, Bethlehem, PA 18018, USA (e-mail: djp208@lehigh.edu).

negatively is likely to depend on the extent to which individuals identify with the groups in question and, in particular, the extent to which membership in one valued group can be replaced by membership in another of similar value (e.g., Breakwell, 1986; Jetten, O'Brien, & Trindall, 2002). As such, reactions to prospective changes in group membership are likely to be influenced by an interplay between current and future identities.

Current identities

In this research, we examined how levels of identification with a current social group and anticipated levels of identification with a future in-group influence expectations with regard to the future. We did so in the context of a biologically driven transition, ageing, due to which humans face the (likely) prospect of shifting from membership in one group (young adult) to another (older adult). On the basis of social identity/self-categorization theory, we predicted that strongly identified young adults would report significantly more negative expectations about the self in old age than those who were weakly identified with the young adult age group. The social identity approach highlights the fact that group memberships form a central component of individuals' identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). Not all group memberships form a social identity, but when people identify or self-categorize with a group, membership therein becomes an important basis for positive self-regard and psychological well-being (e.g., Bat-Chava, 1994; Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979); individuals feel good about themselves and their life circumstances in part because they belong to this valued group. As such, life-changes that involve transitioning away from or out of currently valued collectives are likely to be associated with negative expectations for the future, particularly with regard to the self. To the extent that membership in a particular group is a significant basis or foundation for positive self-regard in the present, a prospective transition into a different social category is likely to be associated with negative expectations about one's self-esteem and psychological well-being in the future (i.e., after the transition occurs).

Prior research has observed evidence of negative psychological reactions to prospective, as well as actual, changes involving current group memberships. For instance, research on organizational restructures and mergers has identified employees' reluctance to disband existing work-groups as a predictor of negative emotions, stress, and poorer adjustment to new organizational structures (e.g., Haunschild, Moreland, & Murrell, 1994; Terry, Callan, & Sartori, 1996; Terry, Carey, & Callan, 2001; Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, Monden, & De Lima, 2002). Consistent with the social identity perspective (see Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999), strongly identified group members tend to respond more negatively than weak identifiers to the prospective loss of a group membership in organizational contexts. As such, Jetten *et al.* (2002) observed that identification with an existing work-group was associated with more negative feelings regarding its upcoming restructure and integration with other groups (see also Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004).

Age groups differ in some important respects from many other social groups in that age-based transitions are inevitable and unidirectional. Further, when one moves between age groups, it is not because the group itself has ceased to exist or has changed in its fundamentals, but rather because one has moved on or can no longer claim membership. Although the boundaries of age-based groups are somewhat flexible,

they are widely recognized at least as broadly defined categories (young adult, middle-aged adult, older adult; e.g., Hummert, 1990), which are often demarked by life-events, rules/laws, and social norms (e.g., reaching legal drinking age, starting a career or having children, reaching retirement age, qualifying for 'senior's discounts', etc.). As young adults confront the prospect of ageing, they are faced with the fact that at some point, whether they like it or not (i.e., regardless of levels of identification/self-categorization), they are increasingly less likely to be categorized by others as belonging to their current age group and ever more likely to be categorized as belonging to older adult categories. To the extent that an age group membership forms an important social identity for individuals, we expect that the prospective transition from this age group to another will be associated with negative reactions to membership change.

Consistent with our contentions that age groups operate as collective identities[1] and that age-related transitions can be experienced negatively, Packer and Chasteen (2006) found that young adults who rated themselves as strongly identified with their age group (on a scale analogous to those used to measure identification with other social groups – see Garstka, Branscombe, & Hummert, 1997) responded to thinking about themselves at the age of 70 by expressing heightened negativity towards older adults. Weakly identified young adults did not respond with heightened negativity, suggesting that they were not as threatened by thoughts of leaving their current age group (Branscombe *et al.*, 1999; Snyder & Miene, 1994).

Future identities

Expectations regarding future states of the self may also be influenced by anticipated levels of identification with groups into which individuals will transition. To the extent that a prospective in-group is expected to be an important social identity and thus to provide a future basis for positive self-regard, individuals are likely to anticipate having higher levels of self-esteem and psychological well-being at that time. In particular, expecting to identify with a future in-group may serve to buffer individuals who are strongly identified with a current in-group against the deleterious effects of a prospective shift from one group to the other. To the extent that individuals expect to transition from one valued group membership to another of similar value, expectations regarding future self-regard may remain positive and stable (see Breakwell, 1986; Jetten *et al.*, 2002). As such, we predicted that strongly identified young adults who believed that they would also identify strongly with their age group as older adults would report significantly more positive expectations about their future self-esteem and psychological well-being than strongly identified young adults who thought that they would be weakly identified with this future in-group.

A certain amount of research has examined the roles that alternate identities can play in relation to shifts in group membership. For instance, Hirschman's (1970) exit-voice-loyalty framework and Rusbult and Farrell's (1983) investment model applied to group contexts both attend to how the attractiveness of alternative collectives affects feelings

---

[1] *As with any attribute (e.g., race, health, income), age can be perceived as a group membership or as a personal characteristic (Simon, 1997; Simon & Hastedt, 1999). On the collective side, research suggests that age is a fundamental category shaping social perceptions (e.g., Brewer, 1988), and that belonging to and identifying with age groups exerts psychological effects analogous to other social groups, including effects on intergroup biases (Chasteen, 2005; Packer & Chasteen, 2006), stereotype threat (Kang & Chasteen, 2009), and psychological well-being (Garstka, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Hummert, 2004).*

and behaviours with respect to a current in-group. In both cases, however, these models focus on predicting individuals' intentions to maintain (vs. leave/exit) a current group membership (e.g., van Dam, 2005), and do not necessarily apply directly to involuntary transitions. Nevertheless, the general pattern of findings in this literature suggests that as the attractiveness of an alternative group membership increases, the importance of maintaining a current membership decreases (e.g., Rusbult & Farrell, 1983; Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988), consistent with the idea that replacing one valued identity with another may mitigate the negative effects of membership change.

With regard to involuntary membership changes, Jetten *et al.* (2002) examined the ability of a superordinate organization-level identity to buffer the effects of losing a subordinate work-group identity in the context of an organizational restructuring. They found that whereas identification with a subordinate work-group (which would be disbanded) predicted more negative feelings regarding the restructuring, identification with the organization as a whole (which would continue to exist) predicted more positive feelings. They did not observe an interaction between organizational and work-group identification, indicating that, at least in this case, identification with an alternate identity did not buffer negative emotions associated with the prospect of losing a valued group membership (i.e., work-group identification predicted negativity regardless of how much individuals identified with the overall organization).[2] It is important to note, however, that in Jetten *et al.*'s (2002) study, the superordinate identity was held concurrently with the subordinate identity, and as such was not a true replacement (rather one membership continued while the other ceased). It is possible that an alternate group membership may have greater capacity to buffer negative effects associated with prospective changes in group membership if it is indeed a replacement at the same level of identity (e.g., a new work-group in this case).

Current research

We conducted two studies to investigate whether expecting to identify with a future in-group reduces (buffers) the extent to which individuals who are strongly identified with a current in-group negatively anticipate a prospective shift from one collective to the other. We hypothesized that identifying with their current age group would not preclude young adults from expecting to identify with another age group in the future (see Bartels, Douwes, de Jong, & Pruyn, 2006; Iyer, Jetten, & Tsivrikos, 2008). As outlined above, we predicted that current age group identification would be associated with more negative expectations regarding future self-esteem and psychological well-being among young adults who did not expect to identify with their age group when they reached old age. Critically, however, we predicted that strongly identified young adults who *did* expect to identify with their age group in old age would not be as negatively affected by the prospect of ageing. Thus, evidence for a buffering effect would be provided in the form of an interaction between current and projected identification, such that the extent to which young adults' expectations about self-regard in old age are negatively affected as a function of identification with their current age group is contingent on their expectations regarding future age group identification. Because individuals who were weakly identified with their current age group were unlikely to be as negatively affected

---

[2]Jetten et al. (2002) did find some evidence that pre-restructure organizational identification buffered negative effects of work-group identification on levels of identification with the organization after the restructuring took place.

by a prospective transition (compared to strong identifiers), projected identification was not hypothesized to play the same buffering role among these participants.

STUDY 1

Study 1 employed a correlational design in which young adults were directed to think about the disadvantages they might experience in old age before completing measures of current and projected age group identification, as well as projections of self-esteem in old age. Participants also completed a measure of current self-esteem in order to determine whether levels of current and projected identification would exert effects on projected self-esteem above simply expecting to maintain similar levels of self-esteem across the life-span (i.e., controlling for current self-esteem). Directing attention to potential negative aspects of old age provided a conservative test of our hypotheses in so far as highlighting disadvantages of a future group membership may exacerbate negative self-related expectations for the future and reduce the power of the future identity to play a buffering role. Importantly, however, if projected identification with a future in-group exerts a buffering effect on projected self-esteem among strongly identified young adults even after focusing on negative aspects of that category, it would speak to the power of anticipating replacing one valued identity with another.

Method

Participants
Fifty-two undergraduate students (29 females, 23 males) at the University of Toronto participated for extra course credit. The mean age of the sample was 18.69 years ($SD = 1.45$; range = 17–23).

Procedure
All participants were asked to spend 8 min writing a short essay about how they might be disadvantaged in old age. Participants were instructed to 'write down as many different ways as you can think of that you may be disadvantaged because of your age when you are an older adult', and were prompted to consider a number of domains, including their finances, social and romantic life, health and safety. Participants then completed measures of current and projected self-esteem, as well as current and projected age group identification. The order of measures was counterbalanced across participants. Finally, participants provided demographic information and were debriefed.

Measures

Current and projected self-esteem
Modified versions of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) were used to assess current and projected self-esteem. Both versions consisted of 10 items amended to reflect current and anticipated future states (e.g., 'I take a positive attitude toward myself', 'I expect that I will take a positive attitude toward myself when I am an older adult'). Participants responded to items on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), and negatively worded items were reverse scored such that higher

overall scores reflected higher self-esteem. Inter-item reliability levels for both scales were good (current $\alpha = .91$; projected $\alpha = .91$).

Current and projected age group identification

Ten items from the Age Group Identification Scale (Garstka *et al.*, 1997) assessed participants' identification with their current age group (e.g., 'I value being a member of my age group') and anticipated levels of identification with their future age group (e.g., 'I expect that I will be proud to be a member of my age group when I am an older adult'). Participants were provided with age-ranges for each category, and were informed that people between the ages of 17 and 25 are typically considered to belong to the young adult category and people over the age of 60 to belong to the older adult category. Responses were made on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), and inter-item reliability levels for both scales were acceptable (current $\alpha = .91$; projected $\alpha = .84$).

Results and discussion

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations are presented in Table 1. Levels of current and projected identification were uncorrelated ($r(51) = .17$, $p = .22$), indicating that identifying with their current age group did not preclude young adults from expecting to identify with an older adult in-group in the future. Participants' estimates of their future self-esteem were strongly associated with current levels of self-esteem ($r(51) = .64$, $p < .001$); as such, we controlled for current self-esteem in subsequent analyses to determine whether our identity variables exerted effects beyond expecting to maintain similar levels of self-esteem over time.[3]

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test predictions; all variables were mean centred, current self-esteem was entered as a control variable in step 1, current identification and projected identification were entered in step 2, and their two-way interaction term was entered in step 3. Current and projected identification exerted independent and opposite main effects on projected self-esteem ($\Delta R^2 = .10$, $p = .01$): overall, current age group identification was negatively associated with estimates of self-esteem in old age ($\beta = -0.29$, $p < .01$), whereas anticipated levels of future identification were marginally positively associated with this same estimate ($\beta = 0.21$, $p = .056$).

Critically, however, the predicted interaction between current and projected identification was significant ($\Delta R^2 = .07$, $p < .01$; $\beta = 0.26$, $p < .01$; see Figure 1). We decomposed the interaction by testing the relationships (simple slopes) between current identification and projected self-esteem among participants who expected to experience low versus high levels of identification with their future in-group (1 *SD* below and above the mean, respectively). Among participants who anticipated low levels of future identification, there was a strong negative relationship between current age group identification and estimates of future self-esteem ($\beta = -0.59$, $p < .001$). However, this relationship was completely attenuated among young adults who expected to identify strongly with their future in-group ($\beta = -0.06$, $p = .66$). Thus, as predicted, the extent to

---

[3] *In this and the subsequent study, analyses omitting current self-esteem as a control variable yielded an identical pattern of results.*

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations (Study 1)

	Descriptives		Bivariate correlations		
	M	SD	Projected ID	Current SE	Projected SE
Current ID	5.45	0.92	.17	−.01	−.26
Projected ID	4.86	0.83		.27	.31*
Current SE	5.42	0.93			.64**
Projected SE	5.08	1.07			

Note. There were main effects of time on the ID and SE variables, such that participants rated current levels of age group identification and self-esteem higher than estimates of future levels of identification and self-esteem (*ps* < .01). ID, identification; SE, self-esteem; *p* < .05; **p* < .01.

young adults' expectations about future self-regard were negatively affected as a function of identification with their current age group was contingent on their expectations regarding future age group identification. High levels of identification with their current in-group only appeared to have a negative effect on projected self-esteem among young adults who did not have a concomitant expectation of future in-group identification; in contrast, strongly identified young adults who believed that they would identify strongly with their age group when they were old did not project lower levels of self-esteem than weakly identified young adults.

We posited that observing this pattern of results despite focusing participants on negative aspects of old age would provide particularly strong evidence for the power of an anticipated identity to buffer against a transition involving a currently valued group membership. However, it is possible that those participants who anticipated identifying with their future age group had less negative expectations regarding old age in general, and that the observed buffering effect on projected self-esteem was due to a general sense of optimism among these participants, rather than the result of an anticipated identity
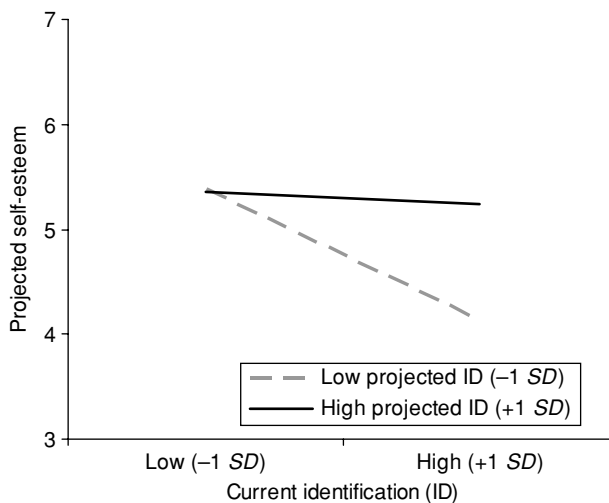

Figure 1. Two-way Current Identification × Projected Identification interaction predicting projected self-esteem (Study 1).

per se. The fact that we observed a buffering effect controlling for levels of current self-esteem hints that it was likely not due to an optimistic bias; however, in order to address this possibility with more rigour, we had independent coders rate participants' written descriptions of old age in terms of their overall negativity ($0 =$ no negativity to $4 =$ a great deal of negativity). Inter-rater reliability was good ($r = .91$, $p < .01$), and the mean level of negativity was 2.37 ($SD = 1.13$). The valence of participants' essays was not associated with projected identification ($r(51) = -.12$, $p = .41$) or projected self-esteem ($r(51) = .05$, $p = .76$), and controlling for essay valence did not alter the interactive effect of current and projected identification on projected self-esteem described above. This suggests that strongly identified young adults who expected to identify with their future in-group did not project higher self-esteem because they were more optimistic about what their overall life circumstances would be like at that time, but rather because they anticipated replacing one important group membership with another.

The correlational design of Study 1 did not allow us to fully disentangle the nature of the relationships between current identification, projected identification, and projected self-esteem. We have argued that expecting to identify with a future in-group exerts a positive and ultimately a protective effect on the level of self-regard or well-being that individuals expect to experience in the future. However, this study cannot rule out alternate causal patterns, the most plausible of which might suggest that anticipating high levels of well-being in old age increases individuals' feelings of identification with their future age group. As a result, one might hypothesize an interaction between current identification and projected self-esteem, such that strongly identified young adults may expect to feel identified with their future in-group (i.e., to transfer their identification from their current to their future group) to a greater extent if they anticipate experiencing high relative to low levels of self-esteem in old age. Examination of this alternate possibility revealed a non-significant interaction predicting projected identification from current identification and projected self-esteem ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = .11$); however, examination of the simple slopes showed that current age group identification did indeed positively predict projected identification among participants who anticipated high ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < .05$) but not low ($\beta = 0.10$, $p = .54$) levels of self-esteem in old age.

STUDY 2

In Study 2, we expanded our dependent measure to form a broader index of anticipated well-being by including items related to anticipated life-satisfaction and depressed emotion in addition to projected self-esteem. In order to better understand the pattern of relationships among variables, we also employed an experimental design. We conjectured that in order for a prospective group membership to function as a viable replacement for a currently valued identity, it would be necessary for individuals (as in the first study) to mentally embed themselves in the future group. According to self-categorization theory, even among members who report being strongly identified with a social group, in any given situation it is necessary that they self-categorize as a member for the identity to exert effects on cognition and behaviour (e.g., Turner *et al.*, 1994; see also Brewer, 1991). When an individual's membership in a particular social group is highly salient, their connection to and the norms associated with that group shape their social perceptions (e.g., stereotypes and intergroup biases; e.g., Turner *et al.*, 1994), self-conceptions (e.g., Onorato & Turner, 2004), and behaviours (e.g., Wellen,

Hogg, & Terry, 1998). When the same individual's membership in that group is less salient, perceptions, self-conceptions, and behaviours are more likely to be shaped by self-categorization in other groups or at a personal level of identity.

We reasoned that just as a current collective identity needs to be salient in order to exert influence, it would be necessary to make membership in a future group salient in order for anticipated feelings of identification to exert buffering effects on projected well-being. As such, *after* participants in Study 2 completed measures of current and projected age group identification embedded among other questionnaires, we randomly assigned them to conditions that varied the salience of their membership/categorization in the future in-group. Participants were directed to either (a) write about what they thought their old age might be like (high salience) or (b) write about what they thought their lives might be like next year (low salience). We hypothesized that compared to weak identifiers, strongly identified young adults in both conditions would tend to project lower levels of well-being in old age. However, we predicted that this would be moderated by a three-way Salience × Current Identification × Projected Identification interaction, such that projected identification would buffer projected well-being among strongly identified young adults only if their future membership in the older adult category was highly salient, thereby attenuating the negative relationship between collective identification and projected well-being as in Study 1.

The second study was also designed to provide a stronger test of the (lack of) valence effects observed in Study 1. Rather than coding the valence of participants' written descriptions, we crossed the salience manipulation described above with a valence manipulation that instructed participants to focus on (a) positive or (b) negative aspects of their lives. Consistent with the results of the previous study and with our contention that it is the expectation of being able to replace one valued group membership with another rather than their valence that buffers projected self-regard/well-being in the face of a prospective transition, we predicted that the valence manipulation would not moderate the buffering effect of projected identification among strongly identified young adults (for whom the future membership was highly salient).

Method

Participants

One hundred and twenty-seven undergraduates (82 females, 45 males) at the University of Toronto participated for extra course credit. Two participants over the age of 30 were removed, leaving a sample with a mean age of 18.75 years ($SD = 1.50$; range $= 17$–25).

Procedure

At the beginning of each session, participants completed measures of current age group identification, projected future identification, and current self-esteem embedded among a number of other scales. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (Salience (of future group membership): high vs. low) × 2 (Valence: positive vs. negative) between-subjects design. Participants were instructed to 'Consider your life *as an older adult* [*next year*]. Please write a description of what your life might be like. Focus as much as possible on *positive* (*negative*) aspects, and the *good* (*bad*) things you expect *when you are old* [*next year*]'. Following the 8 min writing task, participants completed a wider array of items assessing anticipated well-being

in old age, including estimates of future self-esteem, life-satisfaction, and depressed emotion. Finally, participants provided demographic information and were debriefed by the experimenter.

Measures

Current self-esteem (α = .91), current identification (α = .93), and projected identification (α = .86) were assessed prior to condition assignment using the same scales as in Study 1.

Projected well-being

Projected levels of well-being in old age were assessed using the 10 modified self-esteem items from Study 1, as well as five anticipated life-satisfaction items adapted from Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin's (1985) Satisfaction With Life Scale (e.g., 'I expect that I will be satisfied with my life when I am an older adult'; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Participants also rated the likelihood that they would experience feeling 'depressed', 'sad', and 'blue' when they were older adults (scale from 1 = not at all likely to 7 = extremely likely). A principle components analysis indicated that all items loaded on to a dominant first component accounting for 42% of the variance.[4] More importantly, the projected self-esteem, life-satisfaction, and depressed emotion subscales were substantially correlated with one another (rs > .45, ps < .001), and separate analyses on each revealed highly similar patterns of results. As such, in reported analyses, we combined all three types of items (with negatively worded items reverse scored) into a composite projected well-being index, which exhibited good internal reliability (α = .90).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data from one participant who was an outlier on projected well-being (> 3 SD from the mean) were excluded from analyses. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations from the remaining participants are presented in Table 2. In this study, levels of current identification and estimates of future identification were positively correlated (r(123) = .46, p < .01), once again indicating that identifying with their current age group did not preclude young adults from expecting to identify with their future age group; indeed it made it more likely in this sample. Participants' estimates of their future well-being were strongly associated with current levels of self-esteem (r(123) = .49, p < .001); as such, we again controlled for current self-esteem in all tests of predicted effects.

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test predictions; continuous variables were mean centred, and the condition variables were effects coded (Salience: −1 = low, 1 = high; Valence: −1 = negative, 1 = positive). As in Study 1, current and projected identification exerted independent and opposite main effects, with current

---

[4]*This analysis revealed other components with eigenvalues above 1.0; however, each accounted for little additional variance and the scree-plot revealed a single sharp 'elbow' after extraction of the first component. Examination of these other components indicated that they accounted primarily for variance associated with reverse-coded items, and thus likely reflected a methodological artifact rather than the construct of interest (i.e., projected well-being).*

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations (Study 2)

| | Descriptives | | Bivariate correlations | | |
	M	*SD*	Projected ID	Current SE	Projected WB
Current ID	4.98	1.28	.46**	.25**	.00
Projected ID	4.62	1.09		.17	.28**
Current SE	5.32	1.05			.49**
Projected WB	5.19	0.80			

Note. Current age group identification was higher than projected levels of identification ($p < .01$); in this study, current self-esteem was not rated more highly than projected well-being (either on the self-esteem subscale or the overall composite measure). ID, identification; SE, self-esteem; WB, well-being; $**p < .01$.

identification negatively predicting ($\beta = -0.29$, $p < .001$) and projected identification positively predicting ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < .001$) estimates of well-being in old age. There was also a main effect of the valence manipulation ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < .04$), such that participants who focused on positive elements in their lives anticipated higher levels of well-being in old age ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 0.78$) than participants who focused on negative elements in their lives ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 0.82$).[5]

Only one higher-order interaction was statistically significant: as we had predicted, there was a three-way interaction between salience (high vs. low), current identification and projected identification ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < .02$). We decomposed the three-way interaction by examining main and interactive effects of current and projected identification separately within salience conditions. Consistent with the social identity/self-categorization perspective, there was evidence for a buffering effect of anticipated identification only among participants for whom membership in the future category was highly salient (see Figure 2). Among participants who had written about themselves in the near future (i.e., next year), there were independent main effects of current identification ($\beta = -0.30$, $p < .01$) and future identification ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < .01$), but these were not qualified by a significant interaction ($\beta = -0.10$, $p = .18$). As such in this condition, current identification was a significant negative predictor of future well-being among individuals who anticipated both low and high levels of future identification ($ps < .05$). The absence of an interaction in this condition indicates that if a future group membership was low in salience, expecting to identify with that future in-group did not buffer estimates of future well-being among individuals who were strongly identified with their current group. In contrast, the two-way current identification-by-projected identification interaction analogous to that observed in Study 1 was significant among participants who had written about themselves in old age ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < .03$). Examination of the simple slopes within this condition revealed that among participants who anticipated low levels of future identification (1 *SD* below the mean), there was a strong negative relationship between current age group identification and estimates

---

[5]*Given the small magnitude of the difference between valence conditions, we ran a separate ANCOVA testing the effect of the valence manipulation controlling only for current self-esteem. In this analysis, the main effect of valence was not statistically significant (F(1,121) = 2.26, p = .135), indicating that the significant effect in the regression was only observed when controlling for variance associated with other variables. This finding should, therefore, be treated with caution.*
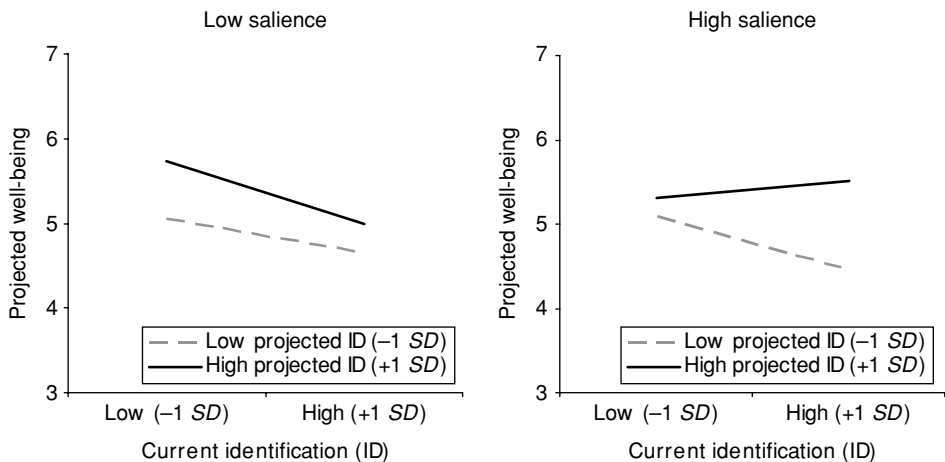
Figure 2. Three-way Salience × Current Identification × Projected Identification interaction predicting projected well-being (Study 2).

of future well-being (β = −0.40, *p* < .02). However, this relationship was completely attenuated among young adults who expected to identify strongly with their future in-group (1 *SD* above the mean; β = 0.12, *p* = .58). Thus, expecting to identify with a future age group buffered projected well-being among strongly identified young adults only when the future categorization was highly salient. In other words, it appears that it was indeed necessary to mentally embed oneself within the future in-group to reap the protective benefits of projected identification.

These effects were not moderated by the valence manipulation (β = −0.01, *p* = .88), and additional targeted analyses examining the potential influence of valence highlighted two important things. First, thinking about a negative rather than a positive old age did not trigger more negative expectations regarding future well-being among strongly identified young adults (i.e., there was no valence × current identification interaction within the high salience condition: β = 0.05, *p* = .69). This suggests that it was not negative circumstances associated with a future group membership that reduced projected well-being as a function of current in-group identification. Second, thinking about a positive rather than a negative old age did not augment the buffering capacity of projected identification (i.e., there was no valence × current identification × projected identification interaction within the high salience condition: β = 0.04, *p* = .76). This indicates that it was not positive valence associated with a future group membership that helped strongly identified young adults generate or maintain positive expectations about future well-being, but rather the value placed upon membership in that prospective in-group. The lack of valence effects in both studies is consistent with the identity perspective we have outlined, which posits that it is identifying and expecting to identify with social groups *per se*, and not their valence of these groups' circumstances, that affects expectations about future self-esteem and psychological well-being.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Consistent with prior research suggesting that collective changes and transitions can be particularly problematic when a group forms a valued part of an individual's current

identity (e.g., Jetten *et al.*, 2002; Packer & Chasteen, 2006; Wohl, Branscombe, & Reysen, 2010), strongly identified young adults in the current studies projected significantly lower self-esteem and well-being in old age than weakly identified young adults. However, in both studies, this negative effect was buffered by projected levels of identification with a future in-group. As such, those strongly identified young adults who anticipated identifying with their future older adult in-group did not expect to have lower self-esteem or psychological well-being in old age, suggesting that prospective transitions are anticipated negatively to the extent that a currently valued identity is thought to be irreplaceable. Importantly, Study 2, which varied the salience of participants' future aged identities, indicated that projected identification only exerted a buffering effect among individuals who had for the moment mentally embedded themselves within the future in-group.

The experimental design of Study 2 is important not only because it illuminates something about the conditions under which projected identification may exert protective effects, but also because it helps to disentangle the nature of the relationships between current identification, projected identification and projected well-being. The alternate interpretation raised in Study 1, which suggested that high levels of projected well-being may influence the extent to which individuals anticipate transferring collective identification from a current to a future in-group, is ruled out in Study 2 by the fact that current and projected identification were measured prior to the manipulation that affected their interactive relationship with projected well-being. In other words, the temporal order of measures in Study 2 logically precluded the manipulation from enabling projected well-being to exert an enhancing effect on the relationship between current and projected identification. That said, we believe that in reality these relationships are likely to be bidirectional, such that just as expecting to identify with a group has positive effects on well-being, expecting to have good psychological well-being at a particular time in life may very well have positive effects on feelings of anticipated identification with relevant social groups.

We find it particularly interesting that the valence of the aged selves envisioned by participants (coded in Study 1 and manipulated in Study 2) did not account for the ageing-related diminution in self-esteem/well-being expected by strongly identified young adults or for the buffering effect of projected identification. In both cases, it appears that it was the psychological state of identifying or expecting to identify with groups rather than the valence of future states that mattered. This is not to suggest that the valence of thoughts about future life circumstances is unimportant (e.g., see Markus & Nurius, 1986); however, the current studies illustrate that over and above positive or negative expectations regarding what life will be like in the future, concerns about prospective changes in group membership have important and specific consequences for expectations regarding future well-being.

Although we are certainly not the first to suggest it (e.g., see Breakwell, 1986; Jetten *et al.*, 2002), as far as we know this is the first empirical demonstration showing that a prospective change that involves transitioning out of a currently valued group membership is anticipated less negatively if individuals expect to replace it with another membership of similar importance. We believe that the buffering effect observed in the current studies is likely to extend to other types of social groups and to other forms of social identity change because the variables at work are psychological and generally thought to apply across group contexts. It will be important in future research to explore the boundaries of this phenomenon, and it is interesting in this regard that Jetten *et al.* (2002) did not find evidence that identification with a superordinate (organization level)

group buffered against the upcoming disbanding of a subordinate (work-group) identity. One possible inference to be tested in future research is whether it is necessary that individuals expect to replace a valued group membership with one at the same level of identity in order for projected identification to serve a buffering role.

We have suggested that because membership in valued groups provides a basis for positive self-regard, prospective transitions in which individuals will leave a current collective and shift to another are associated with negative expectations regarding future self-esteem and associated indices of psychological well-being. If, however, individuals anticipate possessing a future social identity that can provide a replacement foundation for positive self-regard, prospective transitions are anticipated less negatively. As a general model, this is an adequate account for our observed effects; however, further research is required to specify more precisely the mechanisms that underlie the relationships between current/projected identification and projected self-regard. For instance, individuals derive positive self-regard from group memberships, in part, because collectives provide a means of satisfying a basic human need for affiliation or belonging (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary *et al.*, 1995). The thought of leaving a group which currently satisfies this need may be experienced as threatening, a threat which may be mitigated if one expects to satisfy this need elsewhere in the future.

Individuals facing a social identity transition may also experience threat to the extent that it is expected to be associated with a great deal of change. Recent research has found that actual transitions into new groups are facilitated (e.g., members identify more strongly with the new group) when the novel identity is perceived as compatible with existing identities (Iyer, Jetten, Tsivrikos, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009). The less a current in-group and a different future in-group are believed to have in common, the more threatening a transition between them is likely to seem. Further, individuals' expectations regarding how identified they will be with a prospective in-group are likely to be affected by the prospective group's perceived compatibility with existing valued identities. To the extent that this is the case, it will be important to investigate reasons why, for instance, some young adults might perceive their current age group identity as incompatible versus compatible with future age group identities (e.g., 'young and old exist at opposite ends of the life-span' vs. 'both groups will contain members of my generation').

Similarly, other research indicates that perceptions of personal continuity (continuity in identity) over time are an important predictor of psychological well-being (e.g., Chandler & Proulx, 2008). Sani, Bowe, and Herrera (2008) recently extended this finding to collective contexts, showing that perceived continuity in the traditions and history of one's social groups exerts a positive effect on social well-being. In the case of age-related transitions, ageing may be experienced as threatening if it is perceived as disrupting a sense of continuity in one's personal or social identities (i.e., ceasing to be the same person in terms of personal characteristics or collective allegiances). At the same time, however, believing that there is likely to be continuity in a currently valued social identity despite leaving it oneself (e.g., 'young adults will still be hip when I am old') may also heighten the threat associated with a prospective transition by highlighting the losses that may accompany social identity change.

Conclusion
Consistent with prior research, the current studies found that a prospective change in social group membership was associated with lowered expectations regarding future self-esteem and psychological well-being among individuals who were strongly (vs. weakly)

identified with their current collective. These studies further indicated, however, that the future appeared less dim if one thought about a future social category that was expected to be of similar identity value. From one perspective, the shift in allegiance anticipated by some strong identifiers might be regarded as fickle; however, it is fully consistent with conceptions of humans as a species concerned with the continued satisfaction of their belonging-related needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and is likely an adaptive response to the inevitable changes and transitions experienced throughout life.

Acknowledgements

References

Bartels, J., Douwes, R., de Jong, M., & Pruyn, A. (2006). Organizational identification during a merger: Determinants of employee's expected identification with the new organization. *British Journal of Management*, *17*, 49–67. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8551.2006.00478.x

Bat-Chava, Y. (1994). Group identification and self-esteem of deaf adults. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *20*, 494–502. doi:10.1177/0146167294205006

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, *117*, 497–529. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497

Branscombe, N. R., Ellemers, N., Spears, R., & Doosje, B. (1999). The context and content of social identity threat. In N. Ellemers, R. Spears, & B. Doosje (Eds.), *Social identity: Context, commitment, content* (pp. 35–58). New York: Blackwell.

Branscombe, N. R., Schmitt, M. T., & Harvey, R. D. (1999). Perceiving pervasive discrimination among African Americans: Implications for group identification and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *77*, 135–149. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.77.1.135

Branscombe, N. R., & Wann, D. L. (1991). The positive social and self concept consequences of sports team identification. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, *15*, 115–127. doi:10.1177/019372359101500202

Breakwell, G. M. (1986). *Coping with threatened identities*. New York: Methuen.

Brewer, M. B. (1988). A dual-process model of impression formation. In T. K. Srull & R. S. Wyer (Eds.), *Advances in social cognition* (Vol. 1, pp. 1–36). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Brewer, M. B. (1991). The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *17*, 475–482. doi:10.1177/0146167291175001

Brewer, M. B. (2004). Taking the origins of human nature seriously: Toward a more imperialist social psychology. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *8*, 107–113. doi:10.1207/s15327957pspr0802_3

Brewer, M. B., & Gardner, W. (1996). Who is this 'we'? Levels of collective identity and self representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *71*, 83–93. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.71.1.83

Caporael, L. R. (2001). Evolutionary psychology: Toward a unifying theory and a hybrid science. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *52*, 607–628. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.607

Chandler, M. J., & Proulx, T. (2008). Personal persistence and persistent peoples: Continuities in the lives of individual and whole cultural communities. In F. Sani (Ed.), *Self-continuity: Individual and collective perspectives* (pp. 213–226). New York: Psychology Press.

Chasteen, A. L. (2005). Seeing eye-to-eye: Do intergroup biases operate similarly for younger and older adults? *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, *61*, 123–139. doi:10.2190/07Q7-BWYT-NC9E-51FX

Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *49*, 71–75. doi:10.1207/s15327752jpa4901_13

Ellemers, N. (2003). Identity, culture, and change in organizations: A social identity analysis and three illustrative cases. In S. A. Haslam, D. van Knippenberg, M. J. Platow, & N. Ellemers (Eds.), *Social identity at work: Developing theory for organizational practice* (pp. 191–203). New York: Psychology Press.

Ethier, K. A., & Deaux, K. (1994). Negotiating social identity when contexts change: Maintaining identification and responding to threat. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *67*, 243–251. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.67.2.243

Garstka, T. A., Branscombe, N. R., & Hummert, M. L. (1997). *Age group identification across the lifespan*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Society, Washington, DC.

Garstka, T. A., Schmitt, M. T., Branscombe, N. R., & Hummert, M. L. (2004). How young and older adults differ in their responses to perceived age discrimination. *Psychology and Aging*, *19*, 326–335. doi:10.1037/0882-7974.19.2.326

Haunschild, P. R., Moreland, R. L., & Murrell, A. J. (1994). Sources of resistance to mergers between groups. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *24*, 1150–1178. doi:10.1111/j.1559-1816.1994.tb01549.x

Hirschman, A. O. (1970). *Exit, voice and loyalty: Responses to a decline in firms, organizations, and states*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hogg, M. A., & Abrams, D. (1993). Towards a single-process uncertainty-reduction model of social motivation in groups. In M. A. Hogg & D. Abrams (Eds.), *Group motivation: Social psychological perspectives* (pp. 173–190). London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Hummert, M. L. (1990). Multiple stereotypes of elderly and young adults: A comparison of structure and evaluations. *Psychology and Aging*, *5*, 182–193. doi:10.1037/0882-7974.5.2.182

Iyer, A., Jetten, J., & Tsivrikos, D. (2008). Torn between identities: Predictors of adjustment to identity change. In F. Sani (Ed.), *Self continuity: Individual and collective perspectives* (pp. 187–197). New York: Psychology Press.

Iyer, A., Jetten, J., Tsivrikos, D., Postmes, T., & Haslam, S. A. (2009). The more (and the more compatible) the merrier: Multiple group memberships and identity compatibility as predictors of adjustment after life transitions. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *48*, 707–733. doi:10.1348/014466608X397628

Jetten, J., O'Brien, A., & Trindall, N. (2002). Changing identity: Predicting adjustment to organizational restructure as a function of subgroup and superordinate identification. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *41*, 281–297. doi:10.1348/014466602760060147

Jetten, J., Spears, R., & Postmes, T. (2004). Intergroup distinctiveness and differentiation: A meta-analytic integration. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *86*, 862–879. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.86.6.862

Kang, S. K., & Chasteen, A. L. (2009). The moderating role of age group identification and perceived threat on stereotype threat among older adults. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, *69*, 201–220. doi:10.2190/AG.69.3.c

Leary, M. R., Tambor, E. S., Terdal, S. K., & Downs, D. L. (1995). Self-esteem as an interpersonal monitor: The sociometer hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *68*, 518–530. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.68.3.518

Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist*, *41*, 954–969. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.41.9.954

Onorato, R. S., & Turner, J. C. (2004). Fluidity in the self-concept: The shift from personal to social identity. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *34*, 257–278. doi:10.1002/ejsp.195

Packer, D. J., & Chasteen, A. L. (2006). Looking to the future: How possible aged selves influence prejudice toward older adults. *Social Cognition*, *24*, 218–247. doi:10.1521/soco.2006.24.3.218

Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Rusbult, C. E., & Farrell, D. (1983). A longitudinal test of the investment model: The impact on job satisfaction, job commitment, and turnover of variations in rewards, costs, alternatives, and investments. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *68*, 429–438. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.68.3.429

Rusbult, C. E., Farrell, D., Rogers, G., & Mainous, A. G., III (1988). Impact of exchange variables on exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect: An integrative model of responses to declining job satisfaction. *Academy of Management Journal*, *31*, 599–627. doi:10.2307/256461

Sani, F., Bowe, M., & Herrera, M. (2008). Perceived collective continuity and social well-being: Exploring the connections. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *38*, 365–374. doi:10. 1002/ejsp.461

Simon, B. (1997). Self and group in modern society: Ten theses on the individual self and the collective self. In R. Spears, P. J. Oakes, N., Ellemers, & S. A. Haslam (Eds.), *The social psychology of stereotyping and group life* (pp. 318–335). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Simon, B., & Hastedt, C. (1999). Self-aspects as social categories: The role of personal importance and valence. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *29*, 479–487. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1099-0992(199906)29:4<479::AID-EJSP939>3.0.CO;2-M

Snyder, M., & Miene, P. K. (1994). Stereotyping of the elderly: A functional approach. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *33*, 63–82.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–48). Monterey, CA: Brooks-Cole.

Terry, D. J., Callan, V. J., & Sartori, G. (1996). Employee adjustment to an organizational merger: Stress, coping, and intergroup differences. *Stress Medicine*, *12*, 105–122. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1099-1700(199604)12:2<105::AID-SMI695>3.0.CO;2-Q

Terry, D. J., Carey, C. J., & Callan, V. J. (2001). Employee adjustment to an organizational merger: An intergroup perspective. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *27*, 267–280. doi:10. 1177/0146167201273001

Turner, J. C., Oakes, P. J., Haslam, S. A., & McGarty, C. (1994). Self and collective: Cognition and the social context. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *20*, 454–463. doi:10.1177/ 0146167294205002

van Dam, K. (2005). Employee attitudes toward job changes: An application and extension of Rusbult and Farrell's investment model. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, *78*, 253–272. doi:10.1348/096317904X23745

Van Knippenberg, D., Van Knippenberg, B., Monden, L., & De Lima, F. (2002). Organizational identification after a merger: A social identity perspective. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *41*, 233–252. doi:10.1348/014466602760060228

Wellen, J. M., Hogg, M. A., & Terry, D. J. (1998). Group norms and attitude–behavior consistency: The role of group salience and mood. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, *2*, 48–56. doi:10.1037/1089-2699.2.1.48

Wilson, D. S. (2007). *Evolution for everyone*. New York: Bantam Dell.

Wohl, M. J. A., & Branscombe, N. R. (2009). Group threat, collective angst and ingroup forgiveness for the war in Iraq. *Political Psychology*, *30*, 193–217. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2008.00688.x

Wohl, M. J. A., Branscombe, N. R., & Reysen, S. (2010). Perceiving your group's future to be in jeopardy: Extinction threat induces collective angst and the desire to strengthen the ingroup. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *36*, 898–910. doi:10.1177/0146167210372505