

# Ethnic identity, collective self-esteem and academic self-efficacy among black and white tertiary students

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## Abstract

This article reports on a study that investigated the relationship between ethnic identity, collective self-esteem and academic self-efficacy among a sample of black ( $n = 81$ ) and white ( $n = 55$ ) students at a higher education institution (HEI). For the black sample, positive correlations were found between ethnic identity and academic self-efficacy, as well as between collective self-esteem and academic self-efficacy. For the white sample, however, no correlation was found between any of these variables. These findings are discussed in relation to the black respondents' possible experiences and perceptions of racial discrimination in the context of the study, wherein they are a minority. This is also taking into account the history of institutionalised discrimination against blacks during the apartheid era and the fact that the study took place in a historically white HEI.

**Keywords:** collective self-esteem, ethnic identity, intergroup relations, multiculturalism, prejudice, self-concept, self-efficacy

## INTRODUCTION

The current study explored the relationships between ethnic identity and academic self-efficacy, as well as collective self-esteem and academic self-efficacy among black and white students at a public higher education institution (HEI). Collective self-esteem refers to feelings of esteem relating to membership of a certain group, brought about by the subjective evaluation of the value of the group to which an individual belongs (Downie, Mageau, Koestner and Liodden 2006, 529). Academic self-efficacy refers to an individual's perceptions regarding the effectiveness with which he or she can perform academic tasks or achieve academically (Chemers, Hu and Garcia 2001, 58–59). Ethnic identity refers to a form of identity that is based on an individual's membership to a certain ethnic group (Aboud 1981, 39). In the context of the study, an ethnic group refers to individuals who belong to a given

social group that differentiates them from others through a combination of race, a common language and shared history, among others (Neff 2007, 321). In this regard, individuals within a larger, racially homogenous group are further differentiated according to their mother tongues.

The study took place at a historically white, Afrikaans-medium HEI, with white students in the majority and all the other race groups making up less than half of the student population. It is assumed that strained intergroup relations are prevalent in such a context taking into account the fact that HEIs have been cited as contexts in which racial prejudice is likely to occur. A study commissioned by Naledi Pandor, former Minister of Education, showed that racial discrimination is prevalent in HEIs around South Africa (DoE 2008, 41). It could be argued that the racially and culturally diverse nature of HEIs, in itself, gives rise to prejudice, especially considering the prevalence of racial prejudice in post-apartheid South African society, in general. The South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) (cited in Roefs 2006, 89) found that most black respondents perceived white South Africans as the most racist in comparison to other races, whereas white respondents thought the same of black South Africans. The study further revealed that educational institutions are generally perceived as contexts in which racial discrimination is most likely to occur. In this regard, it is assumed that perceptions of prejudice may have implications on the salience of individuals' social identity, particularly with regard to their membership to certain races and ethnicities. It is in view of these that the current study considered the importance attached to ethnic identity in a racially and culturally diverse HEI.

Racial prejudice is also prevalent in contemporary South Africa, in general, despite the official dissolution of apartheid in 1994. Various international studies have found links between ethnic identity and evaluative aspects of the self-concept, such as self-esteem and efficacy beliefs among members of minority groups (see, e.g., Abu-Rayya 2006, 551; Phillips Smith et al. 1999, 876; Umaña-Taylor 2004, 142–143). This is assumed to be related to minority groups' proneness to discrimination or marginalisation in the broader social context. It is thus assumed that marginalisation co-occurs with a salient ethnic identity which, in turn, enhances positive feelings about the self. This is compatible with the assumptions of the social identity theory (SIT). According to this theory, social identity is associated with the subjective elevation of ingroup status above other groups, which promotes feelings of superiority among members of the ingroup, thereby leading to high self-esteem (Baron and Byrne 2003, 223; Turner 1982, 34).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Ethnic identity in a multicultural context**

Numerous studies have shown links between ethnic identity and general feelings of esteem among members of minority groups (Abu-Rayya 2006, 551; Phillips Smith et al. 1999, 876; Umaña-Taylor 2004, 142–143; Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff 2007,

557). In addition, a study by Spencer-Rodgers and Collins (2006, 736) showed that perceptions of negative regard for an individual's group by members of the outgroups were associated with strong identification with the ingroup, as well as high self-esteem. These findings suggest that minority status, possibly concurrent with marginalisation in the broader social context, may cultivate a strong sense of identity among the group's members, which also enhances self-esteem, as suggested by the SIT (Baron and Byrne 2003, 223; Phinney 1992, 170–171).

In relation to the above, Verkuyten (2009, 425) states that multiculturalism tends to threaten individuals' self-identity, with individuals in such a context likely to develop a strong ethnic identity as a result. Furthermore, Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff (2007, 563) argue that ethnic identity, among others, may be a protective factor against the effects of discrimination and serve to enhance the psychological well-being of Latino youth.

The above findings have proved true particularly for minority groups in multicultural settings, though the same cannot be assumed for the South African context. Black South Africans are a majority in the national context who have experienced systematic marginalisation and discrimination during the apartheid era under a system that advocated white supremacy and, more specifically, Afrikaner nationalism (Alexander 2001, 141; Bekker 1993, 49–50). These disparities undoubtedly had implications for either race group's appraisal of the ingroup, especially in relation to the outgroups, feelings of inferiority or superiority as a member of the group in the broader social context, as well as the value attached to the group (i.e. collective self-esteem).

In addition to strong identification with the ingroup, a study by Wiley, Perkins and Deaux (2008, 391 and 394) suggests that a marginalised group's members do not necessarily have low regard for the group as a result of marginalisation. These authors demonstrate that collective self-esteem is a multi-dimensional concept that not only involves group members' awareness of the outgroups' regard for the group ('public regard'), but also subjective perceptions of the ingroup among these members ('private regard') that are independent of the former. In this instance, any given group may have higher scores on private regard and lower scores on public regard or vice versa. Private regard seems to draw from the perceived importance of ethnic group membership, since both concepts involve the value attached to the group by its members in relation to other social groups. Wiley et al. (2008, 391) found a correlation between the private self-esteem and ethnic membership subscales. Similarly, consistently high correlations have been found between the private collective self-esteem and membership self-esteem subscales among samples consisting of black, white and racially diverse South African respondents, respectively (Thomas 2010, 137, 146, 155).

Wiley et al. (2008, 394) demonstrate that private regard, as a function of ethnic identity, remains salient particularly among members of marginalised groups, despite their disadvantaged social status in the broader social context. In contrast, members of majority groups may not place as much emphasis on their ethnic group

identification as minority group members do. This is especially considering the fact that their majority status in a given context may not pose as high a threat to their identification as members of a given group, as opposed to minority group members. This observation could account for findings in previous studies, which consistently show less salience of ethnic identity among members of majority or non-marginalised groups, as well as the relatively less correlation, if at all, that has been found between ethnic identity and self-esteem among this group. Studies have also shown more salient ethnic identities among members of minority groups, as opposed to those belonging to non-marginalised groups. It is in view of these observations that the current study assumes that there could be discrepancies among black and white respondents, with regard to academic self-efficacy's correlation with ethnic identity and collective self-esteem. This is especially given the racial distribution of the HEI under study, with black students in the minority and white students in the majority. These relationships are further complicated by South Africa's racially divided past as intended by the apartheid government.

For members of majority groups, identification with their group may not play as critical a role in the development of self-esteem, as might be the case with members of minority groups. This is because, as a majority group, individuals may interact with members of the ingroup to a larger extent than with minority group members, given the former's overall numerical status in society. For these individuals, especially during interaction with ingroup members, more emphasis is likely to be placed on individual attributes and abilities to inform personal self-esteem, as opposed to minority groups, whose self-esteem seems tied to ethnic identity salience. In addition, the majority group's privileged position may enable them to simply impose their perceived superiority on minority groups and, consequently, have their identity go unchallenged. In view of these, it can be argued that a multicultural context is generally more intimidating to minority group members, due to their predisposition to marginalisation by the majority groups, or simply, the greater risk of their identity and cultural values being submerged in a society in which they are a minority. This is compatible with Verkuyten's (2009, 425) observation that members of minority groups who, incidentally, have low ethnic identity, are likely to feel threatened in a multicultural society.

In the South African context, blacks' more salient ethnic identity, as suggested by previous studies (FutureFact PeopleScape survey, as cited in Alexander 2006, 1; SASAS of 2003, as cited in Roefs 2006, 83), may be due to the threat (physical and ideological) that was posed to them as a group by the apartheid government, as well as the apartheid government's emphasis on their distinct ethnicities (Khunou 2009, 88). It is against this backdrop that black South Africans, in spite of their majority status, could possibly derive their personal self-esteem or efficacy beliefs from group membership. Many black South Africans are of a low socio-economic status, as compared to a relatively small number of white South Africans; thereby suggesting the latter's continued economic power in post-apartheid South Africa (Statistics South Africa 2008, 9–11). Such instances are likely to leave the majority of poor

black South Africans disempowered, a trend that is reminiscent of the apartheid era and its possible effects on black and white South Africans' respective self-concepts. These observations further justify the current study's assumptions that, for black respondents, academic self-efficacy is more likely to correlate with ethnic identity and collective self-esteem, respectively, than among white respondents. The current study assumed that discrepancies regarding the self-concept between black and white South Africans are inevitable, primarily due to the persistence of inequalities between the races, as well as strained intergroup relations in contemporary South Africa (Aliber 2003, 475–476, 487; SASAS, as cited in Roefs 2006, 88–89; Statistics South Africa 2008, 9–11).

### **Prejudice and the self-concept**

Previous research has drawn attention to the prevalence of racial prejudice, as well as perceptions thereof, in South African HEIs (see, e.g., DoE, 2008, 41; SASAS, as cited in Roefs, 2006, 89). Steele and Aronson's (1995, 806) study on stereotype threat proved that individuals' awareness of negative stereotypes against their group and fear of living up to these tend to evoke anxiety and, consequently, undermine their performance. Such findings show the various aspects of an individual's functioning that are influenced by prejudice and the victims' awareness thereof. Furthermore, Crocker (1999, 91) refers to 'collective representations', referring to the stereotypes associated with an individual's group, which are often carried into other seemingly neutral contexts and are associated with general denigration of self-esteem. In any of these contexts, subtle features may draw attention to the stereotypes held about the individual in the broader social context.

The studies cited above and various others associate self-esteem or lack thereof with individuals' acceptance or rejection by others on the basis of their membership of a certain group (see, e.g., Downie et al. 2006, 528; Major, Quinton and Schmader 2003, 229). These studies show the importance of the mere perception of prejudice in relation to intrapersonal factors such as self-esteem and the general ability to perform optimally in a given context. In view of these, it could be argued that intergroup contact in HEIs may give rise to either real or perceived prejudice and, subsequently, have varying implications for students' perceived self-efficacy, particularly academic self-efficacy, given the nature of the context and its emphasis on academic success. This is especially given the historically racialised nature of these institutions as well as the continued prevalence of racial prejudice in these contexts (DoE 2008, 41; Kasese-Hara 2006, 253–255; Robus and MacLeod 2006, 465; SASAS, as cited in Roefs 2006, 89). It is argued that the interplay between the above-mentioned factors is likely to evoke self-definitions based on race, ultimately leading to salient ethnic and racial identities and, ultimately, have implications for academic self-efficacy.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that prejudice or marginalisation in the broader social context does not indiscriminately lead to poor self-esteem, as shown in Wiley et al.'s (2008) study. In the study, migrant black respondents of West Indian origin scored significantly higher on private regard, that is, their own evaluation of the

group, than on public regard, which is their perceptions of the group's evaluation by the outgroups. This suggests that individuals' regard for the ingroup is independent of, if not enhanced, by the outgroups' negative evaluation. In such instances, a favourable view of the group remains in spite of negative evaluation by others.

Similarly, it is argued that individuals employ self-protective mechanisms to prevent the possibly damaging effects of the self-concept that may occur due to negative evaluation of the ingroup by members of the outgroups (Spencer-Rodgers and Collins 2006, 736). Individuals also tend to deal with threats to their self-concept by dismissing the threat as insignificant or through self-affirmations, in a bid to preserve their integrity (Sherman and Cohen 2006, 186). It could, therefore, be argued that the marginalisation of some groups in the broader social context may inadvertently cultivate a strong sense of identity and, possibly, self-esteem or self-efficacy, among the group's adherents.

An instance of the above-mentioned trend in the South African context is Korf and Malan's (2002, 165) study, which found that white, Afrikaans-speaking South Africans maintained a strong ethnic identity by isolating themselves from the negative attributes associated with their group by the outgroups and, instead, focusing on the group's positive aspects. In this instance, regard for the ethnic group to which an individual belongs proves independent of the outgroups' negative perceptions, despite awareness thereof. In the same manner, self-identification by means of ethnicity is most pronounced among black South Africans in comparison with other races, surpassed only by a national and an African identity (Alexander 2006, 1; Roefs 2006, 84). This could be due to their previously marginalised status in the broader social context as a race, coupled with emphasis on their distinct ethnicities by the apartheid government (Khunou 2009, 88; Kiguwa 2006, 320) These trends are compatible with the tenets of the SIT, which states that individuals tend to emphasise the superiority of their group by adopting self-serving biases that highlight positive aspects of the ingroup, especially in relation to the outgroups (Baron and Byrne 2003, 213). These self-serving biases, though subjective and possibly inaccurate, ultimately help individuals form a positive image of the ingroup, thereby elevating the perceived status of the ingroup.

The complexities of the relationships between prejudice, ethnic identity, self-efficacy, collective self-esteem, as described in the above discussion, are evident. This is especially considering observations throughout this discussion consistently showing that various aspects of the self-concept are, to a large extent, mediated by prejudice. In practical settings, prejudice may be covert and, therefore, difficult to identify and study. Therefore, for the purposes of the current study, prejudice was disregarded, and only the relationship between ethnic identity, collective self-esteem and academic self-efficacy was considered, especially given the significance of academic self-efficacy in the study context.

It was, however, assumed that the relationships between these variables are possibly mediated by experiences or perceptions of prejudice in the context of the study. Moreover, differences in the perception and experiences of prejudice may



further be mediated by individuals' experiences of racism in the broader social context, especially considering various race groups' distinct experiences of the socio-political context during the apartheid era.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

The two research questions that guided this study were:

1. What is the relationship between ethnic identity and academic self-efficacy among distinct samples of black and white students?
2. What is the relationship between collective self-esteem and academic self-efficacy among samples of black and white students?

The following hypotheses were subsequently stated:

- H1: There is a relationship between ethnic identity and academic self-efficacy among black students.
- H2: There is no relationship between ethnic identity and academic self-efficacy among white students.
- H3: There is a relationship between collective self-esteem and academic self-efficacy among black students.
- H4: There is no relationship between collective self-esteem and academic self-efficacy among white students.

## **METHOD**

### **Sample**

The study took place at a racially and ethnically diverse South African HEI. At the time of the study, enrolment figures of this HEI showed that 59 per cent of all registered students were white, followed by black students at 35 per cent, with Indian and Coloured students being the least represented at only 4 per cent and 2 per cent, respectively. Two rounds of recruitment for respondents were undertaken. Firstly, students were informed of the study immediately after a formal lecture that they had been attending. Those willing to participate were then given the questionnaire to complete immediately and submit to a research assistant. Students were also informed of the study in several student residences where, upon agreeing to participate, they completed and submitted the questionnaire to the research assistant.

Two distinct samples of 81 black and 55 white students of both sexes and various ethnicities were drawn. The majority of the respondents were Afrikaans and Pedi, closely followed by English and Ndebele respondents. Other ethnic groups whose members took part in the study were Tswana, Sotho, Venda, Zulu, Swati, Xhosa and Tsonga. Respondents were aged between 17 and 30, with the majority aged between 19 and 22. The majority of the respondents were female, at 66 per cent.

## Instruments

The multigroup ethnic identity measure (MEIM), the collective self-esteem scale (CSES) and the academic self-efficacy scale (ASE) were used to measure ethnic identity, collective self-esteem and academic self-efficacy, respectively. The MEIM consists of 15 items ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ) in total, with two subscales measuring ethnic identity search and ethnic identity commitment, respectively. Items on the MEIM are on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree) (Phinney 1992, 164). Phinney (1992, 167, 169–170) confirmed that the MEIM demonstrates construct validity, as shown during its use on an ethnically diverse sample.

The CSES consists of 16 items ( $\alpha = 0.34$ ) and four subscales, namely, membership self-esteem, private self-esteem, public collective self-esteem and the importance attached to a given identity (Crocker n.d.a, 1; Crocker n.d.b, 1). Items on this measure are on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). This measure has been reported as having construct validity specifically in a study involving a South African sample (Korf and Malan 2002, 157).

The ASE consists of 8 items ( $\alpha = 0.74$ ) on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very untrue) to 7 (Very true) (Chemers et al. 2001, 58). In Chemers et al.'s (ibid., 61) study, respondents' scores on academic self-efficacy correlated positively with recent academic performance and expectations, respectively. This presumably serves as indication of the measure's construct validity since, theoretically, positive correlations are expected between academic self-efficacy, expectations of academic outcomes and actual academic performance (Pallant 2010, 7).

## Data analysis

Multiple regression analyses were run through the SPSS, giving an indication of all the relationships of interest in the study. Multiple regression analysis is a statistical method used to determine the extent to which two or more predictors or independent variables are able to predict the dependent variable (ibid., 148). In the analysis, ethnic identity and collective self-esteem were specified as predictors, whereas academic self-efficacy was regarded as the dependent variable. In this study, however, no inferences about causality between the variables are made.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Individuals who indicated their willingness to participate in the study were provided with a consent form. The consent form specified the nature and purpose of the study, procedures to be followed by respondents, as well as ways in which the results would be disseminated. In order to ensure confidentiality, respondents were not required to indicate their names anywhere on the questionnaires.



**RESULTS**

Table 1 shows the correlations between the ASE and the overall MEIM, and the ASE and the overall CSES, among black respondents. For these respondents, there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the overall MEIM score and the ASE ( $r = 0.252$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Similarly, there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the overall CSES score and the ASE ( $r = 0.223$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). The above suggests that, for black respondents, as ethnic identity and collective self-esteem increase, respectively, so does academic self-efficacy. These results are similar to those found in international studies, with a strong ethnic identity generally found to have a positive influence on other aspects of the self-concept, particularly among minority groups that are also prone to discrimination (e.g. Phillips Smith et al. 1999, 876; Spencer-Rodgers and Collins 2006, 736; Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff 2007, 562).

**Table 1:** Correlation between MEIM, CSES and ASE among black respondents

		AS Score	MEIM Overall Score	CSES Overall Score
Pearson Correlation	AS Score	1.000	.252	.223
	MEIM Overall Score	.252	1.000	.518
	CSES Overall Score	.223	.518	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	AS Score	.012	.012	.023
	MEIM Overall Score	.023	.000	.000
	CSES Overall Score			
N	AS Score	81	81	81
	MEIM Overall Score	81	81	81
	CSES Overall Score	81	81	81

Table 2 shows the correlation between the MEIM and the ASE, as well as the CSES and the ASE, among white respondents. For this group, no statistically significant correlation was found between the MEIM and the ASE ( $r = 0.132$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), or between the overall CSES score and the ASE ( $r = 0.194$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). In this instance, it is argued that this trend could be accounted for by white respondents' majority status in the context of the study and lesser likelihood of experiencing racial discrimination, as opposed to black respondents.

**Table 2:** Correlation between MEIM, CSES and ASE among white respondents

Pearson Correlation	AS Score	1.000	.132	.194
	MEIM Overall Score	.132	1.000	.548
	CSES Overall Score	.194	.548	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	AS Score	.169	.169	.078
	MEIM Overall Score	.078	.000	.000
	CSES Overall Score			
N	AS Score	55	55	55
	MEIM Overall Score	55	55	55
	CSES Overall Score	55	55	55

## DISCUSSION

Findings from the current study indicate a positive correlation between ethnic identity and academic self-efficacy among black respondents, who were a minority group in the context of the study. In turn, it could be assumed that this result has implications on these respondents' actual academic achievement. Academic self-efficacy has been consistently identified as an accurate predictor of academic achievement in various contexts (e.g. Carroll et al. 2009, 808; Diseth 2011, 193; Pullmann and Allik 2008, 562). Motlagh, Amrai, Yazdani, Abderahim and Souri (2011, 766) further posit that the effects of self-efficacy on academic achievement could be due to the self-regulation that accompanies the former. Students are likely to apply self-regulated learning that is in direct proportion to their self-efficacy, leading to a subsequent relationship between the latter and academic achievement.

The correlation found between ethnic identity and academic self-efficacy is consistent with previous findings wherein respondents who were considered a minority group consistently had higher scores on ethnic identity, which also tended to strongly correlate with other positive feelings about the self, such as global self-esteem and the general self-concept (Abu-Rayya 2006, 552; Phillips Smith et al. 1999, 876; Phinney 1992, 171–172; Spencer-Rodgers and Collins 2006, 736; Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff 2007, 557; Verkuyten 2009, 425). The trends described above, which also proved applicable in the study, seem to substantiate Verkuyten's (2009, 425) suggestion that multiculturalism may threaten individuals' ethnic identity, particularly members of minority groups who do not identify highly with their ethnic group. This may justify the consistently high ethnic identification found among minority groups in the studies cited above. These individuals may place emphasis on their ethnic identity, upon realisation of the threat posed to this identity by a multicultural context.

The prevalence of racism in HEIs referred to by Kasese-Hara (2006, 253–255) and Robus and MacLeod (2006, 482) could mean that covert and/or overt prejudice is prevalent in the context of the study. This is especially in consideration of the fact that the study took place in what is considered a historically white HEI. Findings from the SASAS (as cited in Roefs 2006, 89), conducted in 2003, also showed that black

and white students identified educational institutions as one of the contexts in which racial discrimination is most likely to occur. It is also argued that South Africa's racially divided past, as embodied in the apartheid system, created a landscape for hostile intergroup relations among members of various races. These trends have, arguably, filtered into contemporary South Africa as, shown in the examples cited above.

An environment that they may perceive as hostile, possibly due to strained intergroup relations, may be encouraging black respondents in the current study to draw from their group, as opposed to individual, identities as a coping mechanism (Feagin and Sikes 1995, 97). In a study by Davis, Dias-Bowie and Greenberg (2004, 432–433), African-American students in a historically white institution indicated feeling that they had to prove that they were worthy of enrolling at the institution due to their race and were regarded as '... representative[s] of all blacks' (*ibid.*, 435). This possibly serves as an explanation for the link found between ethnic identification and academic self-efficacy among black students in the current study, suggesting that the social structure at the HEI may be alienating these respondents socially and, in turn, academically. Such a context may also predispose minority students to stereotype threat, as indicated by Steele and Aronson (1995, 797).

Studies have shown that the effects of real or perceived discrimination are minimised by a salient ethnic identity among members of minority groups, who are typically subjects of prejudice (see, e.g., Phillips Smith et al. 1999, 877; Umaña-Taylor 2004, 144; Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff 2007, 561–562). Furthermore, the correlation between ethnic identity and academic self-efficacy is consistent with Eccles, Wong and Peck's (2006, 408) suggestion that the adoption of an agentic perspective leads to academic achievement and feelings of efficacy despite an individual's immersion in a context of prejudice and discrimination. In view of this, a strong ethnic identity, particularly among black respondents in the current study, may serve as a buffer against the possibly negative effects of real or perceived discrimination and minimise the latter's negative effects on academic self-efficacy. In the same manner, Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff (2007, 562) posit that a salient ethnic identity and cultural orientation, coupled with high self-esteem, enhanced psychological well-being among minority Latino youth.

The results for black respondents are compatible with the tenets of the SIT. The SIT assumes that a salient social identity positively influences self-esteem. For the purposes of the study, academic self-efficacy is assumed to demonstrate self-esteem in an academic context, specifically in relation to the performance of academic tasks. One of the assumptions of the SIT is that there is a relationship between self-esteem and group membership. In this regard, strong identification is usually accompanied by positive feelings arising from membership to a certain group (Baron and Byrne 2003, 223; Turner 1982, 33).

According to the SIT, individuals tend to emphasise the superiority of their group by adopting self-serving biases that highlight positive aspects of the ingroup, especially in relation to the outgroups. These self-serving biases, though subjective

and possibly inaccurate, ultimately help individuals form a positive image of the ingroup, thereby elevating the perceived status of the ingroup (Baron and Byrne 2003, 223).

The statistically significant correlation found between collective self-esteem and academic self-efficacy among black respondents could be due to the notion of collective representations referred to by Crocker (1999, 91). Collective representations, according to Crocker, refer to the tendency by members of a discriminated group to carry schemas of discrimination into other contexts. This is especially true in instances wherein the situation reasonably exposes one to discrimination. The correlation found between collective self-esteem and academic self-efficacy may indeed be due to black South Africans' marginalised status during the apartheid era, coupled with the persistence of prejudice in contemporary South Africa (Alexander 2001, 141; Bekker 1993, 49–50; Roefs 2006, 88–89). This is compatible with international studies on marginalised groups, who are often minorities. In the South African context, however, blacks have experienced such marginalisation, in spite of their numerical majority status. Collective representations, in this regard, may result in members of the marginalised group developing high collective self-esteem, which persists in spite of the outgroups' negative regard for the group, thereby having a positive effect on the former's academic self-efficacy.

The outgroups' evaluation of their group, being only one of the several components of collective self-esteem, may negatively affect self-esteem, though not entirely, due to the multi-dimensional nature of collective self-esteem. Wiley et al. (2008, 394) have shown that, despite negative evaluation by the outgroups, an individual may still maintain a positive evaluation of his/her group. Furthermore, Spencer-Rodgers and Collins (2006, 736) suggest that individuals employ self-protective mechanisms to counteract the possibly damaging effects of negative regard for the group by the outgroups. This may ultimately strengthen individuals' identification with the ingroup and enhance self-esteem. On this basis, it could be argued that enhanced regard for the ingroup or the value attached to membership to the group, which is an integral part of collective self-esteem, also positively affects academic self-efficacy. This is especially when considering the fact that the studies cited above primarily involved respondents from minority groups, who also tended to experience overt or covert discrimination.

In view of the above, it is argued that the correlation found between ethnic identity and academic self-efficacy, collective self-esteem and academic self-efficacy, among black respondents in the study may be explained by trends observed in similar studies involving respondents who are often subjects of discrimination, typically in settings in which they form a minority.

## **CONCLUSION**

All four alternative hypotheses initially stated in the study under discussion were confirmed. The results show a relationship between ethnic identity and academic

self-efficacy among black South Africans, whereas the same cannot be said for white respondents. These results are compatible with findings from various international studies involving minority groups. It is assumed that the trend in the study is due to the minority status of black respondents in the HEI concerned, as well as their possible exposure to prejudice in such a context. The results further suggest that an unfavourable social structure may be emphasising the racial or ethnic differences of minority groups in this context, subsequently undermining their academic experiences. It is also important to note that the broad marginalisation of black South Africans during the apartheid era, despite their majority status, may partly account for these results. Unlike cited international studies, the current study shows that national minority status does not play a decisive role in the link between ethnic identity and efficacy beliefs. Rather, contextual minority status, the dynamics of intergroup relations in such a context, and the broader, past and present social context, all play a role. In this regard, an individual seemingly carries the 'collective representations' or stereotypes associated with his or her group into other contexts, which are reflective of his or her experiences in other contexts. These collective representations may, in turn, affect his or her self-efficacy either negatively or positively, depending on whether such negative regard by the outgroups is counter-acted by the adoption of a strong ethnic identity and higher private regard.

The notion of collective representations is also deemed applicable to the correlation found between collective self-esteem and academic self-efficacy among black respondents in the current study. Despite ingroup members' awareness of negative outgroup perceptions of their group, individuals may score highly on other components of collective self-esteem. They could also adopt self-protective mechanisms or self-affirmations to serve as a buffer against negative perceptions of the ingroup by members of the outgroups, thereby enhancing private regard for the ingroup. This would help them maintain high self-esteem in a given situation, collective self-esteem and, possibly, self-efficacy.

The findings from this study set the South African context apart, with racial or ethnic composition in the national context evidently not the sole determinant of the interaction between aspects of the self-concept such as importance attached to identity, collective self-esteem and efficacy beliefs. This is in contrast with trends in international studies where minority status, especially in the national context, plays a critical role in various aspects of the self-concept and the relationships between these. The study, therefore, has illustrated the uniqueness of South African society and highlights the need to expand social research that is specific to the South African context, which would lead to relevant and informed theorising about social psychological phenomena in South Africa.

Several limitations of the study were identified. Firstly, the samples used in the current study consisted of an unequal number of black and white respondents, though comparisons were subsequently made between the groups. Secondly, the racial composition of the sample in the study was in inverse proportion to the racial distribution of students at the HEI from which the sample was drawn. Black

respondents made up 56 per cent of the total sample, while white respondents represent only 38 per cent of the sample. At the time of data collection, enrolment figures of the specified HEI showed that 59 per cent of registered students were white, while only 38 per cent of these were black.

It is recommended that future studies also include actual academic achievement in order to determine its correlation with perceived academic self-efficacy and whether, similarly to the latter, it is influenced by ethnic identity and collective self-esteem. Personal self-esteem could also be included as one of the variables so as to determine its relationship with ethnic identity and collective self-esteem. Lastly, future studies could report on respondents' actual experiences or perceptions of prejudice in a given context, to determine if this is linked with the other variables discussed in this study.

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