Background

- Social comparison theory: self-worth based on comparisons with others
- Specifically looked at social comparisons for in-group and out-group targets based on major
- Self-evaluations are lowered after participants are exposed to a higher achieving individual (Brewer 1994)
- Upward comparisons with an in-group member decrease self-esteem more than an out-group — similar comparison targets are weighted more heavily (Major, 1993)
- The purpose of this study was to better understand the factors that contribute to self-perception.

Prediction

- Participants will rate themselves lower after witnessing a higher-achieving individual of their own major (in-group) vs. an individual of a different major (out-group).

Method

- Participants: 78 Rice undergraduates from a variety of academic schools.
- Conditions: Participants were randomly assigned to either an in-group or out-group major condition.
  - Half of the participants read the Facebook profile of a student with a major in the same academic school as them.
  - Half of the participants saw the profile of a student with a different major.
  - The gender of the profile was controlled for.
- Assessment: Participants rated the Facebook student and themselves on a self-attributes questionnaire along with the importance of each attribute. GPA was self-reported.

Results

- A 2x2 between-subjects ANOVA was conducted on self-perception score with in vs. out group and major as variables.
- There was a significant interaction, F(1, 74) = 4.170, p < .05, η² = .053.
- The effect of in-group vs. out-group depended on major group.
- Our prediction that in-group condition participants would have lower self-perception scores than out-group participants was supported in natural science and engineering majors in a follow-up t-test.
- Natural Sciences and Engineering major participants who compared themselves with in-group members had significantly lower self-perception scores (M = 61.53) than participants who compared themselves with out-group targets (M = 69.00), t(28) = 2.05, p = .05, 95% CI = [0.01, 14.94].
- GPA did not correlate with self-perception score nor significantly interact with any of the variables of interest.

Discussion

- In-group vs. out-group effects depend on the major grouping of the participant
- Engineering and natural science majors are more negatively impacted by in-group comparisons
- Comparisons may be greater influencers of self-esteem than GPA

Future Work

- Future studies could weigh self-perception scores with personal attribute importance
- Investigate medium of comparison: Facebook profile vs. LinkedIn
- Manipulate individual attributes for more insight to which social factors affect self-perception

References


Self Perception by Major Groupings

![Figure 2. This figure illustrates the interaction between in-group and out-group comparisons among major groupings.](image-url)