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Mark A. Freeman

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What is This?

A large (N = 603) and representative sample in Sri Lanka completed a questionnaire that assessed the salience of 11 social identities (nation, social class, age, religion, caste, occupation, race, gender, educational level, town or village of residence, and political party) within respondents' self-concepts. Consistent with extant psychological theories of identity, four features of an identity were found to be systematically related to its salience within the self-concept: (a) how the status of an identity affects one's overall self-esteem, (b) the degree to which one is a demographic minority on a category of identity, (c) whether an identity has been affected by processes of urban-industrial development, and (d) the type and extent of intergroup contact on a category of identity. The relevance of the identity framework to cross-cultural theory is discussed.

LINKING SELF AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE
A Psychological Perspective on Social Identity in Sri Lanka

MARK A. FREEMAN
Drew University

The concept of identity is by nature Janus-faced (Breakwell, 1992; Hewitt, 1991; Yardley & Honess, 1987). In one sense, the content and meaning of a social identity is normatively defined, the product of processes operating at the social structural level that are not subject to individual interpretation. At the same time, however, individuals exhibit considerable agency in constructing their social identities. Although the "raw material" for the construction of one's various social identities is supplied by one's location[1] in the social structure on dimensions such as class, occupation, and ethnicity, there are many different ways of perceiving, evaluating, and finally synthesizing this raw material at the individual level in the construction of an internalized, coherent self-concept.

This study represents an examination of four hypotheses concerning how this psychological process of synthesis and internalization operates within the constraints of a particular social structure, that of Sri Lanka. From the range of possible social groups and categories, the following 11 were selected for analysis: nation, social class, age, religion, caste, occupation, race,[2] gender, educational level, town or village of residence, and political party. These were chosen because they are applicable to and are of at least moderate significance for all members of this cultural group.[3] Specifically, this study focuses on one aspect of these social identities at the individual level: the felt importance or salience of each social identity.

MODEL OF THE SELF-CONCEPT

Psychology's long-standing interest in the self has yielded a proliferation of diverse models of the self-concept that differ from each other in important respects (Greenwald &

Pratkanis, 1984; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Wylie, 1979). The model of the self-concept to be employed in the present study is thus necessarily selective. First and most directly, it borrows from Stryker's (1980, 1987; Strkyer & Serpe, 1982) identity theory. Second, it adopts the perspective of social identity theory, as developed in the work of Tajfel (1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and later extended by Turner and others (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994).

Two basic concepts constitute the framework for this model: the self-concept and social identity. The self-concept is the total set of cognitions an individual has regarding who he or she is. The self-concept thus subsumes the answers a person gives to the question "Who am I?" Social identities, following Tajfel (1981), are "those aspects of the self-concept which derive from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 255). A social identity, then, is one kind of answer to the question "Who am I?" that is based on membership in a social group or category, together with its evaluative and affective connotations. This study's focus on social identity thus addresses one aspect of the overall self-concept (which also includes personal identities as well as past and possible identities, among others) (e.g., Breakwell, 1992; Deaux, 1991; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Assumption 1: The self is multidimensional. Despite the fact that the self is subjectively experienced as unified and coherent (cf. Wong-Reiger & Taylor, 1981), from a social psychological perspective it is more useful to depict the self-concept as a constellation of multiple identities that are conceptually and empirically distinct (Deaux, 1991, 1996; Rosenberg, 1988). Individuals are always members of multiple social groups and categories, and so their overall subjective sense of who they are (the self-concept) likewise contains multiple social identities, one for each group membership. The self-concept, then, is here regarded as a superordinate category, a repository of potential self-definitions or identities.

Assumption 2: Identities are created equal. The present model of the self-concept makes no a priori assumptions about which identities are most central or self-defining. It is assumed from the outset that different individuals will exhibit different identity structures. This assumption contrasts with that of many models of the self-concept, which do accord a structural primacy to a particular identity—most often personal identity—or to a category of identities (see Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Frable, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman & Markus, 1993). The present model rejects such theory-driven structural formulations of the self-concept. In certain instances, it may be true that particular personal or social identities are consistently ranked as most important or self-defining by a specific group of people in a specific sociocultural environment: for example, gender, class, and race in the United States (Brewer & Lui, 1989; Stryker, 1987) or nation, caste, religion, and language in India (Paranjpe, 1970). But these local consistencies should not be confused with universal structural laws governing the salience of particular identities within the self-concept. New combinations are always possible.

Assumption 3: The self-concept is stable. The present model assumes that the degree of temporal stability in the self-concept is systematically related to the degree of stability in the individual's social environment. Thus, it is assumed that the self-concept exhibits considerable temporal stability, because individuals' social environments also tend to be quite stable (see also Markus & Kunda, 1986; Serpe, 1987; Shibutani, 1961; Swann, 1987). From this

perspective, the self-concept is a cross-situationally stable "confederation" of potential self-conceptions (Markus & Kunda, 1986, p. 859).

HYPOTHESES

The four hypotheses put forward by this study make predictions about how, within this model of the self-concept, individual-level variables—for example, motives, perceptual biases, and social experiences—interact with social structural factors in the construction of social identities. An appropriate overarching descriptive metaphor for this interactionist model of social identity is perhaps that of a game of cards, in which the cards in one's hand are equivalent to one's locations on various social categories (e.g., high social class, minority racial group status, low caste status, etc.) and social-structural processes are analogous to the rules of the particular game one is playing. Just as different game rules will alter the assessment of one's hand of cards, different macro-social processes can encourage different subjective assessments of one's social identities. Finally, psychological processes figure in the metaphor as different strategies adopted by individual actors to win the game or, in this case, to construct the most positive, meaningful, and consensually validated self-concept possible within the constraints set by the prevailing social structure (the rules) and one's location in it (one's hand of cards).

The metaphor can, of course, be taken too far. Social structure and the psychology of the individual, for instance, interact in ways that rules and strategies in a card game do not (Hewitt, 1991). The metaphor also may imply to some readers a degree of choice in the subjective construction of identity that is not entirely appropriate, particularly for those who occupy social categories that are enmeshed in structures of prejudice and discrimination. For members of such groups, the ongoing struggle to construct a positive, satisfying, and consensually validated social identity is not as indeterminate or gamelike as some interactionist models seem to imply. Nonetheless, the metaphor is useful in that it aptly describes how the three components of this model—one's objective social identities, the social structure, and psychological processes at the individual level—interact in the construction of a subjective self-concept. The following hypotheses represent four specific predictions following this interactionist model of identity construction.

> *Hypothesis 1* (self-esteem): The salience of a social identity within the self-concept will be positively correlated with one's status ranking in the corresponding dimension of the social structure.

The drive to maintain high self-esteem through social comparison (Festinger, 1954) is a primary motive in the process of self-construction (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Because the self-concept is composed of social as well as personal identities, self-enhancing social comparison processes are engaged at the intergroup (Brewer & Weber, 1994; Tajfel, 1981) as well as interpersonal levels to maintain positive self-esteem. To the extent that social comparisons in terms of a group identity yield favorable self-evaluations for an individual, the importance of that identity should be emphasized within their self-concept to enhance one's overall self-esteem. Conversely, when social comparisons yield unfavorable self-evaluations on some dimension of identity, the importance of that identity within the self-concept should be de-emphasized to protect one's overall level of self-esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989; Major, Sciacchitano, & Crocker, 1993). Indeed, this hypothesis continues to receive a good deal of empirical support in cases where identities are perceived as legiti-

mately status ranked, both in field settings, where group status is determined by the social structure, and in the laboratory, where the status of a real or artificial group has been manipulated (Brown & Wade, 1987; Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993; Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1985, 1987).

Of the 11 identities in this study, 6 are perceived as (legitimately) status ranked in Sri Lankan social structure and are thus likely to consistently generate favorable or unfavorable social comparisons, depending on whether one's own rank is high or low: class, occupation, educational level, caste, gender, and town of residence. It was predicted that the salience of these 6 categories of identity within an individual's self-concept would be positively related to the individual's social structural rank within that category of identity.

Gender was included in this list because in many domains, gender categories are to some extent consensually ranked in Sri Lanka (male = high status, female = low status). Town of residence was relevant to this hypothesis along a culture-specific dimension. Sri Lankan Sinhalese (the sample for the present study was entirely composed of ethnic Sinhalese) distinguish themselves regionally as "up country" (or *Kandyan*) versus "low country." The connotations of up-country residence within the Sinhalese worldview are all positive: resistance to colonial powers until as recently as 1815, high caste, cultivators and landholders, traditional or "pure" Sinhala culture, and relatively light skin tone. Low-country residence carries with it connotations that are the converse of these, and to the Sinhalese, these are far from trivial distinctions. Thus, it was predicted that town/village identity would be more salient for those living in up-country (high-status) areas than among those living in the low country.

> *Hypothesis 2* (distinctiveness): Numerical minority status on a category of social identity will be positively correlated with the salience of that identity within the self-concept.

Relative in-group size affects the process of self-construction in that being a member of a numerical minority tends to increase the felt importance of group membership for the individual (Brewer, 1991; Mullen, 1991; Simon & Hamilton, 1994). The theoretical explanation for this phenomenon derives from Gestalt psychology: "The smaller perceptual unit will emerge as the perceptual figure, while the larger perceptual unit will recede into a perceptual ground" (Mullen, 1991, p. 299).

This study is concerned with being a minority in a demographic or cross-situationally consistent sense. McGuire (e.g., McGuire & McGuire, 1988) and his associates have explored the issue of distinctiveness most extensively from this perspective, taking advantage of naturally occurring situations fitting this description in the United States: racial identity salience of school children in predominantly White or predominantly non-White school districts (McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978), gender identity salience as a function of household gender composition (McGuire, McGuire, & Winton, 1979), and others (McGuire & McGuire, 1988).

The two tests of this hypothesis conducted in the present sample involve religious and political identities. For religious identity, the distinctiveness hypothesis predicts that religious identity will be more salient for (minority) Sinhalese Christians (about 7% of the Sinhalese population) than (majority) Sinhalese Buddhists (about 90% of the Sinhalese population). In the case of political identity, the hypothesis predicts that political identity will be more salient for members of numerically small parties than for members of numerically large parties.

Hypothesis 3 (social change): Ascribed identities will be less salient and achieved identities more salient for those living in rapidly industrializing urban centers as compared to those living in rural, agriculturally based areas.

Sri Lanka has seen a number of structural changes in its economy over the past several decades: overall growth, expansion of the private sector and of industrial production, and the opening of the economy to international markets. These economic changes demand new social structural arrangements, and in particular they diminish the extent to which traditional, ascribed status systems continue to serve a functional role and increase the role of modern or achieved status systems (Perera, 1985; Spencer, 1990). By extension, if such status systems are structurally less functional, the identities that correspond to them should be less salient in the self-concepts of individuals living in (urban) areas, which have been most extensively exposed to these economic changes (cf. Serpe, 1987). Identities relevant to this hypothesis in the present study are those based on the traditional ascribed statuses of caste, age, gender, and town or village of residence and the modern achieved statuses of class, occupation, and education.

The caste system, for instance, has been eroding with exposure to an increasingly industrial economy in Sri Lanka ever since the arrival of the Portuguese colonists in the 16th century. As for gender identity, the relevant factor is the effect that the emerging modern economic system has had on family structure as more women at all levels of the class hierarchy enter the workforce, reducing the significance of this identity. The functional significance of age identity has also eroded in urban areas because of these economic changes, where the relevant antecedents include reduced control of older generations over job choices and marriage arrangements of succeeding generations, the ability of individuals to acquire substantial material resources through employment and economic enterprise rather than through inheritance, and the spatial separation between and mobility of nuclear family units within the extended family structure. Finally, as for town or village identity, the expansion of the economy and the shift to industrial production demands increased geographic mobility, which serves to erode commitment to a single ancestral home or region.

Thus, it was predicted that identification with one's caste, gender, age, and current town of residence would be reduced, on average, among those living in urban areas, where the modern structural, economic changes affecting these dimensions of the social structure have been most concentrated. In addition, implicit in the paragraphs above is the assertion that, in place of the traditional indicators of social status, the modern social identities of class, occupation, and education will have become relatively more salient for individuals living in urban areas, because these dimensions of the social structure have become more functionally significant in such locales.

Hypothesis 4 (intergroup contact): Superficial intergroup contact will be positively correlated with the salience of the contact-relevant identity; intimate intergroup contact will be negatively correlated with the salience of the contact-relevant identity.

The variable of intergroup contact has most often been examined in studies of ethnocentrism and intergroup relations (Allport, 1954/1979; Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Johnston & Hewstone, 1990; LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Stephan, 1987), exploring the conditions in which contact between social groups either improves or exacerbates intergroup conflict. The dependent variable in research on group contact, therefore, has historically been the quality of intergroup relations, whereas in this study the dependent variable was identity salience.

A close link between identity salience and negative intergroup attitudes on a dimension of identity, however, may reasonably be inferred from the extensive literature linking strong group identification with a range of cognitive biases favoring in-groups and derogating out-groups. Indeed, in Tajfel's (1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) social identity theory, the very foundation of social identification was in-group favoring and out-group derogating social comparisons. Thus, in cases where the literature on contact theory predicts negative intergroup attitudes, we may also infer heightened salience for the contact-relevant dimension of identity.

For a given category of identity, then, two predictions were made. First, it was predicted that superficial intergroup contact on the dimensions of race and religion would increase the subjective importance of these identities within the self-concept. Second, it was predicted that personal or intimate social contact (implying improved intergroup relations) with members of other groups would be negatively associated with the salience of the corresponding identity (cf. Allport, 1954/1979).

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Ethnic composition of sample. The present study focuses on the Sinhalese ethnic group, which comprises 74% of the total population of Sri Lanka, mainly because the next largest minority, at 17% of the population, lives in the northern and eastern provinces of the country. These areas were inaccessible to the author because of the ongoing military conflict there between Tamil separatists and predominantly Sinhalese Sri Lankan government forces.

Sampling method. A total of 1,000 questionnaires were distributed through 14 different school systems across the island of Sri Lanka from January to June 1997. In unsealed envelopes, forms were given to a school official from each school. This individual approved the project and oversaw the distribution of the forms to selected classes of school children. The students were instructed to have one of their parents (mother or father, as designated by an envelope label) complete the questionnaire. The students returned it to school the following day. The forms were subsequently retrieved from the school official by the author. The sample for this study was thus composed of the parents of primary school children. Virtually all children of school age attend primary school in Sri Lanka (United Nations Development Programme, 1997).

Schools for distribution were selected to represent the full range of geographic and urban versus rural environments (with the exception of the northern province, which was off-limits due to the civil war). In addition, within the major urban centers of Kandy and Colombo, respondents of low, middle, and high socioeconomic status (SES) were purposively sampled. This targeting was based on the prestige of the sampled school system, which is a reliable indicator of family SES in the Sri Lankan context. Rural respondents, mainly farmers, were sampled from the central, north-central, eastern, and southern provinces. The sample was thus quite representative of the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka.

Sample characteristics. There were 603 respondents who provided usable data, yielding a 60.3% rate of response. The sample was 50.2% female, with a mean age of 45.8 years (SD =

7.67), an average 11.4 years of education ($SD = 3.42$), and an average monthly income of 7,950 Sri Lankan rupees, or U.S.$137 in early 1997 ($SD = 14,396$ rupees; based on 1995 per capita GNP, average monthly income was about U.S.$58).

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Questionnaire design. The general instructions on the form stated that the questionnaire was "part of a University research project," that respondents were under no obligation to complete the survey, and assured confidentiality of all responses. The 12-page questionnaire consisted of several sections (only the first and last of which are relevant to the hypotheses examined in the present study). The first section was designed to assess the importance of each of the 11 social identities within the respondent's self-concept: nation, social class, age, religion, caste, occupation, race, gender, educational level, town or village of residence, and political party. Respondents were instructed to write a self-defining label corresponding to each social identity (e.g., "Sri Lankan" for national identity, "Buddhist" for religious identity, and so on). For educational level, respondents were instructed to "write the highest school grade passed, or, if you have a University degree, state what it is." For economic class, respondents were asked, "Compared to the average Sri Lankan, what do you think is your economic class? (Please write one of the following: 'very wealthy,' 'somewhat wealthy,' 'middle class,' 'somewhat poor,' 'very poor')."

Respondents were then asked to consider the following questions with respect to each social label: (a) "How important is this label to how you think about yourself?" (b) "How important is this label to how others generally think about you?" (c) "How proud are you of having this label?" (d) "How powerful or strong does this label make you feel when you compare yourself to others?" (e) "How important is this label to your relationships and to the life you lead in Sri Lankan society?" (f) "When thinking of other people, how important is *their* [class, gender, race, etc.] to how you think about them?"[4] Respondents used 6-point scales to respond to each question, in which 1 = *the most* and 6 = *not at all*. This procedure was repeated for each of the 11 identities. Three separate forms were used, each of which listed the identities in a different sequence, to counterbalance the design against any potential ordering effects. These six questions were used to represent the three components of a social identity identified by Stryker (1987): cognitive salience (Items 1, 2, and 6), interactional (social) commitment (Item 5), and affective commitment (Items 3 and 4).

For each identity, the internal consistency of the six items was computed. For all 11 identities, the sixth item appeared to tap a different construct, as scale reliabilities were uniformly improved when this item was deleted. All of the alphas were satisfactorily high, ranging from .83 to .92 for the 11 resulting (five-item) scales. After completing the survey, respondents were thanked for their participation, instructed to place the form in the envelope, seal the envelope, and return the packet. Within 2 weeks, respondents received a debriefing form via the same anonymous route of distribution.

Coding of independent variables. The independent variables in this study are the self-defining social labels from the first section of the questionnaire. Religion, political party, gender, race, and nation were categorical variables and were coded as such without further processing. All other variables were coded so that numerical scores were aligned with the conceptual labels for each variable. Economic class was coded on the 5-point scale described above, ranging from 5 (*very wealthy*) to 1 (*very poor*). Educational level was

TABLE 1
Intercorrelations Between Demographic Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Town/village exposure to economic development[a]							
Occupational status[a]	.24						
Economic class[a]	.30	.25					
Educational level[a]	.44	.48	.31				
Caste rank[a]	.03	−.08	.01	−.05			
Age[a]	.03	.23	.03	.06	−.07		
Religion[b]	.07	.07	.05	.08	.04	−.01	
Gender[c]	−.09	.33	−.05	−.06	−.04	.23	.02

NOTE: Sample sizes vary from 544 to 603. When $n = 550$, $r = .08$ has an associated $p = .05$ (two-tailed).
a. Numerical codes are aligned with the conceptual labels for these variables.
b. 1 = Buddhist, 2 = Christian.
c. 1 = female, 2 = male.

coded into six ordinal categories constructed to obtain a normal distribution and roughly equal intervals of educational attainment, ranging from completed fifth grade ($n = 47$) to awarded postgraduate degree ($n = 13$).

For occupation and caste, special coding schemes were developed to rank them in approximately equal intervals of status. The 150 different occupations listed by the 603 respondents were sorted into eight ranked categories and coded in terms of increasing occupational prestige. Caste was ranked in an analogous fashion, distinguishing low (Navandanna, Hunu, Vahumpura, Berava, Batgam; $n = 41$), middle (Karava, Salagama, Durava; $n = 86$), and high (Goyigama; $n = 455$) caste groups (cf. Ryan, 1953/1993).

Town or village of residence as indicated by respondents was coded on a four-category index of urbanization (1 = rural, 2 = small town near no major urban centers, 3 = moderate-size town or urban periphery, and 4 = major urban center; cell sizes were approximately equal). The intercorrelation matrix for the independent variables is displayed in Table 1.

To test the self-esteem hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) regarding the high status of up-country Sinhalese, respondents from the central highlands (Kandy, Matale, and Gampola subsamples) were coded as up-country residents, and all others were coded as low-country. To test the contact hypothesis (Hypothesis 4), the predictor variable (intergroup social contact) was measured in two ways, in view of the separate predictions for superficial and intimate intergroup contact. Superficial intergroup contact was measured at the community level based on whether a respondent's town of residence was located in a racially and religiously diverse or homogenous area (Department of Census and Statistics, 1986). These two identities are very highly correlated in the Sri Lankan population, such that racially diverse communities are also religiously diverse. Intimate intergroup contact was measured as degree of agreement with two Likert-type items from a separate part of the questionnaire: "I often spend time with people who are not Sinhalese," and "All of the people I consider close friends are Sinhalese" (reversed). The items were summed to create an index of intimate or personal intergroup contact.

Questionnaire translation. The questionnaire was prepared in English by the author following format and item wording guidelines recommended by Brislin (1988). It was trans-

TABLE 2
Salience Hierarchy of Identities for Total Sample

Identity	Mean Salience	SD	n
National identity	4.98	1.09	598
Religious identity	4.80	1.24	599
Racial identity	4.77	1.30	600
Gender identity	4.50	1.33	602
Occupational identity	4.19	1.41	574
Educational identity	4.05	1.17	594
Age identity	4.00	1.29	600
Town/village identity	3.99	1.32	601
Caste identity	3.68	1.65	588
Political identity	3.57	1.50	580
Class identity	3.53	1.22	601

NOTE: Sample sizes vary due to missing values.

lated into Sinhala by a bilingual Sinhala language instructor and subsequently back-translated into English by a bilingual university lecturer. The few discrepancies with the English original were subjected to further rounds of back-translation until an equivalent translation was achieved.

RESULTS

SALIENCE HIERARCHY

Table 2 presents the mean salience ratings for the 11 social identities for the entire sample, ranked in descending order. The psychological predominance of national, religious, and racial identities among the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka—often described but never empirically documented in a large scale survey—is clearly evident in these data.

HYPOTHESIS 1: SELF-ESTEEM

The self-esteem hypothesis was supported for all six status-ranked identities in the study in the positive relationship between the salience of an identity and its ranking in the corresponding social structural status hierarchy (see Figure 1). Linear contrasts (employing the weighted means procedure and one-tailed p values) for the six effects were all statistically significant: for class identity, $t(593) = 4.99$, $p < .001$, $r = .20$; for occupational identity, $t(531) = 8.79$, $p < .001$, $r = .34$; for educational identity, $t(588) = 4.76$, $p < .001$, $r = .19$; for caste identity, $t(571) = 3.16$, $p < .001$, $r = .13$ (effect sizes are the correlations between the linear contrast weights and the individual scores, following Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1997). The analogous t tests for gender identity and town/village identity were also significant, $t(600) = 3.43$, $p < .001$, $r = .14$, and $t(599) = 4.71$, $p < .001$, $r = .21$, respectively. In short, for all six status-ranked identities, identities conferring high social status were more salient at the individual level than identities conferring low social status.
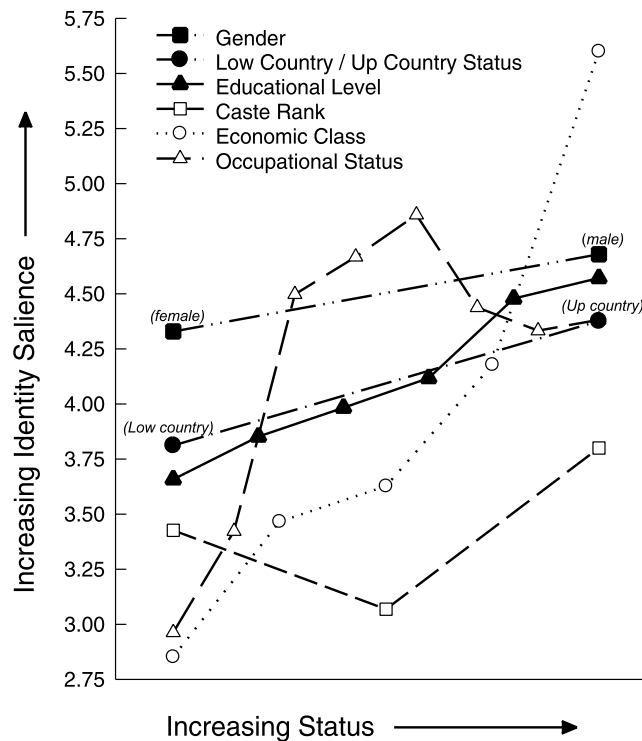
Figure 1:   Relationship Between Identity Status and Identity Salience for Six Status-Ranked Identities

HYPOTHESIS 2: DISTINCTIVENESS

The distinctiveness hypothesis states that one defines the self in terms of a demographic characteristic to the extent that one is in the minority on it in a particular social context. The identities relevant to this hypothesis within the present sample were religion (Buddhist majority vs. Christian minority) and political party. The salience of religious identity for Buddhists who had correctly answered this section (n = 585) was, contrary to prediction, higher (M = 4.82, SD = 1.23) than that of Christians (n = 13, M = 4.14, SD = 1.37), $t(596)$ = 1.97, p = .049 (two-tailed).

For political identity, numerically large parties included the United National Party, the People's Alliance (PA), and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, actually the core of what was the ruling PA coalition at the time of the study. Numerically small political parties in the sample included the People's Liberation Front (JVP), the Independent party, and the Marxist parties: the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), the Sri Lanka Communist Party, and the Peoples' United Front. Marxists, not numerous in the sample, were considered as a single group. Almost 20% of the sample (135 respondents) did not indicate a political party affiliation, and an additional 88 respondents (12.5%) stated that they belonged to no political party. Figure 2 shows how the salience of political identity varied across the remaining respondents.

The distinctiveness hypothesis predicted that political identity salience for members of the first three (small) parties in Figure 2 would exceed that of the latter three. The relevant contrast analysis comparing the first three group means for political identity salience to that of the latter three was statistically significant, $t(474)$ = 2.20, p = .028 (one-tailed), r = .10.
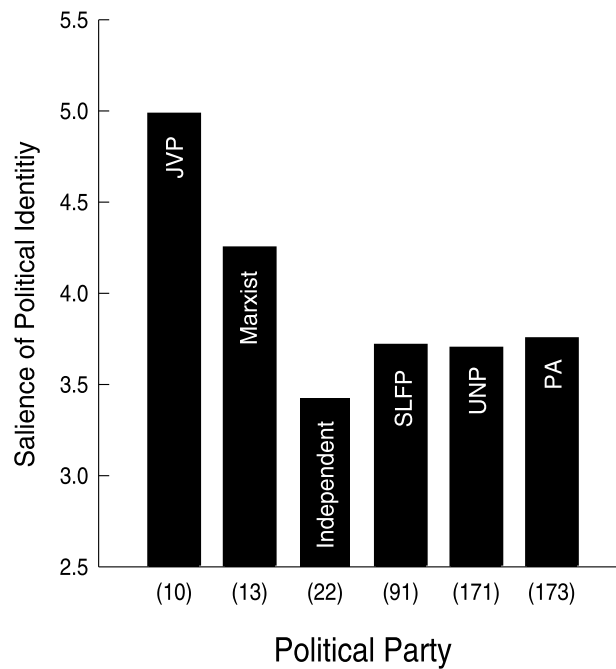
**Figure 2: Salience of Political Identity by Political Party**
NOTE: Sample sizes vary as indicated in parentheses.

HYPOTHESIS 3: SOCIAL CHANGE

The social change hypothesis predicted decreases in the salience of caste, age, gender, and town/village identities and increases in the salience of class, occupational, and educational identities with increasing proximity to urban areas. The two parts of this hypothesis received different levels of support. The salience ratings for traditional ascribed identities were significantly reduced in urban areas; linear contrasts of the mean salience ratings of these four identities across the four levels of urbanization were all significant (see Figure 3), as follows: for caste identity, $t(584) = 2.22$, $p < .013$, $r = .09$; for age identity, $t(596) = 4.18$, $p < .001$, $r = .17$; for town/village identity, $t(597) = 2.11$, $p = .017$, $r = .10$; and for gender identity, $t(598) = 2.24$, $p = .013$, $r = .09$ (all p values are one-tailed). However, modern or achieved social identities were not significantly increased (or decreased) in salience (in linear contrast analyses, all three p values > .10).

HYPOTHESIS 4: INTERGROUP CONTACT

The first prediction of the intergroup contact hypothesis was that racial and religious identity would be more salient in racially and religiously diverse locales (where superficial intergroup contact is frequent). The sample was divided into four categories—three containing respondents from religiously and racially diverse communities (samples obtained from Gampola, Amparai, and Kantale districts) and the last containing respondents from culturally homogenous (Sinhala Buddhist) areas—assessed based on census data from respondents' self-reported town of residence.[5]
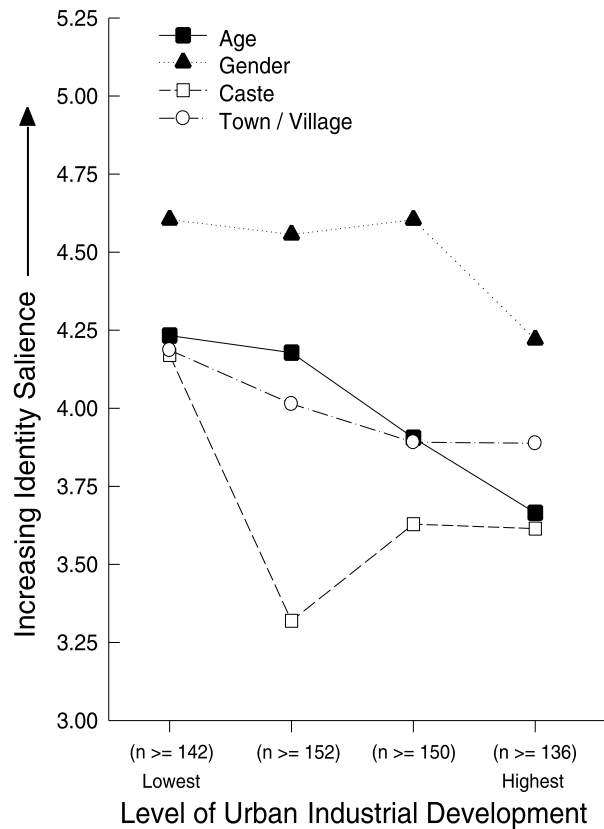
Figure 3: Salience of Four Ascribed Identities by Level of Urban-Industrial Development
NOTE: Sample sizes vary as indicated in parentheses.

Planned contrasts between the four groups comparing the three diverse communities to the homogenous communities in terms of identity salience were significant for both religious and racial identity. For religious identity, using a separate variance estimate, $t(384) = 1.69$, $p = .046$ (one-tailed), and for racial identity, also employing a separate variance estimate, $t(440) = 1.74$, $p = .041$ (one-tailed). The effect size correlations were both $r = .08$. As predicted, religious and racial identities were more salient for those respondents living in culturally diverse communities.

The second part of the intergroup contact hypothesis predicted a negative relationship between the salience of racial or religious identity and the two-item index of intimate intergroup contact. The correlation between racial identity salience and this intergroup contact index was $r(571) = -.20$, $p < .001$, and the corresponding test for religious identity was $r(569) = -.15$, $p < .001$. Racial and religious identities, as predicted, were less salient for those reporting higher levels of intimate intergroup contact on those dimensions of identity.

DISCUSSION

NATIONAL, RACIAL, AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES IN SRI LANKA

The preeminent salience of the identities nation, race, and religion for the entire sample (see Table 2) supports the dominant theme of virtually all social scientific considerations of Sinhalese nationalism published in the past three decades. The salience of these three categories of identity in the present study—consistent with this body of literature—was very strong across all levels of the social structure. The consistent salience of these identities at the individual level is at once an effect of historical and cultural factors (Kemper, 1991) but is also a cause of them, in that their psychological importance will ensure that these issues will remain at the center of Sri Lankan politics for a long time to come. The ongoing civil war, ruefully described as the mother of all problems in this developing country, is one such historical factor: It continues to fuel and to be fueled by the salience of these identities at the individual level.[6]

POSTULATES OF IDENTITY THEORY IN CULTURAL CONTEXT

Self-esteem. The motivation to construct a positive self-image is certainly an essential basis of group identification (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), but acknowledging this tells us nothing about which groups a particular individual will identify with or how strongly he or she will identify with each. The version of the self-esteem hypothesis put forward by social identity theory and tested in the present study, however, presents a more refined analysis: Because many group memberships are ranked in terms of status, placing an emphasis on high-status identities represents an efficient route to achieving a positive self-image, whereas the possession of low-status identities represents an impediment to this goal.

Culture determines the broader social norms that provide the context for constructions of social identity. With regard to self-esteem and social identity, one of the most important normative systems is a culture's degree of emphasis on hierarchical versus egalitarian modes of social relationship. In his cross-cultural study of values, Hofstede (1991) labeled this dimension of cultural variation "Power Distance," and on this dimension Sri Lanka would be classified toward the more hierarchical or power distant end of the continuum (Gunasekera, 1994).

We might predict that individuals in such a hierarchical culture would be more willing to emphasize identities on which they are highly ranked, because this route to achieving a positive self-image is thus socially sanctioned. In addition, the stigma attached to a low-ranking identity should be more readily internalized in hierarchical cultures. Conversely, in more egalitarian cultures, it may be predicted that this route to achieving a positive self-image would be used somewhat less, because such an emphasis runs counter to an egalitarian ethos. These data from Sri Lanka are certainly consistent with this line of reasoning, because the self-esteem hypothesis did receive strong support in this relatively hierarchical cultural context. It remains to be seen whether it will receive similarly strong support in less hierarchically organized cultures.

In an even more significant sense, culture may also influence the strength of the self-esteem motive itself. Recent work in Japan (Heine & Lehman, 1997), for instance, has

suggested that the drive to maintain a positive self-image is simply not as powerful a motiva-tion as in the United States. According to this work, the need for positive self-regard is diminished in Japan and replaced by a need for viewing oneself as a useful, self-critical, and worthy group member. Within the context of the self-esteem hypothesis, then, in Japan the salience of a group identity may depend less on the status of that group within the larger social structure than on one's degree of commitment to and involvement in that group. In summary, if the motivational status of self-esteem does in fact vary across cultural groups, we might reasonably expect that the capacity of the self-esteem hypothesis to predict the salience of individual identities will vary also (cf. Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997).

Distinctiveness. The distinctiveness hypothesis was tested within the context of religious and political identities. In the case of religious identity, majority Buddhist respondents were found to emphasize their religious identity to a greater extent than minority Christian respon-dents. Granted, there were few Christians ($n = 13$) in the sample, but religious identity was so salient for majority Buddhists that it is doubtful that including more Christians in the sample would have reversed this result.

One ad hoc interpretation of this unanticipated finding might be that Sri Lankan Bud-dhists perceive themselves as a minority group in their region of the globe, and hence, these results could be cited as support for the distinctiveness hypothesis. Certainly, that is an often-cited factor contributing to the salience of religious identity for Buddhists in Sri Lanka, but it is a geopolitical factor, not a sociopsychological one. The operative principle in the dis-tinctiveness hypothesis is being a minority in "one's usual social groups" (McGuire, 1984). It would be difficult to argue that the entirety of South Asia constitutes a "usual social group" for the average Sri Lankan Buddhist; and in any case, Christians are also a minority in South Asia.

In the case of political identity, members of small political parties did emphasize political identity to a greater extent than did members of larger parties. A closer analysis of Figure 2, however, revealed one small political party, the Independent party, received the lowest score for political identity salience in the sample. Within the political climate of Sri Lanka, the Independent party is moderate in its policies, whereas the JVP and Marxist parties are radi-cally left wing, and it is members of these latter two parties that demonstrate the highest scores for political identity salience. Therefore, although numerical size and ideological extremism are by no means orthogonal attributes of political parties in the current Sri Lankan context, these results indicate that at least in the case of political identity, it appears that ideo-logical extremism and not numerical minority status per se is what serves to heighten the salience of this identity.

A cultural norm related to the distinctiveness hypothesis, critical to the process of identity construction, is the extent to which a culture emphasizes a multicultural, assimilationist (melting pot) or separatist orientation toward diversity. If a broad multicultural orientation prevails in a culture and in its national policies, then ethnic, religious, or political minorities would be, in theory, more likely to emphasize their minority group identification. In support of this argument, in the current relatively open multiparty democracy in Sri Lanka, numeri-cal and ideological minorities emphasized their political identity more than did members of mainstream political groups. Although in the case of religious identity the pattern was reversed, this does not necessarily rule out the possibility of a link between multiculturalist norms and the salience of minority group identities: Norms regarding the desirability of a multiculturalist attitude may simply differ according to which dimension of identity is under

consideration. Racial and religious identities are bitterly contested in Sri Lanka at the moment, thus heightening the salience of all racial and religious identities. In any case, the relationship between broad cultural attitudes toward diversity and the degree to which minority and majority groups emphasize their racial or political identities merits further research, perhaps in less politically tumultuous environments than Sri Lanka.

Social change. Social structures provide the raw material for the construction of social identity—the groups and institutions with which individual social actors identify. As economic development alters the structural importance of particular objective social categories, then subjective constructions of social identity should also change. The results indicated that the salience of ascribed traditional identities was in fact reduced among urban respondents, as predicted, but that the salience of achieved modern identities was not enhanced relative to rural respondents.

The null results for achieved identities are not terribly damaging to the social change hypothesis, because identity is not a homeostatic system. A reduced identification with one social group does not necessarily imply an increased identification with another to compensate. Perhaps the new, achieved dimensions of identity have simply not taken hold in the Sinhalese urban consciousness, or perhaps they never will; nevertheless, the decline of the salience of traditional dimensions of identity is still consistent with the present formulation of the impact of urban-industrial social change.

Another intriguing possibility is that individuals participating in modern social structures, in response to reduced identification with traditional social categories, may become more individualistic rather than shift their identifications to other social groups. Consistent with this speculation, in a previous study of individualism and collectivism in Sri Lanka (Freeman, 1997), the partial correlation between urban residence and a questionnaire measure of individualism (controlling for income, occupational status, and education) was $r(387) = .30$, $p < .001$.

Intergroup contact. As was the case with all the hypothesis tests in the present study, the supportive results for the contact hypothesis are correlational, not causal in nature. In fact, the relationship between social contact and identity salience is probably reciprocal. Intimate intergroup contact experiences serve to diminish the psychological salience of a group boundary, and this is consistent with the historical tendency to view contact as the independent variable, but these same psychological attitudes also make future intimate and positive contact experiences more likely. Intergroup contact is equally a dependent variable in this attitude-behavior relationship.

TOWARD CROSS-CULTURAL APPLICATION OF THE IDENTITY FRAMEWORK

It is surprising how little cross-cultural work, or even within-culture work in non-Western cultures, has been undertaken within the framework of identity theory to date, because the topic is one ideally suited to cross-cultural psychological analysis. The basic psychological processes of social identification and self-conceptualization are certainly universal, even if the products of these processes are not, and the concepts of identity and self-concept can be operationalized in a reasonably consistent manner across cultures (cf. Deaux, 1996). Moreover, the theoretical framework is flexible, in that it allows radically different self-structures to emerge in different cultures without sacrificing cross-cultural comparability.

This study showed a great deal of within-culture variability in the salience of social identities, but this theoretical framework does permit certain consistencies to emerge at the cultural level as well. The overall salience hierarchy of identities displayed in Table 2 is one important variable that can fruitfully be compared across entire cultural groups. Even where different studies use different measures of identity salience, the rank order of an identity in a salience hierarchy is a variable that can be compared directly across cultural groups with an acceptable degree of equivalence and which may have interesting associations with other culture-level variables such as GDP, level of urbanization, and so on. These intriguing possibilities await the attentions of future research.

NOTES

1. Although acknowledging the socially constructed nature of social categories, in most cases in Sri Lanka it is possible for individuals to consensually define themselves as members of one social category and not another.

2. The terms *race* and *racial* are used because the terms *ethnicity* and *ethnic* in this cultural context lie at the intersection of racial, religious, and linguistic identities, which this article treats as empirically distinct components of the self-concept.

3. This study focuses exclusively on the Sinhalese—the ethnic majority in Sri Lanka in terms of ethnicity—because most of the Sri Lankan Tamil population, the largest ethnic minority in the country, lives in areas where it is currently hazardous if not impossible to travel due to an ongoing civil war.

4. During the design phase of this study, it was supposed that these aspects of an identity might comprise orthogonal factors requiring separate analytical frameworks. As it turned out, all except the sixth item appear to be indicators of a single "importance" or "salience" factor for each identity.

5. For Sinhalese Christians in the sample (valid $n = 13$), it is possible that a case of racial intergroup contact might represent in-group contact on the dimension of religious identity. Virtually all Buddhists are Sinhalese, but there are a fair number of Tamil Christians. Because different intergroup contact effects might potentially emerge for this group, Sinhalese Christians were excluded from all three tests of the intergroup contact hypothesis.

6. No Tamil or other minority respondents were included in the sample, and so it is impossible to evaluate the politically important question of whether equally strong constructions of these identities exist for other ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. The decision not to include Tamils and members of other minority groups in the sample was made in light of practical considerations and should not be construed as implying that the attitudes of the island's minorities are not relevant to the ongoing debate on race and ethnicity in Sri Lanka. They are: Chauvinists and extremists on both sides of the conflict are not in short supply.

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Mark A. Freeman received his Ph.D. in social psychology from Temple University in Philadelphia in 1998. Since then, he has been at Drew University as an assistant professor of psychology and as director of an interdisciplinary program in behavioral science. He is broadly interested in the topic of social identity in terms of explaining its origins in social structural processes as well as its consequences for individual social behavior.