ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Please Your Self: Social Identity Effects on Selective Exposure to News About In- and Out-Groups

Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick[1] & Matthias R. Hastall[2]

1 School of Communication, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210, USA
2 Department of Communication, Zeppelin University Friedrichshafen, Friedrichshafen, Germany

Hypotheses were tested in a secondary data analysis of an experiment on selective exposure to positive and negative news articles about same- and differently aged individuals. A sample of 178 young (18–30 years) and 98 older adults (50–65 years) browsed an online news magazine while reading times were logged by software. Younger individuals (high status, high uncertainty) generally focused their reading on same-aged individuals, with a preference on positive news about this in-group. Older recipients (low-status, low uncertainty) were more likely to select negative news about young individuals than positive news about this out-group and negative news about older individuals. Furthermore, exposure to negative news about younger individuals bolstered older recipients' self-esteem.

Media effects research typically yields small impacts, even though it may be argued that small effect sizes can accumulate to substantial consequences over time (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002). Moreover, the analysis of media effects is much more straightforward if the effect consists of a change; yet it has long been suggested that mass communication mostly reinforces the existing conditions. For example, Klapper's (1960) comprehensive research review was an important contribution to the so-called limited effects view and suggested that media use would primarily reinforce individuals' predispositions. Klapper did not only refer to attitudes but also to groups that an individual belonged to and to group norms.

The idea that preexisting attitudes may channel selective media exposure to the effect that attitude-consistent messages are preferred and used to bolster one's views has received a lot of interest (Donsbach, 1991; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Sears & Freedman, 1967) within the framework of cognitive dissonance

---

Corresponding author: Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick; e-mail: knobloch-westerwick.1@osu.edu

theory (Festinger, 1957). This approach has even coined the traditional meaning of the term *selective exposure*.[1] Yet comparatively little research has examined how predispositions related to social groups affect media choices. If selective exposure to media content occurs due to an interest to maintain a positive view of one's own group, this would most likely be a crucial factor in the seemingly small effects detected by media research—a dominant pattern of selective media use could be reinforcing exposure to positive messages about groups that the individual belongs to. This study aims to address this issue by drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to elaborate on Klapper's (1960) more general statements and by employing experimental selective exposure data. Earlier studies in the media effects context have also worked with social identity theory but did not focus on media choices or did not capture the valence of available messages (see ''Social Identity Theory'' section). In the following sections, we describe theoretical approaches that relate to selective observation of individuals and members of social groups before we present hypotheses for our analysis.

Social cognitive theory

One theoretical approach that has been applied to selective exposure to media characters as they represent social groups (Knobloch, Callison, Chen, Fritzsche, & Zillmann, 2005) is social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001). It conceptualizes media impacts as outcomes of observational learning, as the media provide role models for vicarious experiences. Media users, as every human being, employ observational learning and thus can expand knowledge and skills quickly through information obtained from models presented in the media. Bandura pointed out that selective observation of role models determines what actually influences the individual. Because of communication technologies, modeling influences are no longer confined to patterns exhibited in the immediate environment. In fact, the range of role models to which members in modern societies are exposed on a day-to-day basis has exploded with the expansion of the media landscape. Given the cornucopia of role models, selectivity in observational learning is evidently pivotal.

Bandura (2001) emphasizes the rich variety of role models depicted in the media but offers little explanation on what guides role model selections. More detail was given on motivational effects of models that can serve as basis to derive assumptions on model selections. Social learning and vicarious influence are enhanced by a similarity between the model and the self (Bandura, 2001, p. 283). When the model is similar, observers may find it more likely that they can reach comparable performances to produce the same results. Yet the kind of observed results needs to be considered. Outcomes of observed behavior can be positive, thus functioning as incentive, or negative, presenting a disincentive. The former outcome inhibits adoption of the observed behavior, whereas the latter disinhibits it in the interest of prevention.

Social cognitive theory of mass communication offers a very plausible interpretation of the preoccupation of media content with depictions of individuals. The basis

for inferring hypotheses on selective exposure to media characters is limited, though, as the theory only suggests that similar role models will be preferred. This preference should not depend on outcomes of the role models' behavior, because both positive and negative outcomes can guide behavior and are, therefore, of interest for the individual.

Social comparison framework

Another psychological framework that has been utilized to explain how media users choose from the cornucopia of media information about individuals (Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2006; Knobloch-Westerwick & Romero, 2009) is social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954). It has also been a key foundation for social identity theory, which will be discussed in the next section. Social comparisons may either occur in real life or mediated through mass communication. Virtually all of the psychological concepts that we use to characterize ourselves (e.g., intelligence, attractiveness, sensitivity) involve qualities that only acquire meaning in a comparative context. According to Festinger, individuals thus frequently engage in social comparisons and prefer to compare themselves to others who are similar, as this provides a more precise evaluation of one's opinions or abilities.

Hence, predictions from social comparison theory are equivalent to social cognitive theory predictions—media users should prefer to look at *similar* others portrayed in the media. Furthermore, like social cognitive theory, social comparison research can explain selective exposure to portrayals of individuals in both positive and negative situations. The social comparison framework offers two routes—motivations and self-esteem—to actually predict whether positive or negative portrayals of others will be preferred.

Social comparisons can be driven by different motivations. For instance, Wood (1989) concluded that in addition to the self-evaluation goal emphasized by Festinger, social comparison can also be guided by self-improvement and self-enhancement goals. Depending on motivation, individuals will seek out (a) upward comparisons with others who are in a more positive situation than oneself to learn in the interest of self-improvement or (b) downward comparisons with others who are in a more negative situation than oneself to feel better about oneself for self-enhancement (Butler, 1992).

A second factor that is considered to influence choices of upward and downward comparisons is self-esteem. Wills (1981, 1991) suggested that individuals with low self-esteem favor downward comparisons to enhance their own self-esteem, at least temporarily. Yet Swann's self-verification concept (Swann, Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2003) implies that people seek information that supports preexisting self-views in the interest of coherence, even if these self-views are negative. More recent research, however, yielded evidence that individuals with low self-esteem prefer upward comparisons because they are more interdependent and like to affiliate with more successful others (Vohs & Heatherton, 2004). In contrast, people with high self-esteem are more

independent, so they utilize downward comparisons to set themselves apart and to maintain their self-esteem.

In brief, both social comparison theory and social cognitive theory can account for selective exposure to portrayals of others in (comparatively) positive and negative situations, yet social comparison research offers more specific explanations on why the one or the other will be preferred.

Social identity theory

Another approach from social psychology that has recently attracted more attention in communication research (Hogg & Reid, 2006; Reid, Giles, & Abrams, 2004) and that also relates to the phenomenon of selective exposure to individuals portrayed in the media is social identity theory. Social identity has been suggested to influence media choices in several ways. Two core individual-level motivations are proposed to guide social identity processes—(a) self-enhancement as motive to maintain or increase a positive view of the self and (b) uncertainty reduction as drive to gather information about one's self and the social world (Reid & Hogg, 2005). Hence, individuals seek out particular messages that enhance their social identities, essentially by providing favorable social comparisons with out-groups (Blumer, 1985; Harwood, 1999). Furthermore, media are used to learn about salient out-groups (Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973) or about their in-groups, in part to support conceptions of the relative positions of out-group and in-group.

Tajfel (1978, p. 63) conceptualized social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership." The theory claims that people structure their social worlds into groups and categorize themselves into selected groups, a process that has been described as self-categorization (Turner, 1985). The following principles of social identity theory are of key interest to the current research: "Individuals strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem [. . .] Individuals strive to achieve or to maintain positive social identity. Positive social identity is based to a large extent on favorable comparisons that can be made between the in-group and some relevant out-groups" (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p. 15). This reasoning evidently has its roots in Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory explained above. In situations where a particular in-group identity becomes salient, individuals seek to maintain, protect, or enhance this identity (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Low group status is of particular interest, as its salience instigates a threat to social identity. Tajfel and Turner propose several response strategies to such threat—social creativity is the strategy of greatest interest for the current research and can be described as follows. "The group members may seek positive distinctiveness for the in-group by redefining or altering the elements of the comparative situations [. . .] [For instance, by] Comparing the in-group to the out-group on some new dimension" (Tajfel & Turner, 1986 pp. 19–20).

As the social identity perspective has undergone further elaboratation, uncertainty reduction has been suggested to play a pivotal role for in-group identification (for an overview, see Hogg, 2007). Subjective uncertainty, especially regarding one's self-concept and identity, is said to be aversive, resulting in the motivation to reduce uncertainty; self-categorization in particular reduces uncertainty and provides clarity about one's identity and behavioral expectations. This reasoning from the social identity framework appears to overlap somewhat with the interest in social learning from observing others that are perceived as similar in the social cognitive framework (Bandura, 2001), as well as with the goal of self-evaluation drawing on similar others described in the social comparison context (Festinger, 1954). Similarity in these two other frameworks could be considered to correspond with an in-group categorization. However, social cognitive theory and social comparison theory pertain to interpersonal processes, whereas the social identity perspective draws on intergroup processes, in which individuals can be seen as prototypes for groups.

Assuming that these two core motivations of uncertainty reduction and self-enhancement guide social identity processes gives rise to the interesting question of when one motivation might override the other or how the two might interact. The experimental evidence at hand indicates that the uncertainty motive can override concerns about group status and self-enhancement (Hogg, 2007; Reid & Hogg, 2005). People with high uncertainty are motivated to reduce this uncertainty, irrespective of consequences for self-evaluation; people with low uncertainty are motivated by self-enhancement.

In contrast to social cognitive theory and social comparison theory, social identity theory offers explanations on why media users may take an interest in portrayals of dissimilar others in the media. Obviously, many media reports pertain to members of groups that a particular media recipient does not belong to and may garner attention nonetheless. According to social identity theory, individuals should prefer positive information about in-group members and negative information about out-group members, in an interest to bolster positive views of the own group, and as a result, of the self.

Relationships between social identity and behavior have been examined for a wide variety of social groups (e.g., age groups, ethnic groups, gender groups, and the like; Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Robinson, 1996; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Research in the media context, however, is scarce. There are a few studies, however, that have drawn on this framework to examine media effects on self-esteem or media use gratifications and are thus related to the current research.

Abrams and Giles (2007) conducted a survey that ascertained respondents' self-reported motivations of media use gratifications. This study found that African Americans with stronger ethnic group identity reported avoiding TV programs that lacked Black characters to which they could relate. Building on a uses-and-gratifications framework, this study relied on participants' introspections and recall of media use and use motivations.

Harwood (1997, 1999) and Trepte (2004) examined media content preferences in light of social identity theory, using age, biological sex, or nationality to define social groups. However, valence of the portrayals of these social groups was not considered in this research. Thus a crucial part of social identity theory predictions—do media users prefer positive portrayals of in-group members and negative portrayals of out-group members?—was actually not examined. Effects of media exposure on self-esteem were investigated by Harwood (1999) but no connections with media choices emerged.

Furthermore, experimental work on exposure effects on self-esteem has employed a social identity framework. Mastro (2003, study 2) reports a very weak but significant enhancement of White's self-esteem after exposure to crime drama featuring a Latino murderer compared to seeing the same material with a White actor presented as murderer. Mastro, Behm-Morawitz, and Kopacz (2008) again found inconsistent and weak evidence in line with social identity theory in one out of three experimental groups, consisting of a correlation between ethnic group identification and self-esteem increase after media exposure that allowed favorable group comparison. These studies, however, used a forced-exposure setting and did not look at message choices as a precondition for any of the studied effects.

Current research

The three approaches presented above offer explanations for exposure to depictions of individuals in positive and negative situations—observational learning about rewarded and punished behavior (Bandura, 2001), upward and downward comparisons for self-motivation and self-enhancement, and preference for portrayals of in-group members in positive contexts and out-group members in negative contexts. However, only social identity theory allows deriving hypotheses on motivations to look at others that are perceived as dissimilar. In contrast, both social cognitive theory and social comparison theory imply that we focus our selective attention on those who are similar. Yet rigorous tests of social identity predictions for selective media exposure still define a void.

The current investigation aims to tackle this phenomenon through a secondary data analysis of an experiment that was originally designed to test hypotheses on preferences for portrayals of similar others (same age, same sex) derived from social comparison theory (Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2006). Overall, it yielded clear evidence that media recipients prefer portrayals of similar others. However, in contrast to expectations and unlike younger media users, older recipients did not discern media messages along these lines and were equally interested in portrayals of young and same-aged characters. The current reanalysis aims to disentangle why the older recipients showed this unexpected pattern. Hence, the current investigation utilizes age as a characteristic that is crucial for social identity (McCann, Kellerman, Giles, Gallois, & Viladot, 2004).

We suspect that differences in identity uncertainty as well as in perceived group status between young and older participants have produced these dissimilar behaviors. A younger age has frequently been associated with high-identity uncertainty (Honess & Yardley, 1987); older age is often subject to negative stereotypes of ageism (Giles & Reid, 2005). Youth is generally considered an ideal in western industrialized countries (McCann et al., 2004). Thus, older recipients may aim to enhance their social identity through favorable social comparisons, whereas young recipients are probably more concerned with reducing identity uncertainty. We assume that the older media recipients allotted equal exposure to portrayals of young and older characters because they favored negative portrayals of the young out-group and positive portrayals of the same-aged in-group. For young media recipients, an in-group focus addresses greater identity uncertainty that is characteristic for young age. Furthermore, young recipients possibly considered the portrayals of older adults less relevant given that they represent a low-status group, comparatively speaking. The social identity framework, however, implies that even the high-status group aims to maintain a positive social identity. Based on these considerations, the following hypotheses are subject to empirical tests.

> **H1:** Recipients with comparatively low group status and low identity uncertainty (older group) will prefer negative news over positive news about a high-status out-group,

> **H2:** Recipients with comparatively low group status and low identity uncertainty (older group) will prefer positive news over negative news about the in-group.

> **H3:** Recipients with comparatively high-identity uncertainty (young group) will prefer news about the in-group over news about an out-group.

> **H4:** Recipients with comparatively high group status and with high-identity uncertainty (young group) will prefer positive news over negative news about the in-group.

Furthermore, in this originally used research context of social comparison, a positive view of the self is more often considered a determinant of social comparison choices, whereas social identity theory conceptualizes it as an outcome of favorable comparisons of the in-group with an out-group.[2] Accordingly, the original analysis employed self-esteem as a selective exposure predictor only. In contrast, the current reanalysis looks at self-esteem as potentially influenced by selective media exposure. Prior media research has not found such impact (Harwood, 1999). Yet it must be noted that the original experiment employed a measure of global personal trait self-esteem, which will be less sensitive to the predicted impacts than a specific social state self-esteem (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998).

> **H5:** Exposure to negative news about ''out-groups'' enhances self-esteem among recipients with comparatively low group status.

> **H6:** Exposure to positive news about ''in-groups'' enhances self-esteem among recipients with comparatively low group status.

Method

Overview

Young and older adults (18–30 vs. 50–65 years) browsed through an online news magazine before completing a questionnaire. During the scheduled 4-minute browsing time, reading of specific news reports was unobtrusively logged. This selective exposure measure indicated comparison choices with in-group and out-group members. After the browsing period, participants completed a questionnaire including a self-esteem measure.

Eight manipulated articles focused on an individual and varied by age group (18–30 vs. 50–65 years) of the individual portrayed in the text and in an image and valence of the news story (positive vs. negative). The effectiveness of these stimuli manipulations regarding age and valence had been established in a pretest. To avoid influences of particular article topics, the associations between articles and photos as well as the age indication in the news lead were rotated; articles were presented with either positive or negative emphasis.

Recipients' age group (18–30 vs. 50–65 years) served as between-group factor. The dependent measures were exposure for positive articles about younger adults, negative articles about younger adults, positive articles about older adults, and negative articles about older adults. Furthermore, any impacts of selective exposure on self-esteem ascertained after exposure were analyzed.

Respondents

For the pretest of the stimulus materials, 138 German participants were recruited from a general education university course on art history and via personal contacts in order to include middle-aged respondents. Of the 60 male respondents, 41 were in the age group 18–30 years and 19 in the 50–65 years group. Of the 70 female participants, 50 belonged to the younger age group (18–30 years) and 20 to the older age group (50–65 years). The younger age category had an average age of 21.0 years ($SD = 2.1$), the middle-aged categories' average age was 57.5 years ($SD = 5.6$).

For the main experiment, participants were recruited from introductory computer courses at German universities and from a German community college with courses for a broad range of age groups. Any participants of the age range 31–49 years were excluded from the analyses, which resulted in a sample size of 276, 154 men and 122 women. Of the 154 men, 108 were in the age group 18–30 years and 46 in the 50–65 years group. Of the 122 women, 70 belonged to the younger age group (18–30 yrs) and 52 to the middle-aged category (50–65 years). The total average age was 34.0 years. The average age was 21.0 ($SD = 2.1$) in the "young" group and 57.5 ($SD = 5.6$) in the older group.

Pretest

Great care was taken to approach a stimuli set with ideal characteristics. The design required photos of individuals that were unambiguous regarding the individuals'

Table 1 Pretest ($n = 138$) Categorizations Into Age Groups and "Likeable" Ratings for Individuals Depicted in Portrait Photos

	Desired Age Group Categorizations (%)		Average Ratings for "Likeable"	
	Young adults	Older adults	Young adults	Older adults
Photos featuring young individuals (18–30 years)				
Photo 1	95	88	3.1	3.3
Photo 2	76	68	3.3	3.7*
Photo 3	75	73	3.6	3.7
Photo 4	89	75	3.6	3.7
Photos featuring older individuals (51–65 years)				
Photo 5	73	75	3.3	4.0*
Photo 6[a]	62	69	3.7	3.6
Photo 7	74	70	3.1	3.5
Photo 8	76	80	4.1	4.0

[a]36 versus 31% categorized the depicted individual in the >65 years group.
*Indicates significant difference, $p < .05$, between age groups.

age and articles with clear valence differentiations, yet equivalent interest levels for positive and negative news. We report only results from a second pretest that was conducted after the first attempt had not yielded a stimuli set with satisfactory characteristics.

Portrait photos were displayed via laptop presentation. This allowed the showing of a set of 40 pictures in full color instead of b&w paper versions. Respondents received a questionnaire that contained questions (translated) on age categorizations ("The person on image <#>; is below 18 years/18–30 years/31–49 years/50–65 years/older than 65 years.") and on perceptions of how "likeable" the portrayed individual was on a 5-point scale. As Table 1 shows, the eight photos selected for the main experiment differentiated clearly regarding the age group of the depicted individuals and did so in both age groups. Six of the eight images yielded about the same ratings for "likeable"; one portrait of a younger individual and one portrait of an older individual were rated higher by the older age group. The final selection of portraits featured two women and two men for each age group.

Furthermore, the questionnaire presented 14 news leads (headline and subheadline). For the pretest, the news leads did not indicate the age of the key individual from the article. Respondents rated these brief news leads based on the questions (translated) "How positive or negative is the event reported in the article in your opinion?" (11-point scale, ranging from *very negative* to *very positive*) and "How interesting is the article in your judgment?" (11-point scale, ranging from *very interesting* to *very uninteresting*). The eight news leads that were selected for the manipulation

in the main experiment yielded significant differences throughout for the valence questions (on average $M = 3.0$ vs. 7.3, $F[1, 135] = 269.5$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .67$) and no significant differences for the interest question (*n.s.*). This pattern also held up when differentiating by age of the pretest respondents, with the exception of one news lead which produced a valence difference that fell short of significance in the older pretest respondent group (Table 2).

Experimental procedure

Respondents were asked to participate in the study in a computer laboratory. After the general greeting, they were instructed as follows (translated): "We would like to present a test version of an online magazine to you that it is not yet available on the Internet. In the following, you will have some time to gain an impression of the magazine. Then a questionnaire will be uploaded automatically so you can evaluate the magazine. Please note that time does not allow you to read all of the articles. Thus please just look at the articles that you find interesting, just as you normally would." Then participants were asked to start a web browser and to enter the link to the experimental online magazine.

The remaining procedure was entirely computer-based. The introduction page, showing a header logo of the hosting German university, essentially presented the same information as the verbal instruction. After participants clicked a "continue" button, the screen displayed the experimental online magazine. After 4 minutes of browsing time, a three-page questionnaire was uploaded.

The first questionnaire page collected evaluations of the news site but mainly served to provide closure for participants. The second questionnaire page featured the Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale. Finally, participants reported their age and sex on the third page before they were debriefed.

Experimental materials

The experimental WWW magazine was programmed specifically for this study and ran on a server at a German university. The overview page (Figure 1) showed 10 news leads that each contained a headline, a subheadline, a small photograph, and a "more" hyperlink to access the actual article. Whenever a participant accessed or exited an article page via hyperlinks, a Perl script logged the activity to accumulate selective exposure times.

All articles were about the same length (352–358 words). Two of the presented articles, featuring the topics of debit card crime and sea horses, served to veil the research interest and remained constant across experimental versions. The remaining eight articles focused on events concerning an individual and were experimentally manipulated. Following the research design, each article was prepared in eight versions. Thus the same topic was presented with either positive or negative outcome, focusing on a male or a female, and focusing on a young (18–30 years) or a middle-aged individual (50–65 years). The valence variation was achieved by indicating different outcomes in the headlines in the news lead. For example, one article

Table 2 Pretest (n = 138) Ratings for Valence and Interest for News Leads

| Article (head-line keyword) | Valence (Higher Ratings Indicate Positive Tone) | | | | Interest (Higher Ratings Indicate More Interest) | | | |
| | Young adults | | Older adults | | Young adults | | Older adults | |
	Positive version	Negative version	Positive version	Negative version	Positive version	Negative version	Positive version	Negative version
Malpractice	5.7	1.8*	6.0	3.6*	4.8	4.9	3.7	4.3
Visitation	6.0	3.3*	4.9	4.0	5.6	6.0	6.2	6.0
Abandoned	3.6	1.9*	2.6	2.0*	5.5	4.9	5.8	6.0
Technician	7.2	2.2*	6.1	2.6*	5.5	4.8	3.9	4.7
Diving	7.5	1.9*	6.1	2.9*	6.6	5.2	5.4	4.8
Meningitis	8.0	2.0*	7.6	3.4*	4.6	5.3	3.4	4.3
Company	7.5	2.3*	7.1	2.6*	5.7	6.0	4.1	5.1
Charity	8.3	1.9*	8.1	2.5*	4.6	4.3	5.1	3.4

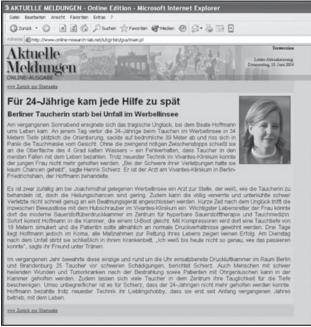*Indicates significant difference, $p < .05$, within age groups.

Figure 1 Screenshots of overview page and article page (examples).

featured the headline (translated) "Patient awarded 250,000 Euro in malpractice lawsuit" for the positive version versus "Brain-damaged patient loses appeal—Lack of malpractice evidence forces patient to pay back 250,000 Euro" for the negative version. Another example was titled (translated) "Visitation rights gained after daring protest—Demonstration at 100 feet high a success" for a positive article versus "Visitation rights denied despite daring protest—Demonstration at 100 feet high in vain" for a negative article. The topics of the eight manipulated reports were (a) the financial success/failure of an interior design company, (b) job changes of an employee in transportation business, (c) a diving accident, (d) organization of a charity event, (e) a life-threatening act of an abandoned lover, (f) a divorced parent's protest for visitation rights, (g) a meningitis case, and (h) a malpractice lawsuit.

The age variations were apparent both through portrait photos associated with the reports and through information on the individuals incorporated in the news leads that mentioned age. As explained above, a pretest was conducted to ensure the effectiveness of the valence treatment via the headlines; furthermore the pretest ascertained that the individuals were perceived to fit into the relevant age category. For each age group, two images of males and two images of females were employed.

To prevent possible confounding, the associations of article topic with sex/age-group combinations were rotated in eight different arrangements. The positions in which specific combinations thereof appeared on the overview page were furthermore counterbalanced (four versions). Finally, each sex/age-group combination was presented with one of two portrait photos. Thus these systematic rotations resulted in 64 versions of the overview page of the experimental newsmagazine, which were randomly assigned to participants.

Dependent measures
Dependent measures for selective exposure were derived from logged hyperlink use for specific articles and referred to exposure to (a) negative articles about young characters, (b) positive articles about young characters, (c) negative articles about older characters, and (d) positive articles about an older character. Three different measures of selective exposure were employed: any exposure or exposure likelihood (0/1), number of selected articles (0/1/2), and exposure time in seconds.

To ascertain self-esteem after selective exposure, the 10 items from the German version of the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Ferring & Filipp, 1996; Rosenberg, 1965), with a 5-point response format (0 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*), were presented after the browsing period.

Results

Preliminary analyses
The self-esteem scale was reliable in both age groups (Cronbach's α = .84 for younger participants and .80 for older participants). The sum score did not differ significantly by age group (M = 29.0 and 30.0, SD = .66 and .64).

Effects of age on selective exposure

To test hypotheses 1–4, mixed analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with age group of featured character and valence of the news article as within-group factors and age group of news recipient as between-group factor were conducted. Thus the four repeated dependent measures referred to exposure to (a) negative articles about young characters, (b) positive articles about young characters, (c) negative articles about older characters, and (d) positive articles about older characters. The three selective exposure measures—exposure likelihood, number of selected articles, and exposure times—yielded the same effect patterns in the ANOVA but subsequent comparisons showed slightly different results.

Interactions between recipient age and featured character's age emerged ($F[1, 272] = 11.2$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .040$ for exposure likelihood; $F[1, 272] = 11.5$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .041$ for number of selected articles; $F[1, 272] = 11.7$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .041$ for exposure times). These interactions, however, were qualified by valence of the news stories, resulting in a three-way interaction ($F[1, 272] = 6.7$, $p = .010, \eta^2 = .024; F[1, 272] = 5.0, p = .026, \eta^2 = .018; F[1, 272] = 4.6, p = .033$, $\eta^2 = .017$). No other effects approached significance. Group means and subsequent tests are reported in Table 3 and illustrated in Figure 2.

Older news recipients were more likely to select negative content about young adults than positive articles about this "out-group," which supports H1. They were also significantly less likely to pick negative content about the age "in-group"

Table 3 Selective Exposure to Positive and Negative Articles Featuring Young or Older Individuals (18–30 vs. 50–65 years) by Age Group of News Recipient

	Exposure Likelihood		Articles Selected		Exposure Time	
	Young readers	Older readers	Young readers	Older readers	Young readers	Older readers
Positive news about young individuals	.63A	.43A***	.77A	.50**	41A	23a***
Negative news about young individuals	.53B	.55B	.59B	.61	33B	31b
Positive news about older individuals	.33C	.51AB**	.37C	.53**	19C	32b**
Negative news about older individuals	.35C	.44A	.39C	.52*	21C	27ab

Note: Means in a column with different uppercase letters differ at $p < .05$ (one-sided test), with different lowercase letters at $p < .10$, Sidak correction for multiple comparisons. Pairs of means in a row within a top-heading column with *** differ at $p \leq .001$ and with ** at $p < .01$.
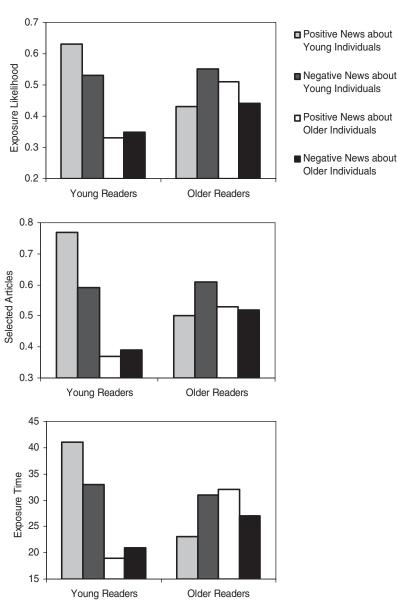
Figure 2 Selective exposure to news about in- and out-groups as defined by age.

than about the age "out-group." No formal hypothesis had been proposed on this comparison (within valence and between portrayed character-groups) but the pattern fits well into the social identity framework. Even though they clicked on more positive messages about individuals from their own age range than on negative messages about same-aged people (in line with H2), this difference was not significant. For number of selected articles, comparisons within the older recipient group yielded no significant

differences. For exposure times, older news recipients tended to spend more time on negative messages than on positive messages about young individuals (in line with H1) but this difference fell short of significance.

Young news recipients showed an overall significantly greater interest in coverage of same-age individuals, resulting in equally low interest for positive and negative articles about older individuals, in line with H3. However, young news readers' exposure to positive news about same-aged individuals was significantly higher than exposure to negative news about same-aged individuals. This pattern applied to all three measures of selective exposure and corroborates H4.

Effects of selective exposure on self-esteem

To test H5 and H6, regression analyses with the same dependent variables as criteria were conducted separately for the age groups, as reported in Table 4. No significant effects were found for the young news recipients. Older news recipients, however, scored higher in self-esteem if they had chosen to look at negative content about young individuals or if the number of selected articles with such content was higher. Their exposure time for negative news about young individuals was weakly linked to higher self-esteem scores as well. Thus H5 received support but H6 was not supported.

Discussion

The current examination drew on social identity theory to derive hypotheses on selective exposure to news that showed members of different social groups in positive and negative circumstances. Age served as the characteristic to define different social

Table 4 Effects of Selective Exposure to Positive and Negative Articles Featuring Young or Older Individuals (18−30 vs. 50−65 years) on Self-Esteem by Age Group of News Recipient (beta weights)

	Exposure Likelihood		Articles Selected		Exposure Time	
	Young readers	Older readers	Young readers	Older readers	Young readers	Older readers
Positive news about young individuals	.05	.07	.01	.08	−.03	.06
Negative news about young individuals	.10	.32**	.06	.31**	−.02	.21*
Positive news about older individuals	.10	.07	.08	.07	−.03	.03
Negative news about older individuals	.01	.05	.02	.05	.07	.07
R^2	.018	.128	.009	.120	.008	.040

Note: Beta weights with ** are significant at $p < .01$, with * at $p < .067$.

groups. The findings do not corroborate what social cognitive theory and social comparison theory would predict, namely an overarching preference for portrayals of similar others. However, the results offer support for four out of six hypotheses derived from the social identity framework.

We expected that news about in-groups would be generally preferred if they featured positive events, compared to news about in-group members in negative circumstances. Indeed, young recipients preferred positive news about same-aged individuals who represented the in-group in this case and were less inclined to read negative articles about same-aged individuals. As younger adults can be considered a high-status group, comparatively speaking, this supports H4. However, among older recipients, the expected pattern was too weak to reach significance (failing to support H2). Furthermore, we predicted that members of low status, low identity uncertainty group prefer negative news over positive news when the news stories pertain to out-group members (H1). Older recipients were considered to meet these group criteria and indeed showed this preference, rendering support for this prediction. Moreover, young recipients as high-identity uncertainty group did not discern news about a low-status out-group based on message valence and simply showed a generally low interest in these messages; most likely, their high-identity uncertainty led them to focus on information on their in-group (in line with H3). Finally, the prediction that exposure to negative news about a high-status out-group enhances self-esteem among low-status group members (H5) was supported. Older recipients indicated higher self-esteem after more exposure to negative messages about young age-group members. Exposure to positive news about the low-status in-group did not have the hypothesized enhancing effect on self-esteem, failing to support H6.

Various limitations of the current investigation must be considered. For instance, the age groups were linked to low/high status and identity uncertainty based on prior research; no concurring data were collected from the current sample. Furthermore, we conducted a secondary data analysis. One could argue that the data at hand offer a more rigorous test for social identity predictions for media preferences than what has been available so far, because the valence of the media messages is accounted for and plays a crucial role in the theoretical framework. However, the self-esteem measure we used to detect effects of selective exposure on positive views of the self is a measure of global personal trait self-esteem and unlikely to reflect possibly subtle impacts on self-views. Indeed, Rubin and Hewstone (1998) reviewed the pertinent literature and found that tests of the social identity theory's self-esteem hypotheses that employed such measures yielded unsupportive evidence almost as frequently as supportive evidence, whereas measures of specific, social, and especially situational self-esteem yielded more supportive evidence. The effects we found for self-esteem as dependent measure are thus remarkable, yet a more variable measure for valence of self views would have been more appropriate. Ideally, baseline trait self-esteem should be measured in a separate session prior to the selective exposure browsing period. This would also rule out the possibility that self-esteem might govern reading choices instead of being affected by the selective reading.

Another factor that may have prevented stronger and more consistent effects is age as characteristic to define social groups. Young and older groups, as defined here, are not clearly segregated social segments. In contrast, many close relationships with people from the so-called out-group will often exist, as one's parents or children will be members of the out-group. Hence, many media recipients will feel more affiliated with an out-group that is defined by age compared to alternative definitions of social groups, such as nationalities or supporters of political agendas. Furthermore, a measure of age-group identification would have addressed variations along these lines and should be included in similar future research.

Regardless of these limitations, the current examination yielded promising support for the social identity hypotheses. It might even instigate some reinterpretations of earlier findings that showed that African Americans are more discerning along the lines of featured characters' race than Whites are (Knobloch-Westerwick, Appiah, & Alter, 2008). It had been suggested that the mere fact of being a member of a numeric minority increases higher group salience. However, it might be the membership in a low-status group that resulted in these patterns, if ageism and racism can be considered comparable as negative stereotyping phenomena.

The current research fleshes out what Klapper (1960) proposed in basic terms only when he suggested that media use primarily reinforces individuals' preexisting attitudes and groups-related norms, resulting in "limited effects." Indeed, social identity channels media use and subsequent effects such as bolstering self-esteem. This channeling will depend on potentially complex constellations of identity uncertainty, group status, and additional related perceptions of stability, legitimacy, and permeability of groups or of their status (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Clearly, the information exposure is not "neutral"—many biases along the lines of identity will shape message selections. However, what looks like a bias can also be considered a functional approach that fosters identity coherence and social orientation, as well as positive self-regard. Along these lines, media use can, at best, reduce social conflict but may also prevent social change for the better. Groups with high-identity certainty and high status and resulting higher self-esteem (in simplistic terms—White, male, heterosexual, middle-class or higher) may allot more time to media exposure that actually helps them to adjust to the environment in ways that go beyond group-related information, given that they should be less preoccupied with resolving uncertain identity aspects and self-enhancement. Given that the subsequent outcomes will often consist of *strengthening* the status quo, the seemingly limited effects described by Klapper may be massive after all.

Future research needs to examine other social identity categories—such as nationalities, ethnicies, or political partisanship—while addressing shortcomings from the current project. The framework should not only apply to news and information in the media; it may also explain the appeal of entertainment genres and the like, such as humor and comedy (Zillmann & Cantor, 1972), political satire, and gossip magazines and celebrity news (Zillmann & Knobloch, 2001). An obvious extension of the current research is to examine other outcomes, in

addition to bolstering self-esteem. For example, media exposure that bolsters the "social self" might strengthen preexisting support for group-relevant political issues (e.g., Medicare in the context of age groups).

Going beyond the probably more common pattern of status reinforcement, it would be of great interest to specify the circumstances under which selective exposure can lead to subsequent attitude change or greater out-group tolerance. In other words, when do media users venture into messages that challenge their attitudes and current group memberships? This knowledge could support balanced opinion formation in a democracy, as well as tolerance and acceptance of diversity. Social identity theory aims to explain social stasis as well as social change—we may have just begun to understand the role of selective media use in these processes (Reid et al., 2004).

Notes

1   Nowadays, selective exposure usually coins observations that media users do not allocate their media choices and time equally to the available cornucopia of media messages and demonstrate preference and avoidance patterns due to situational circumstances and personality factors (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2006, 2008; Zillmann & Bryant, 1985).

2   Even though many social identity studies employed self-esteem as predictor of in-group bias, this approach was not endorsed by the theory's authors Tajfel and Turner (1986), see also Aberson, Healy, and Romero (2000).

References

Aberson, C. L., Healy, M., & Romero, V. (2000). Ingroup bias and self-esteem: A meta-analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, **4**(2), 157–173.

Abrams, J. R., & Giles, H. (2007). Ethnic identity gratifications selection and avoidance by African Americans: A group vitality and social identity gratifications perspective. *Media Psychology*, **9**(1), 115–134.

Abrams, D., & Hogg, M. A. (1990). Social identification, self-categorization, and social influence. *European Review of Social Psychology*, **1**(1), 195–228.

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory of mass communication. *Media Psychology*, **3**(3), 265–299.

Blumer, J. G. (1985). The social character of media gratifications. In K. E. Rosengren, L. A. Wenner & P. Palmgreen (Eds.), *Media gratifications research* (pp. 41–60). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Butler, R. (1992). What young people want to know when: Effects of mastery and ability goals on interest in different kinds of social comparisons. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **62**(6), 934–943.

Donsbach, W. (1991). *Medienwirkung trotz Selektion: Einflußfaktoren auf die Zuwendung zu Zeitungsinhalten* [Media effects despite selection: Factors influencing selective attention to newspaper contents]. Cologne, Germany: Böhlau.

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, **7**(2), 117–140.

Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Ferring, D., & Filipp, S.-H. (1996). Messung des Selbstwertgefühls: Befunde zu Reliabilität, Validität und Stabilität der Rosenberg-Skala [Measuring self-esteem: Findings about the reliability, validity, and stability of the Rosenberg scale]. *Diagnostica*, **42**(3), 284–292.

Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., Signorielli, N., & Shanahan, J. (2002). Growing up with television: Cultivation processes. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (pp. 43–67). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Giles, H., & Reid, S. A. (2005). Ageism across the lifespan: Towards a self-categorization model of ageing. *Journal of Social Issues*, **61**(2), 389–404.

Harwood, J. (1997). Viewing age: Lifespan identity and television viewing choices. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, **41**(2), 203–213.

Harwood, J. (1999). Age identification, social identity gratifications, and television viewing. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, **43**(1), 123–136.

Hogg, M. A. (2007). Uncertainty-identity theory. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 39, pp. 69–126). San Diego, CA: Elsevier.

Hogg, M. A., & Reid, S. A. (2006). Social identity, self-categorization, and the communication of group norms. *Communication Theory*, **16**(1), 7–30.

Honess, T., & Yardley, K. (Eds.). (1987). *Self and identity: Perspectives across the lifespan*. New York: Routledge.

Katz, E., Gurevitch, M., & Haas, H. (1973). On the use of the mass media for important things. *American Sociological Review*, **38**(2), 164–181.

Knobloch, S., Callison, C., Chen, L., Fritzsche, A., & Zillmann, D. (2005). Children's sex-stereotyped self-socialization through selective exposure to entertainment: Cross-cultural experiments in Germany, China, and the United States. *Journal of Communication*, **55**(1), 122–138.

Knobloch-Westerwick, S. (2006). Mood management: Theory, evidence, and advancements. In J. Bryant & P. Vorderer (Eds.), *The psychology of entertainment* (pp. 239–254). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Knobloch-Westerwick, S. (2008). Informational utility. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of communication* (pp. 2273–2276). Oxford, U.K. and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Knobloch-Westerwick, S., Appiah, O., & Alter, S. (2008). News selection patterns as a function of race: The discerning minority and the indiscriminating majority. *Media Psychology*, **11**(3), 400–417.

Knobloch-Westerwick, S., & Hastall, M. (2006). Social comparisons with news personae: Selective exposure to news portrayals of same-sex and same-age characters. *Communication Research*, **33**(4), 262–284.

Knobloch-Westerwick, S., & Meng, J. (2009). Looking the other way: Selective exposure to attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal political information. *Communication Research*, **36**, 426–448.

Knobloch-Westerwick, S., & Romero, J. (2009, May). *Body ideals in the media: Perceived attainability and social comparison choices*. Paper presented at the ICA conference, Mass Communication Division, Chicago, Il.

Klapper, J. T. (1960). *The effects of mass communication*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

McCann, R., Kellerman, K., Giles, H., Gallois, C., Viladot, M. A. (2004). Cultural and gender influences on age identification. *Communication Studies*, **55**(1), 88–105.

Mastro, D. E. (2003). A social identity approach to understanding the impact of television messages. *Communication Monographs*, **70**(2), 98–113.

Mastro, D., Behm-Morawtiz, E., & Kopacz, M. (2008). Exposure to television portrayals of Latinos: The implications of aversive racism and social identity theory. *Human Communication Research*, **34**(1), 1–27.

Reid, S. A., Giles, H., & Abrams, J. R. (2004). A social identity model of media usage and effects. *Zeitschrift für Medienpsychologie,* **16**, 17–25.

Reid, S. A., & Hogg, M. A. (2005). Uncertainty reduction, self-enhancement, and ingroup identification. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, **31**(6), 804–817.

Robinson, W. P. (Ed.) (1996). *Social groups and identities: Developing the legacy of Henri Tajfel.* Boston: Butterworth Heinemann.

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

Rubin, M., & Hewstone, M. (1998). Social identity theory's self-esteem hypothesis: A review and some suggestions for clarification. *Personality & Social Psychology Review*, **2**(1), 40–65.

Sears, D. O., & Freedman, J. L. (1967). Selective exposure to information: A critical review. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, **31**(2), 194–213.

Swann, W. B., Rentfrow, P. J., & Guinn, J. S. (2003). Self-verification: The search for coherence. In M. R. Leary (Ed.), *Handbook of self and identity* (pp. 367–383). New York: Guilford Press.

Tajfel, H. (1978). Social categorizations, social identity, and social comparison. In H. Tajfel (Ed.), *Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 61–76). London: Academic Press.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7–24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

Trepte, S. (2004). Soziale Identität und Medienwahl [Social identity and media choice]. *Medien- und Kommunikationswissenschaft*, **52**(2), 230–249.

Turner, J. C. (1985). Social categorization and the self-concept: A social-cognitive theory of group behavior. In E. J. Lawler (Ed.), *Advances in group processes: Theory and research* (Vol. 2, pp. 77–122). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Vohs, K. D., & Heatherton, T. F. (2004). Ego threats elicits different social comparison processes among high and low self-esteem people: Implications for interpersonal perceptions. *Social Cognition*, **22**(1), 168–191.

Wills, T. A. (1981). Downward comparison principles in social psychology. *Psychological Bulletin*, **90**(2), 245–271.

Wills, T. A. (1991). Similarity and self-esteem in downward comparison. In J. Suls & T. A. Wills (Eds.), *Social comparison* (pp. 51–78). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Wood, J. V. (1989). Theory and research concerning social comparisons of personal attributes. *Psychological Bulletin*, **106**(2), 231–248.

Zillmann, D., & Bryant, J. (1985). *Selective exposure to communication.* Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Zillmann, D., & Cantor, J. R. (1972). Directionality of transitory dominance as a communication variable affecting humor appreciation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **24**(2), 191–198.

Zillmann, D., & Knobloch, S. (2001). Emotional reactions to narratives about the fortunes of personae in the news theater. *Poetics*, **29**, 189–206.

愉悦自我：对关于群体内和群体外新闻的选择性接触

Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick

俄亥俄州立大学

Matthias R. Hastall

Erfurt University

【摘要：】

本文利用一项试验的数据进行二次分析,检测有关阅读与同龄人和非同龄人相关的正负面新闻的选择性接触读阅。时间由软件记录，178 位轻年人（18-30）岁 和98 位年纪稍长的（人成50-65。志杂闻新上网览浏）年轻

）性定确不度高，位地高（人 般一关注有关人龄同的内容，且更爱偏这个相同群体的正面新闻。年长者）性定确不度低，位地低（倾向于择选关于年轻人这个外部群体的负面新闻而非正面新闻，并且也关注年长者的，外此。闻新面负接触有关年轻人的面负新闻能够提高年长者的自尊心。

Les effets de l'identité sociale sur l'exposition sélective à des informations concernant des endogroupes et des exogroupes

Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick & Matthias R. Hastall

Des hypothèses ont été testées dans une analyse de données secondaires tirées d'une expérience sur l'exposition sélective à des articles d'information positifs ou négatifs portant sur des individus de même âge ou d'âge différent que soi. Un échantillon de 178 jeunes adultes (18-30 ans) et de 98 adultes plus âgés (50-65 ans) ont parcouru un magazine d'information en ligne alors que leur temps de lecture était enregistré par un logiciel. Les individus plus jeunes (statut élevé, incertitude élevée) ont généralement concentré leur lecture sur les histoires concernant les individus du même âge qu'eux, préférant les nouvelles positives à propos de cet endogroupe. Les participants plus âgés (faible statut et faible incertitude) étaient plus susceptibles de sélectionner des informations négatives à propos des jeunes que des informations positives à propos de cet exogroupe ou que des informations négatives à propos de personnes plus âgées. De plus, l'exposition à des informations négatives concernant les individus plus jeunes a renforcé l'estime de soi chez les participants plus âgés.

Mots clés : théorie de l'identité sociale, exposition sélective, estime de soi, âge, théorie de l'identité incertaine, comparaison sociale, nouvelles

Sich selbst zufriedenstellen: Selektive Wahrnehmung von Nachrichten über In- und Out-Groups und deren Wirkung auf das Selbstbewusstsein

Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick & Matthias R. Hastall

Mittels einer Sekundäranalyse von Experimentaldaten zur selektiven Wahrnehmung von positiven und negativen Nachrichtenartikeln über gleichaltrige und jüngere bzw. ältere Personen testeten wir verschiedene Hypothesen. Eine Stichprobe von 178 jungen (18-30 Jahre) und 98 älteren (50-65 Jahre) Erwachsenen las ein Online-Nachrichtenmagazin während ihre Lesezeiten mittels Software mitgeloggt wurde. Jüngere Personen (hoher Status, hohe Unsicherheit) konzentrierten sich beim Lesen eher auf gleichaltrige Personen. Ältere Personen (niedriger Status, niedrige Unsicherheit) wählten häufiger negative Nachrichten über junge Personen als positive Nachrichten über diese Out-Group oder negative Nachrichten über ältere Personen. Außerdem stärkte die Rezeption negativen Nachrichten über jüngere Personen das Selbstbewusstsein der älteren Teilnehmer.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Theorie der sozialen Identität, selektive Wahrnehmung, Selbstbewusstsein, Alter, Unsicherheit-Identitäts-Theorie, sozialer Vergleich, Nachrichten

자기자신을 만족시키기:

조직내외에 관한 뉴스에 대한 선택적 노출과 자부심에 대한 효과

Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick, The Ohio State University

&

Matthias R. Hastall, Erfurt University, Germany

요약

여러 가정들이 같은, 그리고 다른 나이집단들에 대한 긍적적이고 부정적인 뉴스기사들에 대한 선택적 노출에 대한 2차적 자료들을 연구하는 것으로 테스트되었다. 18세부터 30세 사이의 178명 젊은이들과, 50-65세사이의 중노년들을 대상으로 한 집단들로 하여금 온라인 뉴스 잡지들을 읽게하였으며, 그들이 시간은 소프트웨어에 의해 기록되도록 하였다. 젊은이들은 일반적으로 같은 또래 나이의 개인들에 대한 기사에 보다 초점을 두었는데, 집단내에서 이에 관한 긍정적인 뉴스에 선호도를 두었다. 보다 나이가 든 참여자들은 젊은이들에 관한 부정적인 뉴스를 선택하는 경향이 높았는데, 더우기, 젊은이들에 관한 부정적인 뉴스에 대한 노출은 나이가 더 든 사람들의 자부심을 지지하는 경향으로 연계되었다.