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PSYCHOLOGICAL INSECURITY AND LEADERSHIP STYLES

Christiane Schoel, Dagmar Stahlberg, and Constantine Sedikides

One of the most fundamental human motives is the need for security. Individuals desire predictable, structured, and sheltered niches. They want to experience control over their lives, render their social interactions understandable, and make sense of themselves and their social environment. Already in his theory of motivation, Maslow (1943) highlighted the importance of the need for security. He distinguished among five categories of needs: physiological needs, security, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization. He proposed that these needs form a hierarchy, such that a higher-order need is activated only when the lower-order need is satisfied. Security occupies a basic position in this hierarchy and is preceded only by physiological needs. Establishing and maintaining security, then, is primary to belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization. Times of terrorism, political upheavals, economic crises, national conflicts, and increasingly demanding social interactions pose substantial threats to the need for security for individuals in many cultures. Of course, these threats differ on several dimensions. Yet they all entail unpredictability, loss of control, and potential harm. As such, they may impact negatively on the individual. One such negative impact is self-uncertainty (cf. Kagan, 1972).

In order to cope with self-uncertainty, individuals might implement several strategies (e.g., seeking social support, attempting to stabilize their environment, disengaging from their environment) that will help them to reestablish a sense of security. In the present chapter, we focus on a strategy that has received limited empirical attention: preference for a specific leadership style. We address the questions of when and why individuals who normally endorse democratic values prefer an autocratic over a democratic leadership style, and we discuss the relevant role of self-uncertainty as a situational trigger and of self-esteem as a dispositional moderator.

Self-Uncertainty

The concept of uncertainty has had its share of definitional bids. In this chapter, we focus on *self-uncertainty*. The self is conceived of as an organizing structure that directs thinking, feeling, and behaving (Markus, 1977; Sedikides & Gregg, 2003). As such, self-uncertainty arises when subjectively important self-aspects are in question (Sedikides & Strube, 1997; Trope, 1983). Some persons are prone to experiencing this sort of uncertainty more persistently than others. Consistently, De Cremer and Sedikides (2005) operationalized dispositional self-uncertainty in terms of self-doubt, self-esteem instability, and self-concept unclarity. *Self-doubt* refers to individuals' lingering doubts and concerns about their competence and abilities (Braslow, Guerretaz, Arkin, & Oleson, 2012).

Self-esteem instability captures the extent to which individuals experience frequent shifts in their level of self-worth (Kernis, 2005; see also section "Self-Esteem Stability"). *Self-concept unclarity* relates to the extent to which individuals harbor self-beliefs that are inconsistent and unstable over time (J. Campbell, 1990). Those high in self-doubt, self-esteem instability, or self-concept unclarity are assumed to experience high levels of uncertainty about themselves.[1]

Self-uncertainty can be understood not only as a chronic disposition (i.e., trait) but also as a transient condition (i.e., state; Van den Bos, 2001). Thus, most persons recognize the sense of being uncertain about themselves (or the world around them) in one situation or another. Building on social identity theory, Hogg (2009) postulated that self-uncertainty can derive from threats to (a) one's personal self (e.g., experiencing a failure in the achievement domain), (b) one's relational self (e.g., rejection from a friend or lover), or (c) one's collective self (e.g., perceiving mistreatment of a valued ingroup) (see also Sedikides, Gaertner, Luke, O'Mara, & Gebauer, 2013).

Irrespective of whether self-uncertainty is dispositionally or situationally induced, however, the resulting feelings are alarming and aversive (Arkin, Oleson, & Carroll, 2010; Loseman, Miedema, Van den Bos, & Vermunt, 2009; Sedikides, 2012). These feelings are accompanied by a subjective sense of reduced control over one's life (Hogg, 2000; Sedikides, De Cremer, Hart, & Brebels, 2010), they disrupt the homeostasis of the self-system, and they trigger motivation or strategies to cope with or counteract them. These strategies are hardening of attitudes in alternative domains such as political attitudes (i.e. compensatory conviction; McGregor, Zanna, Holmes, & Spencer, 2001), clinging to more conservative political ideologies (Jost et al., 2007), defending one's cultural world views (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991), attaching to one's religion (Sedikides & Gebauer, 2013), experiencing social integration or group identification (Hogg, 2009), and perceiving fairness in organizational procedures (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002). We will consider an additional strategy for coping with self-uncertainty, namely the expression of preferences for leadership styles. Specifically, we will discuss preference for autocratic and democratic leadership.

Leadership Styles

Definitions of leadership abound owing to the multitude of theoretical approaches to the topic. We focus on leadership styles, that is, on *what* leaders do and, in particular, *how* they do it. Leadership styles can differ in how power is distributed, whose needs are met, and how decisions are made (Bass, 1990). We review research findings on two discrepant leadership styles that have attracted a great deal of empirical interest: autocratic and democratic.

Autocratic and Democratic Leadership

The differentiation between autocratic and democratic leadership goes back to the classic studies by Lewin and colleagues (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939; Lippitt & White, 1943). According to their definition, autocratic leaders are mainly concerned with getting the job done. If there are decisions to be made, they make them themselves rather than following extensive consultation. They determine prescribed policies, procedures, rules, and goals. They do not provide group members with an overview of the proposed action plan. Instead, they dictate methods and activity steps one at a time, so that future steps remain ambiguous to group members. They also direct in a hands-on way, and even micromanage under tight control, actions and interactions within the group. Democratic leaders, in contrast, encourage group members to participate in the decision-making process and to determine their own policies. They explain the steps towards attaining the group goals in advance, let group members initiate and select their own strategies to deal with occupational tasks and interactions, consult widely, and are concerned with the group members' needs (Lippitt, 1940). In essence, autocratic and democratic leadership can be seen as

two opposing poles of a continuum, with autocratic leadership granting low levels of participation and democratic leadership granting high levels of participation (Bass, 1990).

Leadership Evaluations

A portion of the literature has reported antipathy towards autocratic leadership. Even groups starting with a dictatorial decision rule nearly always revert to a democratic rule, regardless of their performance quality (Nielsen & Miller, 1997). Moreover, group members refuse to assign an autocratic leader to solve conflicts over public goods or public resources in social dilemmas (Rutte & Wilke, 1985; Samuelson & Messick, 1986; Van Vugt & De Cremer, 1999, Experiment 1).

However, another portion of the literature has resulted in less clear-cut conclusions when attempting to differentiate between dimensions of leadership evaluation. Children led by an autocratic teacher express much more discontent, hostility, and aggression than children led by a democratic teacher, but the former are slightly more productive in completing various group tasks than the latter (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939). More generally, literature reviews and meta-analytic syntheses converge in showcasing positive effects of democratic leadership with regard to group atmosphere and satisfaction but have produced mixed results with regard to group performance and outcomes (Bass, 1990; Gastil, 1994; Miller & Monge, 1986).

Consistent with the distinction between work satisfaction and productivity, we propose a differentiation between followers' evaluations of leadership valence (pleasant vs. unpleasant) and leadership success (success vs. failure; see also Hogg, 2007; Kaplan, Hogan, & Craig, 2008). Valence judgments may be seen as an answer to the question of how much followers *like* a leader, and thereby refer to the affective component of leadership attitudes. In contrast, success judgments relate to the question of whether followers *believe* a leader to be successful, and thereby reflect the cognitive component of leadership attitudes (cf. multicomponent model of attitudes; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). These affective valence and cognitive success judgments do not necessarily coincide; a well-liked leader can be attributed low success, and a successful leader may be disliked.

In Western cultures (and others), democratic principles constitute predominant social values that are generally fostered through socialization processes and are thus available and accessible. Consistently, we assume that when individuals feel secure, they will generally favor democratic over autocratic leadership with regard to both valence and success. Thus, the default attitude will be pro-democratic. We propose, however, that under conditions of self-uncertainty, autocratic leadership may become an option for some, and it is then that the differentiation between valence and success becomes critical.

Uncertainty and Leadership Preferences

Following a literature review, we were able to identify only one study that reported a positive association between self-uncertainty and preferences for autocratic leadership (Rast, Hogg, & Giessner, 2013). Correlational findings aside, the causal influence of other types of uncertainty on leadership preferences has been examined in divergent research traditions: normative leadership theories, authoritarianism, conservative shift hypothesis, and terror management theory.

Normative Leadership Theories

Normative leadership theories were the first to take situational circumstances into account when pondering the optimal leadership style. In his contingency theory of leadership, Fiedler (1964) maintained that when (a) the group task is fuzzy and unclearly defined, (b) the leader's position power is low, and/or (c) the leader–member relationships are poor, an autocratic or directive task-oriented leadership

style is most effective. Similarly, in his path goal theory, House (1996) proposed a directive leadership when the subordinates' role and task demands are ambiguous (e.g., when the task is new or complex). Contrastingly, in their normative decision theory, Vroom and Yetton (1973) advocated a democratic leadership style accompanied by a consultative leader–follower relationship when a task is unclearly structured.

Different models, then, make conflicting predictions about which leadership style is most effective in a situation characterized by uncertainty. However, these approaches focus almost exclusively on a single aspect of uncertainty: clarity of the group task. The approaches do not consider self-related aspects of uncertainty. Moreover, they can be understood as recommendations on how a leader should behave in order to be successful with regard to objective outcomes. To be distinguished from this normative approach are subjective leadership evaluations, which refer to whether a particular leadership style is seen as more successful in a given situation by leaders or their subordinates, even if it is not successful in reality. Finally, there might be no "one-size-fits-all" leadership style; individuals vary in their personality characteristics (e.g., their self-esteem—see below) and therefore require different ways of being led.

Authoritarianism

There is a long tradition of explaining authoritarianism from a personality perspective (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). Empirical evidence, however, suggests that authoritarian attitudes and behaviors are not only a matter of person characteristics but can also be induced by situational factors such as threats and personal insecurity. Comparing archival data, several studies have found indicators associated with authoritarianism to be significantly higher in periods of societal threat than periods of calm (Doty, Peterson, & Winter, 1991; Sales, 1973). For example, Sales (1972) showed that during the Great Depression in the United States conversion rates from non-authoritarian to authoritarian church denominations were substantially higher than in times of economic security. More directly related to leadership, McCann (1997) reported that U.S. presidential elections were more influenced by the perceived strength and power of the candidates during years of high social, economic, and political threat relative to years of low threat.

In addition, consistent with an interactional perspective (Stenner, 2005), dispositional authoritarianism has been identified as a moderator of the link between threat and various authoritarian indicators. For example, Feldman and Stenner (1997) found that persons higher (rather than lower) on authoritarianism responded to societal threat with increased intolerance, prejudice, and punitiveness. Moreover, Rickert (1998) showed that authoritarians experiencing economic threat were more likely than non-threatened authoritarians or non-authoritarians to support social policies that restricted benefits for powerless and disadvantaged groups. Finally, McCann (2008) demonstrated that under conditions of societal threat compared to low threat, the number of death sentences and executions—a phenomenon that can be interpreted as an expression of authoritarian aggressiveness—increased in conservative U.S. states but decreased in liberal U.S. states.

Conservative Shift Hypothesis and Terror Management Theory

In their uncertainty-threat model Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway (2003) proposed that conservatism is preferred over liberal ideologies in times of threat because it is characterized by stability and hierarchy, which afford reassurance and structure. Further, Jost and colleagues identified death anxiety and system threat as the two strongest psychological predictors of political conservatism. Consistently, Bonanno and Jost (2006) reported a conservative shift among proximal survivors of the 9/11 terrorist attacks irrespective of their political orientation and party identification.

An approach that explicitly focuses on responses to life-threatening events is terror management theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986). According to this theory, mortality salience (i.e., reminders of death and one's own impermanence) constitutes the ultimate threat to the self and results in the motivation to affirm cultural belief systems that imbue life with meaning. Terror management theory has received extensive empirical support (for a recent review, see Burke, Kosloff, & Landau, 2013). With regard to leadership, empirical evidence suggests an increase in preferences for charismatic and autocratic leaders compared to relationship-oriented democratic leaders under heightened mortality salience (Cohen, Solomon, Maxfield, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2004). For example, mortality salience (compared to a control condition involving dental pain) led to stronger support for the former U.S. president George W. Bush and his counterterrorism policies, regardless of participants' political orientation (Landau et al., 2004; Nail & McGregor, 2009).

As with the authoritarianism literature, individual difference variables have also been found to moderate the link between mortality salience and leadership preferences. For example, Kosloff, Greenberg, Weise, and Solomon (2010) showed increased support for a charismatic political candidate after mortality salience, but only if the candidate had the same political orientation as the participant. Two other studies demonstrated increased support for President George W. Bush following mortality salience only for participants low in trait self-control (Gailliot, Schmeichel, & Baumeister, 2006) or whose attachment style was insecure (Weise et al., 2008).

Self-Esteem

Taken together, previous research indicates that, under threat, default or pro-democratic attitudes can undergo changes in favor of strong, charismatic, and autocratic leaders. We argue that one commonality that different kinds of threat share is that they arouse feelings of self-uncertainty. Our empirical focus has been on the effects of self-uncertainty on preferences for autocratic versus democratic leadership (Schoel, Bluemke, Mueller, & Stahlberg, 2011). We proposed that self-esteem—in particular the combination of self-esteem level and self-esteem stability—is critical for which leadership style followers will prefer in a situation of self-uncertainty. We drew from Weary and Edwards' (1996) model of causal uncertainty resolution. The model distinguishes between two mechanisms that are activated under uncertainty: (1) a *comparator* determines the discrepancy between the current state and the desired state of certainty, and activates different action plans for the reduction of perceived uncertainty; (2) an *outcome expectancy assessor* determines whether an action plan, and which one, will actually be undertaken, depending on the expectancy of whether an action will be successful in reducing uncertainty. We assumed that individuals would differ with regard to these success expectations, and here is where self-esteem comes into play. In the following section, we discuss the aspects of self-esteem level and self-esteem stability that may be responsible for differential success expectancies, before we explicate our hypotheses with regard to the evaluations of democratic and autocratic leadership.

Self-Esteem Level

Self-esteem refers to the affective or evaluative component of the self-concept (Greenwald, Bellezza, & Banaji, 1988). In particular, we define self-esteem as the degree to which one likes or dislikes oneself (Sedikides & Gregg, 2003). Individuals with high self-esteem (high SEs) differ from individuals with low self-esteem (low SEs) in the way they think, feel, and behave.

High SEs have positive self-views and regard themselves as intelligent, attractive, and popular (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). They are optimistic and have positive expectations about their future (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994), even being prone to positive illusions

(Brown, Collins, & Schmidt, 1988). They are self-confident in their opinions and actions (Brockner, 1988), have a greater sense of personal control (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and show less stress and negative affect in the aftermath of negative events (Di Paula & Campbell, 2002). In summary, those higher in self-esteem are well equipped to cope actively with threats.

Low SEs hold comparatively negative attitudes towards themselves. Their self-concepts are uncertain, incoherent, and fluctuating (J. Campbell & Lavallee, 1993), and they are more prone to depressive symptoms (Orth, Robins, Trzesniewski, Maes, & Schmitt, 2009). They are also less self-confident than high SEs, especially after failure (McFarlin & Blascovich, 1981), and are more susceptible to external cues and social influence owing to their uncertainty about the correctness of their thoughts and actions (Brockner, 1988). As a consequence, they rely more strongly on social cues for guidance and have a higher need for social approval, resulting in self-presentation strategies such as going along with others or being overly influenced by the attitudes and behaviors of others.

Building on these differences, we propose that high SEs have more positive expectancies about their personal ability to reduce self-uncertainty, whereas low SEs have more doubt in their own abilities to overcome self-uncertainty.

Self-esteem level and leadership preferences. We were unable to locate any studies that tested directly the link between self-esteem and autocratic or democratic leadership preferences. Some insight, however, can be gained from a related research area, namely procedural fairness. Relevant experiments manipulate whether participants *are* or *are not* allowed to voice their opinion in authority-driven decision-making processes (Folger, Rosenfield, Grove, & Corkran, 1979). In particular, voice is defined as "the extent to which people are allowed to provide input in the decision process" (Brockner et al., 1998, p. 394). This definition comprises the main distinctive feature of autocratic and democratic leadership: the degree of participation granted (Bass, 1990).

There is some evidence that self-esteem is related positively to "voice behavior," that is, the willingness to voice one's opinions within a group. For example, in a longitudinal study, LePine and Van Dyne (1998) found that employees with high compared to low self-esteem were more willing to speak out, particularly in large groups. Moreover, Brockner and colleagues (1998) investigated whether high and low SEs were differentially influenced by perceived levels of granted voice. In four field studies, they examined the joint impact of self-esteem and voice on perceived organizational support among survivors of job layoffs, on organizational identification after a major cost-cutting initiative, and on satisfaction with interpersonal encounters in everyday life. Additionally, in a laboratory setting, they experimentally manipulated beliefs about one's capability to provide meaningful input and the opportunity to voice one's opinion, while subsequently assessing the effects of these manipulations on satisfaction with the decision reached. All five studies furnished converging evidence that self-esteem moderated voice perceptions. Specifically, voice was more positively related to the dependent variables among high SEs than low SEs; stated otherwise, high SEs were influenced more strongly by the perceived availability of voice opportunities. Moreover, the results of the laboratory experiment indicated that high SEs were more confident than low SEs in their capability to provide meaningful input in the decision-making process, and they were therefore more motivated to have voice. In conclusion, high SEs may be more inclined to take part in a democratic decision-making process than low SEs, at least in social contexts that encompass the potential of self-uncertainty (e.g., layoffs, cost-cutting initiatives, interpersonal encounters).

Self-Esteem Stability

Another aspect of self-esteem on which individuals differ dispositionally is stability (Kernis & Waschull, 1995). Self-esteem stability is defined as "the magnitude of short-term fluctuations that

people experience in their contextually based, immediate feelings of self-worth" (Kernis, 2005, p. 1572). Individuals with stable self-esteem (stable SEs) have secure feelings of self-worth, which are relatively unwavering over time and across situations. Their sense of self-worth is not dependent on the opinions of others, and they have no need to continually validate themselves. Consequently, their self-esteem is not substantially affected by situational short-term variations and is not easily threatened (Kernis, Lakey, & Heppner, 2008). In contrast, individuals with unstable self-esteem (unstable SEs) hold unsettled and insecure feelings of self-worth. Changes can derive from both the presence of external evaluative cues (e.g., interpersonal feedback) and internal self-generated information (e.g., salience of specific self-aspects). Thus, unstable SEs' self-worth is dependent on externally imposed and internally imposed standards, and they are reactive to everyday successes and failures (Kernis, 2005). In sum, the self-concepts of stable SEs are strong and clearly defined, whereas the self-concepts of unstable SEs are characterized by confusion, conflict, and self-doubt. Relatedly, Kernis, Paradise, Whitaker, Wheatman, and Goldman (2000) obtained a link between self-esteem stability and different self-regulatory styles of goal pursuit. Whereas stable SEs were agentic and self-determined, unstable SEs were more influenced by external and internal pressures.

In our view, these differing characteristics of stable and unstable SEs should predict divergent success expectations for overcoming perceived self-uncertainty. Given that stable SEs are more independent and more self-determined in their goal pursuit, they should believe in their personal ability to reduce self-uncertainty. In contrast, because of their self-doubt, unstable SEs should possess more negative success expectancies and be more inclined to rely on others.

Self-Uncertainty, Leadership Preferences, and the Moderating Role of Self-Esteem: The Followers' Perspective

Bringing the literatures on uncertainty, leadership styles, and self-esteem together, Schoel and colleagues (2011) formulated and tested a set of hypotheses that we describe next.

Given the prevalence of democratic values, Western citizens view autocratic leadership with aversion. We therefore assumed the *default attitude* to be pro-democratic. In response to perceived self-threat, however, authoritarian tendencies and preferences for autocratic leaders rise. We proposed that self-uncertainty would not increase authoritarian tendencies across the board. Instead, self-esteem and its stability would moderate this effect, because which leadership style is preferred under uncertainty would depend on the expected success of one's input in reducing the aversive state of uncertainty. As a result of higher expectations of successfully performing those behaviors that make a difference, both high and stable SEs would be motivated to maximize their input and would prefer democratic leadership even more than they normally would. After all, one of the major features of democratic leadership is to encourage participation in decision-making processes. In contrast, low and unstable SEs would not believe that they can successfully reduce perceived self-uncertainty and would therefore prefer to hand over this responsibility to someone else who makes the decision for them—an autocratic leader. Thus, we hypothesized that self-esteem level and stability operate in the same direction and produce additive effects. Under self-uncertainty, stable high SEs would manifest an increase in preference for democratic leadership, resulting in a *democratic reaction*. Contrastingly, unstable low SEs would manifest a deviation from their pro-democratic default attitude in favor of an autocratic leader, resulting in a *submissive reaction*.

Moreover, we hypothesized that these uncertainty responses, and especially the submissive reaction, would manifest themselves only in regards to the expected success of leadership styles but not in regards to the perceived valence of leadership styles. Owing to the strong emotional aversion towards autocratic leadership, high SEs but also unstable low SEs would *like* democratic leadership better than autocratic leadership, resulting in an unshakable pro-democratic default attitude on the valence dimension. However, with regard to success expectations, reactions to uncertainty

should differ depending on the level and stability of self-esteem: stable high SEs would *believe* that their input makes a difference under conditions of self-uncertainty and would therefore associate democratic leadership with success, whereas unstable low SEs would doubt their ability to reduce perceived self-uncertainty, resulting in a decreased association of democratic leadership with success, in favor of an autocratic leader.

Finally, we expected that explicit judgments of autocratic leadership are subject to social desirability effects, as there are strong norms against open admission of preferences for autocratic leaders. We therefore hypothesized that the differential reactions to self-uncertainty of stable high and unstable low SEs would be more pronounced on implicit (i.e., automatic response) measures than on explicit (i.e., conscious self-report) measures.

Pro-Democratic Default Attitudes

Our first hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) was that, in the absence of self-uncertainty, all participants would favor democratic over autocratic leadership with regard to both valence and success. As such, participants would manifest a pro-democratic default attitude on both dimensions regardless of type of measurement (explicit vs. implicit). To test this hypothesis, we developed explicit and implicit leadership measures that discriminate valence from success evaluations. Specifically, for our explicit measures, we asked participants to report how "positive/pleasant/enjoyable" (valence dimension) and how "successful/efficient/profitable" (success dimension) they thought the respective leadership style was (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). We computed a difference score of relative favoritism by subtracting autocratic from democratic scores separately for the valence and the success dimension. Positive values indicated a preference for democratic leadership, whereas negative values indicated a preference for autocratic leadership.

In addition, we developed two Implicit Association Tests (IATs; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998): a valence IAT and a success IAT. The IAT is an unobtrusive measure for assessing the strength of associations between target concepts and attribute dimensions. The target concepts of the newly developed IATs were democratic and autocratic leadership, and the attribute dimensions were (a) pleasant and unpleasant for the valence IAT and (b) success and failure for the success IAT. Positive IAT effects indicated a preference for democratic leadership, negative IAT effects a preference for autocratic leadership.

We validated the newly developed explicit and implicit measures in two studies. In the first study, we primed participants with certainty by asking them to write down the emotions and bodily reactions that feeling certain of themselves arouses in them. Subsequently, we applied the new leadership evaluation measures. In accordance with our assumption, results on explicit and implicit measures revealed a pro-democratic default attitude (reflected by positive difference scores for the explicit measures and positive IAT effects) with regard to both valence and success. In a second study, we replicated these findings without a certainty priming. Thus, under conditions of self-certainty or in the absence of self-uncertainty, individuals like democratic leadership better than autocratic leadership and also believe the former to be more successful than the latter. But what happens under conditions of self-uncertainty? Do people then still adhere to their pro-democratic default attitudes? In the next step, we put this question under empirical scrutiny.

Democratic and Submissive Reactions to State Self-Uncertainty

To reiterate, we argued that stable high SEs are confident in their ability to reduce self-uncertainty, whereas unstable low SEs are plagued by self-doubts. Hence, stable high SEs would perceive democratic leadership as successful, thus allowing them to contribute to the decision-making process. Unstable low SEs, however, would seek to displace the responsibility of decision-making to someone

else (e.g., an authority figure). In the face of self-uncertainty, an autocratic leader might appear successful to them even when such a leader is not likable. In our next study, we tested whether the pro-democratic default attitude is prone to change under conditions of self-uncertainty. We hypothesized that stable high SEs would display a democratic reaction (Hypothesis 2), whereas unstable low SEs would display a submissive reaction (Hypothesis 3), with regard to their success attributions.

We induced state self-certainty and self-uncertainty experimentally with a manipulation adapted from Van den Bos (2001). We asked participants the following two questions: "Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of you being (un)certain of yourself arouses in you," and "Please write down what you think physically happens to you as you feel (un)certain of yourself."[2] Afterwards, participants completed the implicit and explicit leadership evaluation measures and filled in self-esteem level and self-esteem stability measures. We assessed self-esteem level with Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Inventory. Sample items are "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others" and "I take a positive attitude towards myself" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). Self-esteem stability was assessed with the Labile Self-Esteem Scale (Dykman, 1998). Sample items are "My self-esteem shifts rapidly from feeling good about myself on one day to feeling bad about myself the next day" and "Compared to most people, my self-esteem changes rapidly" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). We reverse-coded the items for the latter scale such that higher scores reflected higher self-esteem stability. Finally, given that we expected an additive effect and the two self-esteem measures were substantially interrelated, we aggregated the two self-esteem scales to form a new variable of conjoint self-esteem, with the extremes reflecting stable high SEs and unstable low SEs.[3]

In line with Hypotheses 2 and 3, the aggregate of self-esteem level and stability determined whether individuals responded to self-uncertainty priming with a democratic or a submissive reaction. Stable high SEs showed an increase, unstable low SEs a decrease, in their success attributions for democratic leadership. These changes to pro-democratic default attitudes, however, were observed only on the implicit success measure (i.e., the success IAT). The valence IAT and the explicit success and valence measures remained unaffected by the self-uncertainty manipulation. The findings indicate that (a) self-uncertainty reactions are restricted to cognitive success expectations and do not generalize to affective valence judgments, and (b) the democratic and submissive reactions operate on a basic or automatic level that is not influenced by social desirability concerns and that individuals are not necessarily aware of.

Submissive Reactions to Salient Trait Self-Uncertainty

In the preceding study, we induced self-uncertainty in all participants via an experimental manipulation. Some persons are dispositionally more insecure and uncertain of themselves than others. These are persons with unstable self-esteem (Kernis & Waschull, 1995) and persons with low self-esteem (J. Campbell & Lavallee, 1993). Chronic awareness of this self-uncertainty, however, would be maladaptive and would bear the risk of depression (Edwards & Weary, 1993). We argue, therefore, that unstable low SEs usually have available thoughts about their self-uncertainty, but these thoughts are dormant. Consequently, they would become aware of their personal insecurity if these thoughts were to become accessible through situational triggers.

In a follow-up study, we assumed that simply completing a self-report questionnaire concerning uncertainty would prompt unstable low SEs to think about their trait self-uncertainty. Thus, we manipulated the accessibility of self-uncertainty by varying the order of measures: we assessed the uncertainty questionnaire either *before* the explicit and implicit leadership measures or *afterwards*. In particular, participants completed the Emotional Uncertainty subscale of the Uncertainty Response Scale (Greco & Roger, 2001). The 15 items assess how individuals

respond emotionally to experiencing uncertainty or being exposed to uncertain situations. Sample items are "Uncertainty frightens me" and "When the future is uncertain, I generally expect the worst to happen."

We hypothesized that completing this questionnaire first would render trait self-uncertainty accessible in unstable low SEs when they subsequently filled out the leadership measures. Again they should have doubts in their own ability to reduce this uncertainty about themselves and therefore would attribute less success to democratic leadership than they normally would, resulting in a submissive reaction. In contrast, we expected to observe the pro-democratic default attitude among unstable low SEs who completed the trait uncertainty questionnaire afterwards, because their self-uncertainty would have remained dormant during the filling out of leadership measures. The same should hold for stable high SEs but for a different reason: they are dispositionally self-certain (J. Campbell & Lavallee, 1993; Kernis & Waschull, 1995) and would therefore adhere to their pro-democratic default attitudes.

Consistent with the hypotheses, stable high SEs, who had no reason to feel self-uncertain *after* completing the Emotional Uncertainty scale, adhered to pro-democratic default attitudes in both measurement order conditions and regardless of evaluation dimension (i.e., success vs. valence) or type of measurement (i.e., implicit vs. explicit). In contrast, unstable low SEs who completed the Emotional Uncertainty scale *before* the leadership measures responded with a drop in their democratic preference on the success IAT compared to those in the no-salience condition, implying that they are prone to a submissive reaction in response to situational priming. Again the valence dimension and explicit measures were unaffected by the manipulation of the salience of self-uncertainty.

Summary

Taken together, the results show that there is no general submissive reaction to self-uncertainty. Only participants with low and unstable self-esteem attribute more success to autocratic leadership when they are primed with state self-uncertainty or when their trait self-uncertainty is made salient to them. Owing to their low expectations regarding their own ability to reduce uncertainty, they likely relinquished their own decisions or contributions in favor of a powerful leader who might handle situations better than they could. However, they still disliked autocratic leadership as much as participants with high and stable self-esteem. Priming state self-uncertainty in participants with high and stable self-esteem even elicited a democratic reaction. These participants were likely confident in their own ability to reduce self-uncertainty and therefore preferred a democratic leadership style that invites active participation. Note that we assumed the submissive and democratic reactions to be due to differential expectancies about one's ability to provide meaningful input and to contribute to uncertainty reduction. Future research may opt to assess or experimentally manipulate these expectancies.

The differentiation between affective valence and cognitive success evaluations, and the application of implicit instead of explicit measures, turned out to be crucial. The described reactions to self-uncertainty occurred only on the implicit success measure. Yet the reader will need to keep in mind that the political orientation of participants (mainly German students) in all of our studies was more liberal than conservative (when considering the scale midpoint as a reference) and that the instantiation of self-uncertainty was mild. In situations of extreme self-uncertainty, however, autocratic leadership may gain influence. In such situations, valence judgments may retreat into the background, and success evaluations may come into the foreground at *both* the implicit and the explicit level. It is then that people may accept an autocratic leader as the necessary evil to overcome the unbearable state of self-uncertainty.

Pro-Democratic Default Attitudes: The Leader's Perspective

Most previous research on uncertainty and leadership preferences (including our own studies) focused on the group members' perspective—that is, how followers perceive and evaluate different kinds of leadership. Followers, however, are only one side of the coin. Leadership can be seen as a two-sided process of influence: the followers' desires or claims for participation and the leaders' willingness to grant participation. In the next study, therefore, we investigated whether being in a leader or a follower position would create a difference in terms of resulting leadership preferences.

Leadership has been defined as the process of influencing others (Stogdill, 1950), and power is conceived of as the capacity to influence others (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Thus, power is a means through which leadership is enacted, and being a leader implies and requires power. The literature has shown that power entails several positive consequences for power holders. For example, power increases reliance on general knowledge structures and confidence in one's thoughts and perspectives (Briñol, Petty, Valle, Rucker, & Becerra, 2007), heightens action orientation (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003), and reduces vulnerability to situational and interpersonal pressures (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008). We therefore hypothesized that even under conditions of self-uncertainty, leaders (i.e., power holders) would adhere to their core knowledge structures and preexisting values—the prevailing pro-democratic default attitude (Hypothesis 4).

Applying the same manipulations and measures as in the experiment described under the heading "Democratic and Submissive Reactions to State Self-Uncertainty," we primed self-uncertainty versus self-certainty and assessed self-esteem level and stability. In addition, we asked participants to imagine being in a leadership versus a follower position. Subsequently, participants completed the implicit and explicit leadership measures. In the followers' condition, we replicated the findings from our previous studies: on the implicit success measure (i.e., the success IAT), stable high SEs showed a democratic reaction and unstable low SEs a submissive reaction to uncertainty. In contrast, participants in the leadership position were buffered against these uncertainty responses: they showed no changes in their default attitude, which was pro-democratic.

The finding that leaders were less affected by self-uncertainty in their leadership preferences than followers seems to be reassuring for at least two reasons. First, an autocratic leadership style allocates the power in the group solely to the leader, and previous research has demonstrated that too much power can make a leader corrupt and bears the risk of power exploitation (Keltner et al., 2003; Kipnis, 1972). Second, it would be dysfunctional for the group's goal to change the leadership style whenever the leader feels self-uncertain. Although changes in a person's leadership style when the situation demands so may prove to be efficient (see "Normative Leadership Theories"), such changes would likely invalidate a leader's authority as s/he would be seen to be, and perhaps would feel, self-uncertain. But do all leaders share a pro-democratic default attitude and adhere to it under conditions of self-uncertainty? In the following section, we focus on a group of individuals who may be an exception: narcissists.

Implications and Future Directions: Pro-Democratic Default Attitudes in Question—the Case of Narcissistic Leaders

Social and personality psychologists conceptually define narcissism as a normally distributed trait that is characterized by grandiosity, desire for admiration, hypersensitivity to criticism, lack of empathy, and the inclination to "use" others for the narcissist's own advantage (Emmons, 1987). Social and personality psychologists often operationally define narcissism in terms of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. According to it, narcissists are persons high on authority, superiority,

exhibitionism, exploitativeness, vanity, and entitlement (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Narcissists are "disagreeable extraverts" (Paulhus, 2001). They have an exaggerated sense of self-worth and self-report robust psychological health (e.g., high subjective well-being and low sadness, anxiety, and neuroticism; Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004; Zuckerman & O'Loughlin, 2009). In interpersonal relationships, even in close ones, narcissists strive for a competitive lead. They want to be better than others, particularly on agentic characteristics such as intelligence, competence, and performance (Krizan & Bushman, 2011; Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, Elliot, & Gregg, 2002). With regard to self-uncertainty and leadership preferences, narcissists are of particular interest because they exhibit a strong desire for power and are characterized by a special constellation of self-esteem.

Trait Narcissism, Power, and Leadership

Power and leadership can be seen as a means for enhancing or maintaining one's sense of grandiosity, superiority, and entitlement. Narcissists have a strong need for power (Horton & Sedikides, 2009; Raskin & Novacek, 1991) and strive to attain leadership positions (W. Campbell & Campbell, 2009). Indeed, narcissists are more likely than their non-narcissistic counterparts to emerge as leaders in leaderless groups (Brunell et al., 2008).

However, few studies have addressed the question of which leadership style narcissists prefer when in a leadership position (for a review, see W. Campbell, Hoffman, Campbell, & Marchisio, 2011), and those that have mainly focused on transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is defined in terms of the impact on or changes in the followers. It is about conveying a clear vision of the group's goals by inspiring followers to change expectations, perceptions, and motivations in working towards common goals (Bass, 1985). The four components of transformational leadership are (1) idealized influence (i.e., providing a role model that instills pride and gains respect and trust), (2) inspirational motivation (i.e., articulating an appealing and inspiring vision), (3) intellectual stimulation (i.e., challenging assumptions, stimulating creativity, and encouraging problem-solving), and (4) individualized consideration (i.e., attending to followers' individual needs, being a mentor or coach).

At first glance, the findings with regard to the relation between narcissism and transformational leadership are contradictory. Judge, LePine, and Rich (2006) reported a positive correlation between narcissism and self-ratings of global transformational leadership, but Khoo and Burch (2008) failed to replicate this general pattern. More differentiated analyses of Khoo and Burch's results, however, uncovered a positive relation between narcissism and the charismatic component of "idealized influence," but a negative relation between narcissism and the other-oriented component of "individual consideration." Thus, narcissism seems to be linked to "personalized charisma" that stands in the service of self-aggrandizement but less so to "socialized charisma" that stands in the service of the group (cf. Popper, 2000).

From the perspective of others, content analyses of presidential speeches revealed that narcissistic U.S. presidents are perceived to be more charismatic (Deluga, 1997). In addition, narcissists are seen as transformational leaders by their peers (Judge et al., 2006). However, they are not seen as transformational leaders by their supervisors, and they are also attributed less organizational citizenship and more counterproductive work behaviors by the latter (Judge et al., 2006).

To our knowledge, no research has examined narcissistic preferences for autocratic and democratic leadership styles. Given their excessive need for power and their unconcern for others, narcissistic leaders might be prone to an autocratic leadership style. It remains an open question, however, how strongly narcissists are influenced by social norms and values. In the absence of self-uncertainty, they may still prefer a democratic over an autocratic leadership style, but we propose that this preference will be less pronounced than in non-narcissists. Under conditions

of self-uncertainty, however, we would expect a reverse pattern: narcissistic leaders would adopt an autocratic instead of a democratic leadership style. In the following section, we describe this hypothesis in more detail.

Narcissists' Ego Fragility and Their Presumed Autocratic Reaction

Narcissists' affective states are more influenced by situational variation than those of non-narcissists. For example, Emmons (1987) assessed participants' daily mood for a period of six weeks and found positive correlations between narcissism and both positive and negative mood swings. Rhodewalt, Madrian, and Cheney (1998) replicated this finding in two diary studies. Similarly, Cheng, Tracy, and Miller (2013) found that, in response to daily frustrations and emotions, (female) narcissists manifested higher levels of emotional distress as measured by two stress biomarkers: cortisol and alpha-amylase. In addition, Rhodewalt et al. (1998) reported more self-esteem instability in narcissists in response to negative social interactions. Rhodewalt and Morf (1998) also found that narcissists responded to experimentally induced failure with greater anger, anxiety, and self-esteem fluctuations than non-narcissists. Thus, although narcissists' self-evaluations are positive, they are volatile. From a psychodynamic perspective, narcissists' inflated self-perceptions reflect strategic compensation for underlying ego fragility (Kohut, 1966). Consistent with this view, Gregg and Sedikides (2010) replicated earlier research showing a positive relation between narcissism and explicit self-esteem but also reported a negative relation between narcissism and implicit self-esteem as assessed by the Name Letter Task (Koole & Pelham, 2003) and the Go No-go Association Test (Nosek & Banaji, 2001). In all, narcissists seem to have high, but poorly grounded, self-esteem (see also Myers & Zeigler-Hill, 2012; Zeigler-Hill & Besser, 2013).

Other research has shown that narcissists respond aggressively when provoked or under conditions of self-threat (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Jones & Paulhus, 2010). Aggression in turn can be seen as a way to restore a sense of control and personal power (Depret & Fiske, 1993) or as a symbolic way to assert superiority over others (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). Yet aggression is only one way to respond to self-threatening situations. Being in a leadership position, an autocratic leadership style offers another possibility to gain authority and superiority over others. Given the responsiveness of narcissists to ego-threatening situations and their tendency to react with power-enhancing behaviors (such as aggression), we would expect narcissistic leaders to manifest a preference for an autocratic over a democratic leadership style under conditions of self-uncertainty. Thus, they should respond with an *autocratic reaction*.

It remains an empirical question whether this autocratic reaction would be restricted to cognitive success considerations or whether it would extend to affective valence judgments. It may well be that narcissistic leaders not only believe autocratic leadership to be more successful but also like it more when they are self-uncertain. Moreover, when defending themselves against self-uncertainty, they may be less concerned about social desirability norms and may openly admit their preferences for autocratic leadership on explicit measures.

Preferences for Narcissistic Leaders

On the other hand, Nevicka, De Hoogh, Van Vianen, and Ten Velden (2013) showed that, under conditions of uncertainty, narcissistic (compared to non-narcissistic) leaders were judged as more desirable and were chosen more often, regardless of whether participants were aware of the personality liabilities of such leaders (e.g., conceit, exploitativeness). Although Nevicka and colleagues did not examine the role of self-esteem or self-esteem stability, the general thrust of their findings is consistent with the idea that uncertainty fosters preferences for authoritarian/narcissistic leadership styles.

Investigating the leadership histories of 42 U.S. presidents, Watts and colleagues (2013) argued that such a preference for narcissistic leaders may be a double-edged sword. Grandiose narcissism was positively related to crisis management, agenda-setting, and legislation initiation. However, narcissistic presidents were more often the subject of congressional impeachment resolutions and behaved more unethically than non-narcissistic presidents. Using the example of Richard "Dick" Fuld, CEO and chairman of Lehman Brothers from 1994 to 2008, Stein (2013) also highlighted the ups and downs of a narcissistic leader. Under Fuld's leadership, the highly fractured company was reunited and prospered in terms of market capitalization and net revenues. Moreover, Fuld was praised and admired for his decisive response to the 9/11 terror attacks, which directly affected Lehman Brothers' global headquarters. These were probably the reasons why his autocratic leadership style, which tolerated no dissent, was accepted by his subordinates. His risk appetite and hubris, however, led to fatal financial investments and decisions, finally resulting in Lehman Brothers' bankruptcy—an event regarded as one of the most impactful triggers of the global financial crisis (for similar examples, see Owen & Davidson, 2009; Petit & Bollaert, 2012).

Conclusion

This chapter set out to determine the conditions under which individuals prefer an autocratic over a democratic leadership style. Findings from the authoritarianism and terror management literatures as well as our own research suggest that threatening situations are often characterized by self-uncertainty. Various traits moderate the link between self-uncertainty and leadership preferences. We focused on self-esteem and argued that individuals with low and unstable self-esteem are prone to submit to autocratic leadership. Individuals with high and stable self-esteem, however, are buffered against this submissive reaction. They are optimistic and self-confident, have a sense of personal control, and pursue their goals with self-determination. Thus, they possess personal security. Their belief in their abilities to tackle self-uncertainty on their own and to provide meaningful input in decision-making processes can even lead them to manifest a more pronounced preference for democratic leadership—that is, a democratic reaction. We also identified power as a buffering mechanism. Individuals who merely imagine being in a leadership position adhere to a pro-democratic default attitude in the face of self-uncertainty regardless of their self-esteem. Interestingly, one group of individuals who might react with a preference for an autocratic style particularly when in a leadership position is narcissists. They hold a high but fragile sense of self-worth, are very sensitive to situations characterized by self-uncertainty, and are prone to dominant, power-striving responses to personal threats. Therefore, a preference for autocratic leadership may be their response to self-uncertainty.

Notes

1 Note, however, that although all three of these dispositions are related to the subjective experience of self-uncertainty, they differ in terms of the nature of that relation. Chronic self-doubt is a measure of the meta-cognitive experience of self-uncertainty, whereas self-esteem instability and self-concept unclarity are typically measured as fluctuations over time. Arguably, then, chronic self-doubt constitutes the most direct measure of the experience of self-uncertainty.
2 The original German wording was "Bitte beschreiben Sie, welche Gefühle der Gedanke in Ihnen auslöst, sich Ihrer selbst unsicher zu sein," and "Bitte schreiben Sie auf, was körperlich mit Ihnen passiert, wenn Sie sich Ihrer selbst unsicher fühlen."
3 We also tested a multiplicative model with (un)certainty, self-esteem level, and self-esteem stability as independent predictors. The three-way interaction, however, was not significant (for further information, see Schoel et al., 2011, pp. 527–530).

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