CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION
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Perhaps from the very beginning of civilization, there has been concern with the question as to why some people become popular among peers, while others are rejected to the extent of living lonely life in isolation. With the Morenno's discovery of 'Sociometry' as a device for measuring the popularity of individuals in a group, it became possible for social scientists to conduct empirical studies of the factors associated with the popularity. It was natural for social scientists to start with the assumption that populars have certain personality characteristics which enables them to win the respect and admiration of their peers. Later on it was realized that the characteristics which make an individual popular among peer group may not ensure his popularity among members of another group, because cultural variations play very important role in determining what is to be admired by an individual about others (Wani, 1982).

The present study is one more attempt to discover the factors that lead to different levels of acceptability of the individual by members of a group to which he belongs. The present attempt is, however, different from the previous ones in respect of its emphasis on the cognitive processes and evaluations of the descriptive traits by the populars, neglectees and isolates, because the subjects belonging to
three groups were expected to differ in their self-perception and perception of those who are different from them with respect to sociometric status. It was assumed that the difference in self-description and description of others has to with the differences of the evaluation of the adjectives with which they have to describe themselves and others. Further, it was assumed that the three groups may differ with regard to various biased components involved in the process of self and other perception.

It is logical to assume that some individuals become popular among their cohorts because they know what traits are admired in the society to which they belong and they either cultivate those characteristics in themselves or are able to make others believe that they possess the socially desirable traits. The populars may also be aware of what is to be done to attract others while making others feel that they would reap rich dividends in their future interaction without incurring too much cost. Additionally, populars may be the persons who have a strong need for approval and, therefore, conform to the social norms.

With the above introductory remarks about the purpose of the study let us state the specific objectives of the study and then examine how far the findings of the study are in accordance with the theoretical expectations.
It may be recalled that there were three main objectives of the study: (a) to find out the differences in self and other's perception of populars, neglectees and isolates; (b) to discover differences among the three groups with respect to evaluation of traits in terms of their social desirability, importance and rareness; and (c) to discover the differences among the three groups with regard to the biased components viz., leniency error, halo-effect and rater-trait interaction.

So far as the first objective of the study is concerned, it was expected that there may be differences among the three sociometric groups regarding their self-perception. It was hypothesized that populars may perceive themselves as possessing the socially desirable traits and in the case of neglectees and isolates, the expectation was contrary.

There are individual differences in the desire to manage and effectively market one's behaviour so as to achieve favourable evaluations from others. This heightened dependence on others for approval influences the individual's self-esteem. Differences in approval motivation, that is, the desire to win the approval of significant others have been related to social conformity in several studies (Crowne and Liverant, 1963; Crowne and Marlowe, 1964; Strickland and Crowne, 1962). The more important it is to the individual that he be well regarded by others, the more frequently he
conforms to group pressure. In general, people who are interaction-oriented (McDavid, 1959; Schroder and Hunt, 1958; Wilson, 1960) and who seek harmonious social relations and the esteem of important others tend to be conforming. Non-conformists run the risk of rejection and people who conform to group norms do tend to become popular (Argyle, 1957). An interesting confirmation of this point is provided in a study of the sociology of musical taste by Johnstone and Katz (1957). They reported that the songs preferred by popular girls conform more closely to neighbourhood norms than the song preferences of the less popular.

These empirical findings lead us to believe that populars have a strong need for approval which may affect their self-esteem and hence their self-perception. Since they receive some social appraisal, this may further raise this need and thereby they try to acquire those traits which will add still further to their popularity. In contrast, neglectees and isolates don't have the strong need for approval, therefore, they neither conform too much to the social norms, nor they try to achieve good characteristics. The findings of the present study seem to support these views. Populars have perceived themselves as good, loyal, powerful, neat, hard-working, friendly, kind and trustworthy. Neglectees and isolates have perceived themselves as powerless, quite, weak, tense, bad, stupid, etc.
Earlier studies of Dahlke (1953) and Baron (1953) also support these findings. Dahlke's study revealed that poorly adjusted children rate themselves negatively as compared to those who are better adjusted. Likewise, Baron's study revealed that high sociometric girls seldom indicate the presence of adverse emotionality or a sense of inordinate environmental demands. They compare themselves favourably with peers, feel secure in status, enjoy group activities and display (systematic) behaviour infrequently and appear to have established satisfactory home and school relationships. Girls of low sociometric status frequently indicate the presence of adverse emotionality and a sense of excessive environmental demands and compare unfavourably with peers.

Regarding others' perception two contradictory effects have been observed in the empirical studies. The first one, the false consensus effect, is the tendency for people to perceive similarity, to assume that others feel, think or behave as they themselves do (e.g., Fields and Schuman, 1976; Ross, Greene and House, 1977; Sherman, et al. 1983) and that individuals often use the same categories in describing the other people that they use in describing themselves (Dornbusch, Hastorf, Richardson, Muzzy and Vreeland, 1956; Shraunger and Altrochi, 1964; Lemong and Warren, 1974; O'Keefe, Lelia and O'Keefe, 1977; Hirshberg and Jennings, 1980; Higgins, King and Marvin, 1982; Lewicki, 1983). Even some earliest theorists
like Hall, 1898; James, 1915; McDougall, 1921; Mead, 1934; etc. have also supported the contention that there is a reciprocal and mutual influence between the self-concept and the perception of others. People differ greatly in perceiving others and there can be little doubt that the self plays an important part in this process. People obviously often attempt to defend or enhance their self-esteem and use their images of themselves as comparison standards in evaluating themselves and others (e.g. Peterson, 1974; Weary and Arkin, 1981).

The second effect is the tendency to perceive others differently from oneself. This effect is mostly operative in those instances in which the need to emerge as unique overrides the need to be seen as a member of a group. The need to be unique is specially likely to be dominant, if being unique implies being 'better' (Fromkin, 1970, 1972).

Besides the above effects, another important effect which operates in the person perception process is the social stereotyping. Social stereotypes essentially consist of a set of characteristics attributed to a human group. It results from normal cognitive categorization processes that ensue as a result of peoples' attempts to deal with the enormous amount of information they receive about other people (Allport, 1945; Hamilton, 1979, 1981; Tajfel, 1961). Such type of categorization becomes the basis for using
similarity or dissimilarity judgements (Campbell, 1977).

When we examine the result of present study in the light of the above discussion, it seems that the perception of others has been mostly influenced by the inter-group discriminating effects. The results of the study imply that populars as well as neglectees and isolates have perceived others belonging to their own sociometric groups similar to themselves; whereas persons belonging to other sociometric groups have been perceived differently. For example, populars have perceived other populars positively and other neglectees and other isolates negatively; neglectees and isolates have perceived other neglectees and isolates negatively, that is in the same way as they perceived themselves, and perceived other populars positively, i.e., in contrast to their self-evaluation.

As far as the second aim, i.e., the trait evaluation of three sociometric groups is concerned, results show that the difference do exist between the groups. Populars have evaluated those traits as important and desirable which they have assigned to themselves. For example, populars perceived themselves as possessing the traits like good, loyal, powerful, hardworking kind, neat, friendly and trustworthy; they have evaluated some of these traits as socially desirable
and some as important. All of these traits have been evaluated by populars as rare. It seems that populars are aware what traits are socially desirable and important, and they try to acquire these traits so as to conform to the group norms. Simultaneously, they seem to have a desire to be unique i.e., be different from others. This is evident from their evaluation of those traits as rare which they think they possess and also from the perception of others being contrasted from their self-perception.

The relationship between being liked by the other members and the closeness of one's adherence to the group norms seems to be complex one. Sometimes results different from those reported earlier by us have been observed. For example, Dittes and Kelley (1956) demonstrated that the members who conform 'most' to the group norms, privately as well as publicly, are not populars but have an average amount of acceptance by the group. Likewise, Jones, Jones and Gergan (1963) have shown that when a person is seen to be dependent and consistently conforming, he is negatively evaluated. However, even if he is very conforming he is evaluated positively, if the conformity does not take place in a context in which he is seen to be dependent.

The above findings and the findings of the present study lead us to believe that populars have a better
understanding and perception of the social interaction processes and situations. They seem to conform to the social norms only to the extent which gives them the attainment of popularity, and they may not hesitate in deviating from the social norms or being unique, where the deviation or being unique is admired and is, therefore, necessary for their maintenance of popularity. The neglectees and isolates seem to lack the awareness of socially desirable characteristics as well as the insight in the process of social interaction. This is evident from their evaluation of traits. They have evaluated those traits as unimportant and undesirable, which they think they possess. Simultaneously, they have evaluated the same traits as uncommon, indicating that they consider themselves different from others. But for them being different or being unique does not mean being better as is evident from their self-perception. Instead, this is an expression of their awareness of being neglected and isolated.

The third aim of the study was to find out the differences among the three sociometric groups regarding some biased components, i.e., the leniency error, halo-effect and rater-trait interaction.

The leniency effect is the tendency to rate oneself as well as others high on favourable traits and low on
unfavourable ones. It was assumed that populars would be more lenient than neglectees and isolates. The assumption was drawn from the social exchange theory propounded by a number of social theorists (for example, Homans, 1961; Thibaut and Kelley, 1959) who have employed the conventional incentive formulation in analyzing many different forms of social behaviour. Social interactions are viewed as social exchange in which people are affected by the ratio of rewards to costs. Thibaut and Kelley have proposed that in dealing with other people, the individual will consider more than the ratio between his rewards and costs in the interaction; he will be attracted to these people to the degree that there is a positive outcome (that is, his reward exceeds his cost). These exchange formulations are useful in accounting for differences in personal popularity as Thibaut and Kelley and Homans have shown in their discussion of the well known study by Helen Hall Jennings (1950). In a comparison of highly popular teenage girls with those who were far less popular in a state institution for delinquent girls, the popular girls generally provided many more rewards to their peers at comparatively little psychological cost to these others.

Our result is in accordance with the above findings. Populars have been found to be more lenient in assigning the ratings than neglectees and isolates, thereby confirming the notion that populars, in order to enhance their popularity, are more generous to others. Neglectees and isolates seem to
undermine their sociometric status by giving less reward, in the form of being strict while rating others.

Halo-effect is the judge's tendency to rate subjects on several traits in terms of a general impression of goodness or badness. Thorndike (1920) gave emphasis on the dramatic fact that if another was liked or found attractive on one dimension, he would tend to be liked in all respects. In the present study intergroup differences were expected regarding the halo-effect. Popularters were expected to show less halo-effect on the ground that their perception and cognition of others are more differentiated and complex. This implies that they would not be swayed by overall impression of others but would be able to judge each characteristic of others independently. Neglectees and isolates were expected to show greater halo-effect because of lack of intraindividual difference in perception of others. However, no significant difference was found among the three groups. The lack of difference among the groups may be due to the fact that although these subjects were instructed to keep in mind a particular individual i.e. a popular a neglectee and an isolate, while rating others, they might not have adhered to this instruction and hence considered the category of the individual and rated him stereotypically. In the absence of consideration for individuality or uniqueness, the cognitive differentiation and complexity might have not been relevant in describing the others.
The lack of difference among the three groups regarding inter-trait interaction, found in the present study, is contrary to the expectation. It may be so because the general tendency of being less lenient is so dominant throughout that the slight variations in the degree of leniency on the occasion of assigning ratings for different traits are over shadowed by the generalized tendency of being lenient or strict in describing others.