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Self-Esteem Within the Work and Organizational Context: A Review of the Organization-Based Self-Esteem Literature[☆]

Jon L. Pierce*

*Department of Management Studies, Labovitz School of Business and Economics,
University of Minnesota Duluth, 10 University Drive, Duluth, MN 55812, USA*

Donald G. Gardner

*Department of Management, College of Business and Administration,
University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, Colorado Springs, CO, USA*

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On numerous occasions it has been suggested that an individual's self-esteem, formed around work and organizational experiences, plays a significant role in determining employee motivation, work-related attitudes and behaviors. We review more than a decade of research on an organization-based conceptualization of self-esteem. It is observed that sources of organization structure, signals about worth from the organization, as well as, success-building role conditions predict organization-based self-esteem. In addition, organization-based self-esteem is related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, motivation, citizenship behavior, in-role performance, and turnover intentions, as well as, other important organization-related attitudes and behaviors. Explanations for these effects and directions for future research are discussed.

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During the 1970s, Korman (1970, 1971, 1976) published several papers focused on employee self-esteem. At the center of his work was the suggestion that an individual's self-esteem, formed around work and organizational experiences, would play a significant role in determining employee motivation, work-related attitudes and behaviors. We review

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 219 726 7929; fax: +.: +1 218 726 7578.

E-mail addresses: jpierce@d.umn.edu (J.L. Pierce), dgardner@uccs.edu (D.G. Gardner).

more than a decade of research which has focused on 'organization-based self-esteem' – a conceptualization of self-esteem largely determined by an individual's work and organizational experiences. We seek to identify what might be the antecedents and consequences of organization-based self-esteem, and the role played by self-esteem framed within the work and organizational context. We start by reviewing the self-esteem concept and related self-esteem theory. We summarize the research focused on organization-based self-esteem which provides insight into who the high organization-based self-esteem individual is, and what might be its antecedent and consequent conditions. We also discuss the construct validity of the organization-based self-esteem instrument and offer some suggestions for future research.

Self-Esteem

As a preliminary discussion to organization-based self-esteem we briefly discuss the self-esteem construct. Distinguishing global from organization-based self-esteem, we review the conceptual definition of organization-based self-esteem and provide a partial explication of the construct.

The Self-Esteem Construct

Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall self-evaluation of his/her competencies (Rosenberg, 1965). It is that self-evaluation and descriptive conceptualization that individuals make and maintain with regard to themselves. In this sense, self-esteem is a personal evaluation reflecting what people think of themselves as individuals. For Korman (1970), self-esteem reflects the degree to which the individual "sees him [her]self as a competent, need-satisfying individual" (p. 32); thus, the high self-esteem individual has a "sense of personal adequacy and a sense of having achieved need satisfaction in the past" (Korman, 1966: 479). In addition to reflecting a cognition about oneself, Pelham and Swann (1989) note that self-esteem also consists of an affective (liking/disliking) component – high self-esteem people like who and what they are. Thus, people high in global self-esteem agree with statements like "I am a person of worth, on an equal plane with others" and "I am satisfied with myself" (from Rosenberg's, 1965, widely used measure of self-esteem).

The self-esteem construct is usually conceptualized as a hierarchical phenomenon. As such, it exists at different levels of specificity, commonly seen in terms of global, and task or situation-specific self-esteem (Simpson & Boyle, 1975). As a multifaceted conceptualization of the self, scholars (e.g., Korman, 1970; Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton, 1976) generally agree that self-esteem may also develop around a number of other dimensions (e.g., the social, physical, academic, and moral-self).

To date, most of our understanding of self-esteem in general and self-esteem within the work and organizational context stems from research focused on global (chronic) self-esteem (Brockner, 1988). Research focused on an organization-based conceptualization of the self has, however, started to emerge.

Organization-Based Self-Esteem

Building upon the notion that self-esteem is a hierarchical and multifaceted phenomenon, and Coopersmith's (1967) observation that self-esteem indicates the extent to which the individual believes him/herself to be capable, significant, and worthy, Pierce, Gardner, Cummings and Dunham (1989) introduced the concept of organization-based self-esteem. *Organization-based self-esteem* (OBSE) is defined as the degree to which an individual believes him/herself to be capable, significant, and worthy as an organizational member.

Elaboration of the construct casts OBSE as a self-evaluation of one's personal adequacy (worthiness) as an organizational member. It reflects the self-perceived value that individuals have of themselves as important, competent, and capable within their employing organizations – employees with high organization-based self-esteem have come to believe that "I count around here." Consistent with Korman's (1966, 1970, 1971, 1976) view of self-esteem, people with strong organization-based self-esteem have a sense of having satisfied their needs through their organizational roles. OBSE is less malleable than task-specific self-esteem, but more malleable than global. Early in one's tenure with an organization, OBSE is an outer level conceptualization of the self – state-like, reflecting unstable feelings of self-regard (Campbell, 1990). With increasing tenure, self-esteem evolves from a primarily outer level to a less changeable inner level self-concept (Campbell, 1990). Thus, for most job-experienced employees OBSE is highly stable (Pierce et al., 1989). Organizational members with high OBSE have come to believe that "I make a difference around here" and that "I am an important part of this place" (from the OBSE Scale; Pierce et al., 1989).

We note that while OBSE is highly stable in a similarly stable work environment, changes in the latter can produce changes in OBSE (see discussion in the following; e.g., Pierce et al., 1989). It is because OBSE is potentially changeable (e.g., increased) that organizations may affect OBSE by changing its likely antecedents (see the following).

Theorizing on Organization-Based Self-Esteem

Scholars have reasoned that individuals form a self-concept around work, and that their organizational experiences play a powerful role in determining their level of self-esteem. In this section, we will summarize existing perspectives on the theory of self-esteem, addressing the question – What are the determinants and consequences of self-esteem which is formed around work and organizational experiences?

The literature on the origins of global self-esteem (cf. Brockner, 1988; Franks & Marolla, 1976; Korman, 1970, 1971, 1976) suggest that self-esteem is affected by several forces (forces similar to those that give rise to self-efficacy; Bandura, 1982). These determinants can be categorized as (1) the implicit signals sent by the environmental structures to which one is exposed, (2) messages sent from significant others in one's social environment, and (3) the individual's feelings of efficacy and competence derived from his/her direct and personal experiences. Building upon this work, Pierce et al. (1989) reasoned that the determinants of organization-based self-esteem are similar, yet grounded in one's work and organizational experiences.

Speaking to the role of work environment structures, Korman (1971) noted that in mechanistically designed social systems people tend to develop low levels of self-esteem. Mechanistic organizations achieve a high level of system-imposed control through a division of labor, rigid hierarchy, centralization, standardization, and formalization. Such social system structuring promotes the development of belief systems that are consonant with the inherent mistrust in the abilities and willingness of people to self-regulate. Building upon Korman's work, Pierce et al. (1989) theorized that any form of system-imposed behavior control, or external control system, carries with it an assumption about the incapability of individuals to self-direct and self-regulate. One consequence of a highly structured and controlled system is likely to be the suggestion to employees that they are not competent within the organizational context. By way of contrast, complex job designs, non-routine technologies, organically designed and high involvement social systems lead to higher levels of self-esteem because they are less structured, tend to see people as a valuable organizational 'resource' and provide them with greater opportunities to self-regulate and express themselves in their organizational roles.

As people experience higher levels of self-expression and personal control, there is an increased likelihood that the individual will attribute positive events to themselves, thereby affecting their level of organization-based self-esteem. It could be argued that as work environment structure decreases and personal control increases, people will come to see themselves as capable of independent action and thereby develop a sense of self-worth consistent with that personal image.

A second major source from which self-esteem emerges are the social messages received and internalized that come from meaningful and significant others (Baumeister, 1999; Brockner, 1988; Brookover, Thomas & Paterson, 1964). To the extent that others think that an individual is able, competent, and need-satisfying, and over time communicates that perception through their words and behaviors, an individual will come to hold similar self-beliefs (Korman, 1970, 1976). In this sense an individual's OBSE is, in part, a social construction, shaped and molded according to the messages about the self transmitted by role models, teachers, mentors, and those who evaluate the individual's work. Once these messages are internalized and integrated into the person's conceptualization of and evaluation of the self, they become a part of the self-concept.

Finally, it has been suggested that self-esteem finds part of its origin in direct and personal experiences (e.g., Brockner, 1988; Korman, 1970, 1976). Individuals who come to feel efficacious and competent, derived from their own experiences (e.g., successful completion of a project), come to hold positive images of themselves. Generally speaking, experiences of success in an organization will bolster an individual's organization-based self-esteem, while the experience of failure will have the opposite effect. Bandura's (1997) work with self-efficacy provides some insight into this relationship. He suggests that the impact of past performance (e.g., success and/or failure) on self-beliefs depends on the individual's interpretation of that performance and the attributions that are made. Individuals who have successful experiences and who attribute that success to themselves are more likely to experience an increase in self-efficacy, which in turn and over time impacts OBSE (Gardner & Pierce, 1998, 2001). Similarly, an individual who experiences failure and attributes it to the self will eventually experience a diminution of self-esteem.

Scholars working with the global self-esteem construct (e.g., Brockner, 1988; Korman, 1970, 1976) posit that self-esteem is central to the explanation of employee attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction), motivation, and performance. Addressing the question ‘why,’ several self-regulatory mechanisms have been employed to provide insight into these self-esteem effects. Among the most visible explanatory mechanisms have been self-consistency motivation (Korman, 1970), self-enhancement motivation (Dipboye, 1977), behavioral plasticity (Brockner, 1988), self-protection (Korman, 2001), or a combination of them (Dipboye, 1977). We have reason to believe that the same self-regulatory mechanisms will play a role influencing the attitudinal, motivational, and behavioral effects of OBSE.

Employing *self-consistency motivation*, Korman (1970) hypothesized that “all other things being equal, individuals will engage in and find satisfying those behavioral roles which maximize their sense of cognitive balance or consistency” (p. 32). He predicted that (a) “individuals will be motivated to perform on a task or job in a manner which is consistent with the self-image with which they approach the task or job situation,” and (b) “individuals will tend to choose and find most satisfying those jobs and task roles which are consistent with their self-cognitions” (Korman, 1970: 32). This means that people who have positive images of themselves will engage in behaviors, possess attitudes and choose roles that reinforce that positive image. In contrast, people who have negative images of themselves will engage in behaviors (or withhold effort) and possess attitudes that are consistent with that negative image.

Cognitive consistency motivation and its role as a regulatory mechanism has sparked controversy (see Dipboye, 1977; Swann, Griffin, Predmore & Gaines, 1987). *Self-enhancement* theory, while offering many of the same predictions as self-consistency theory, provides an alternative perspective on the underlying dynamics associated with self-esteem effects. Self-enhancement theory posits that low as well as high self-esteem individuals have basic needs to enhance their level of self-esteem (Dipboye, 1977; Sedikides, Gaertner & Tosuchi, 2003). In contrast, Korman (1970) argued that “man is consistent and not self-enhancing” (p. 36). According to Korman (1970), people have a need to align their level of performance with their self-concept. Self-enhancement theory also postulates that low self-esteem individuals commonly engage in “damage control.” They lack confidence about their ability to succeed (Campbell, 1990), and to prevent further erosion of their self-esteem, they commonly withhold task-related effort. This lack of effort then becomes the justification for their poor performance, rather than more enduring problems like lack of ability. “Thus, the low self-esteem person’s failure may reflect a *rational* decision to exert low effort rather than an *irrational* consistency with the self-perception of inadequacy” (Dipboye, 1977: 110; emphasis added).

According to Brockner (1988) *behavioral plasticity* refers to the extent to which an individual is affected by external factors (e.g., social influences). Brockner (1988) hypothesized that there are differences in the degree to which individuals attend and react to external cues. The degree of an individual’s reactivity to external cues is, at least in part, caused by self-esteem. People with low self-esteem are more behaviorally plastic (reactive) than those with high self-esteem because the former tend to be more yielding to external cues (Brockner, 1988). One attribute of low self-esteem individuals is that they seek out and respond to events in their environment, while high self-esteem individuals are more confident in their competence and consequently attend to and react to external cues with a lower

intensity. Low self-esteem individuals experience more uncertainty as to the correctness of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and thus rely more on external cues to guide them. In addition, they seek acceptance and approval from others through conforming attitudinal and behavioral acts. Predictions from behavioral plasticity position self-esteem as an important individual difference variable moderating the relationship between work environment conditions (e.g., adverse role conditions) and employee attitudes, motivation and behavior.

Recently, Korman (2001) conceived of a dual motivational system operating in work organizations. One is the *self-enhancement motivational system*, which is activated when employees see an opportunity to achieve high performance goals, believe they can achieve them, but also see the organization as encouraging them to do so. Korman believes providing meaningful work and empowering employees to perform will lead to high self-enhancing employees. A second motivational system, which Korman terms *self-protective motivation*, is activated when employees feel they cannot meet performance expectations, and see the work environment as one that emphasizes punishment in motivating employees. Damage control, as discussed above, would be evident when self-protection motivation is in operation. For both motivational systems Korman positions self-esteem as a key dispositional precursor. High self-esteem precedes self-enhancement motivation, while low self-esteem precedes self-protection motivation (along with other dispositions like locus of control, and positive and negative affectivity).

In summary, the various perspectives on how global self-esteem and therefore OBSE might affect human motivation differ on a number of issues. There is the long-term issue of whether humans are self-consistent, self-enhance, or do both under different circumstances. There is also the issue of whether low self-esteem individuals are more reactive to cues in their social environments than highs. These are research questions beyond the scope of this review and remain to be resolved in future research (see Discussion section that follows).

Next we turn our attention to a review of research on organization-based self-esteem. The work that has been conducted employing this construct informs our thinking about three substantive issues, namely, the validity of the instrument measuring this self-esteem construct, the trait correlates of the organization-based self-esteem, and the work and organizational experiences which might be its antecedents and consequences.

Research Methodology Issues

In this section we comment on methodological issues that pertain to organization-based self-esteem. Specifically, we comment on the instrument *per se* and existing construct validation evidence.

Measurement

Pierce et al.'s (1989) instrument for the measurement of organization-based self-esteem is a 10-item instrument. The instructions ask the respondent to think about his/her relationship with their employing organization and to indicate the degree to which they have come to *believe in* each of each of the following statements: I COUNT around here; I am TAKEN SERIOUSLY around here; There is FAITH IN ME around here; I am TRUSTED around

here; I am HELPFUL around here; I am a VALUABLE PART OF THIS PLACE; I am EFFICIENT around here; I am an IMPORTANT PART OF THIS PLACE; I MAKE A DIFFERENCE around here; and I am COOPERATIVE around here. Each item is measured with a Likert-type scale anchored strongly agree to strongly disagree.

While the instrument has now been employed in more than a dozen countries (e.g., Australia, Egypt, England, Hong Kong, Iceland, India, Israel, Japan, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, United States), it is not known to what extent culture is a boundary condition. It is possible that people from collectivistic cultures may think of self (e.g., I COUNT around here) differently from those with more individualistic values (see [Riordan & Vandenberg, 1994](#)). Finally and as will be seen below, given the consistently strong coefficient alpha values a more parsimonious instrument might be a viable option. Several investigators (e.g., [Chattopadhyay, 2003](#); [Van Dyne & Pierce, 2003](#)) have employed a shortened version of the instrument without any apparent effect.

Construct Validation Evidence

[Schwab \(1980\)](#) reminds us that construct validation is a dynamic and on-going process. Construct validity refers to the degree of correspondence that exists between the conceptual definition given to a construct and its operational definition ([Schwab, 1980](#)). According to [Edwards \(2003\)](#), “Construct validity does not refer to the inherent properties of a measure or instrument. Instead, it concerns the degree to which a measure represents a particular construct and allows credible inferences regarding the nature of the construct” (p. 5). While there is no single test that can be employed to demonstrate construct validity, its evidence stems from a number of sources ([Edwards, 2003](#); [Schwab, 1980](#)). First, construct validity evidence derives from an examination of the relationship between the conceptual and operational definition separate from the theory in which the construct is embedded. Second, evidence speaking to the issue of construct validity stems from the behavior of the measure within its nomological network.

Our review of the OBSE literature provides us with several new perspectives regarding the validity of the instrument developed and initially validated in [Pierce et al. \(1989\)](#). Their developmental and construct validation work involved over 2000 individuals from a diverse set of organizations and occupations. They conducted seven field studies and a single laboratory simulation. They provided evidence in support of the homogeneity of scale items, test-retest and internal consistency reliability, convergent, discriminant, incremental, concurrent, and predictive validity estimates.

The studies reviewed here reveal internal consistency reliability estimates (coefficient alpha) for the 10-item instrument ranging from .82 to .95. The only alpha value outside of this range is an internal consistency coefficient of .69 from a Korean sample. The average reported alpha value is .88.

Employing confirmatory factor analyses, [Van Dyne, VandeWalle, Kostova and Cummings \(2000\)](#) found a single factor solution for the 10-item instrument. Their ethnically diverse sample included 797 individuals, evenly split between males and female, with respondents coming from 53 different countries and speaking 102 different native languages.

OBSE was correlated with measures of global self-esteem. As noted earlier global self-esteem is the overall evaluation and affective orientation toward the self, stemming

from an accumulation of an individual's involvement in several different life arenas. It is therefore possible for an individual to have differing self-perceptions and evaluations from one arena to the next; thus we are unlikely to witness an extremely high convergence with global self-esteem. Yet, given the importance of work in the lives of many people we would expect a relatively strong and positive relationship. Results from a number of American samples reveal correlations between OBSE and global self-esteem that range between .44 (Jex & Elacqua, 1999) and .54 (Pierce et al., 1989). These findings suggest modest convergent validity, with both the Rosenberg (1965) and Janis-Field self-esteem scales (Eagly, 1967).

Each study conducted subsequent to the introduction of the organization-based self-esteem construct and measurement instrument was designed to address substantive hypotheses related to OBSE. From these studies we can gain insight into the nomological validity (i.e., concurrent, predictive and criterion-related validity) of the OBSE instrument. The vast majority of the studies reviewed below provide support for the hypothesized effects related to OBSE, which leaves us a respectable amount of concurrent validity evidence.

Several studies (reviewed in the following) speak to the instrument's predictive and criterion-related validity. Two studies, one an organizational simulation (Pierce et al., 1989) and the second a longitudinal field study (Riordan, Weatherly, Vandenberg & Self, 2001) provide evidence suggesting that social system and job design affects organization-based self-esteem. Employing longitudinal data and a correlational design Gardner, Pierce, Van Dyne and Cummings (2000) reveals a significant relationship between job and pay level, and OBSE. Employing a quasi-experimental design, Riordan et al. (2001) found that an organization's socialization tactics affect OBSE. In addition, several investigators observed OBSE's lagged prediction of performance and employee attitudes (Gardner & Pierce, 1998, 2001; Gardner et al., 2000; Pierce et al., 1993; Riordan et al., 2001; Van Dyne et al., 2000).

Antecedents of Organization-Based Self-Esteem

Building upon the notion that self-esteem is shaped by work and organizational experiences, and self-esteem influences work-related motivation, attitudes and behavior, we provide a comprehensive review of the literature¹ that has emerged since the introduction of the measure of organization-based self-esteem (Pierce et al., 1989). We will first look at relationships that have been positioned as the antecedents of OBSE, which include individual traits, work and organizational experiences.² Next we look at relationships that reflect the hypothesized effects of OBSE. Following a review of this main effects literature, we will conclude our review of substantive OBSE research by looking at those studies that have positioned OBSE as either a mediating or moderating variable in several different models of micro-organizational behavior.

Trait Correlates of OBSE

Research evidence, largely cross-sectional, correlational, and self-report in nature, provides us with some insight into the person who develops a strong and positive organization-based self-esteem. We treat issues pertaining to the traits of the person as correlates simply

because the causal connection between OBSE and the different traits awaits theoretical elaboration, a task beyond the scope of this paper.

We would expect there to be a substantial relationship between global self-esteem and organization-based self-esteem. After all, work is a major life activity that likely has effects on both work-related and global self-esteem. As mentioned earlier, observations from American samples reveal a positive and significant relationship between global self-esteem and OBSE (Jex & Elacqua, 1999; Tang & Ibrahim, 1998; Van Dyne, Earley & Cummings, 1990; Vecchio, 2000). OBSE has also been observed to have a significant relationship with global self-esteem in the Middle East (i.e., Egypt and Saudi Arabia), within a group of Mexican workers (Borycki, Thorn & LeMaster, 1998), and in a sample of U.K. engineering consultants (Bowden, 2002). These significant non-US sample studies had correlations in the range of .17 to .56.

Organization-based self-esteem has also been observed to have a positive and significant relationship with generalized (trait) self-efficacy (Gardner & Pierce, 1998, 2001; Stark, Thomas & Poppler, 2000) and job-specific self-efficacy (Kark, Shamir & Chen, 2003). Lee (2003b) also reports observing a positive relationship between OBSE and generalized self-efficacy in both of his Korean bank samples. Similarly, Van Dyne et al. (1990) observed a significant relationship between class-based self-esteem (a modification of OBSE to the classroom for the students being studied) and a measure of state-based self-efficacy (i.e., certainty judgments for a particular grade) among their sample of university students. Finally, Kark et al. (2003) observed a positive relationship between OBSE and collective efficacy in their study of a large Israeli banking organization. People with high OBSE possess higher global self-esteem and view themselves as being more efficacious than their low OBSE counterparts. The self-efficacy correlations have ranged between .19 and .65.

It has also been observed that OBSE is related to several other individual difference variables. Heck, Bedeian, and Day (in press) and Stark et al. (2000) observed a negative relationship between OBSE and negative affectivity. While Lee (2003b) failed to observe a similar relationship, he did observe a positive relationship between OBSE and positive affectivity in his Korean samples. OBSE has also been found to have a negative relationship with Machiavellianism (Vecchio, 2000), and a positive relationship with internal locus of control (Stark et al., 2000), and Protestant work ethic and need for achievement (Tang & Ibrahim, 1998). Correlations between OBSE and these non-self-concept personality traits ranged between .21 and .57.

In summary, research on personality correlates of OBSE has been mostly sporadic, with the exception of global self-esteem. At this point we can characterize the high OBSE individual as being high in global self-esteem, positive affectivity, internal locus of control, Protestant work ethic, and need for achievement, and low on negative affectivity and Machiavellianism.

Organizational Context

As noted above, it has been suggested that the origins of self-esteem can be found in three different forces: the implicit signals sent by organization structures, the messages sent by significant others in one's social environment (interpersonal relations and organizational

culture), and feelings of efficacy and competence derived from one's own experiences (success-building role conditions).

Organizational structure. From a theoretical perspective, OBSE is believed to, in part, find its roots in the organizational structures to which the individual is exposed. Organization scholars (e.g., [Berger & Cummings, 1979](#)), for example, have commented upon the negative effects of mechanistically designed organizational structures and organizational size. Conventional wisdom suggests that large and mechanistically designed social systems breed an impersonality of interpersonal relationships, which eventually contributes to negative individual effects, such as job dissatisfaction and alienation. Research evidence confirms these predictions. [Ragins, Cotton and Miller \(2000\)](#), for example, report a negative relationship ($r = -.17, p < .01$) between organization size and OBSE. [Chattopadhyay \(2003\)](#) also observed a negative relationship between social system size and organization-based self-esteem. [Pierce et al. \(1989\)](#) observed that employees exposed to a mechanistically designed organization had lower levels of OBSE than those working under a more organically designed social system. Similarly, [Tan and Peng \(1997\)](#) report positive relationships between organic structures and a context-specific organization-based measure of self-esteem.

Complex jobs typically allow employees a high level of self-direction and self-control. We would expect this to have a positive effect on employees' self-esteem. Several investigators have explored the relationship between job complexity and OBSE. In each of these investigations a relatively strong and positive relationship has been observed, both within North American studies, but also across several other cultures. Specifically, [Tan and Peng \(1997\)](#) hypothesized and observed a positive relationship between job complexity (i.e., jobs characterized by high levels of feedback, task identity, and significance) and OBSE, as did [Pierce et al. \(1989\)](#). Consistent with observations of a positive relationship between job complexity and OBSE, [Chattopadhyay and George \(2001\)](#) found a positive relationship ($r = .49$) between task interdependence (which increases job complexity) and OBSE within the computer manufacturing industry.

Several investigations looking at the effects of job complexity on OBSE derive from non-American samples. [Lee \(2003b\)](#), for example, reports finding a positive relationship between job complexity and OBSE in both of his Korean bank samples. In his regression model, job complexity emerges with the strongest beta weight as a predictor of OBSE, stronger than that associated with positive affectivity and perceptions of participatory management practices. [Vecchio \(2000\)](#) and [McAllister and Bigley \(2002\)](#) report that there is a positive relationship between autonomy and OBSE, as did [Borycki et al. \(1998\)](#) in both their American and Mexican samples. [Tang and Ibrahim \(1998\)](#) observed a positive relationship between job complexity and OBSE in their American and Middle East samples (respectively), while [Aryee and Luk \(1996\)](#) observed a significant relationship between interesting work and skill utilization, and OBSE in their Hong Kong sample. In sum, there is a robust relationship (r values typically ranging between .22 and .61) between the perception that one performs enriched work and one's level of OBSE.

Effects associated with opportunities for participation and the exercise of control through participation in autonomous work groups on OBSE have been examined. Consistent with the observation that the opportunity to exercise influence favorably affects OBSE is [Kostova, Latham, Cummings and Hollingworth's \(1997\)](#) observation of a positive relationship

($r = .32$) between participation and OBSE. Lee (2003b) reports a positive relationship ($r = .52$ and $.46$) between participatory management practices and OBSE. In a study of employee owned organizations, Pierce (1997) reports a positive relationship ($r = .54$) between perceptions of influence/control and OBSE. Similarly, Bowden (2002) reports a positive relationship between work control and OBSE within her sample of British engineering consultants. Vecchio (2000) observed a negative relationship ($r = -.46$) between a sense of lack of control and OBSE, suggesting that coming to feel that one is not able to control work environmental forces adversely affects one's OBSE. The effect of leader behavior in autonomous work groups on OBSE was investigated by Elloy and Randolph (1997). They reasoned that leaders who permit their followers to exercise self-direction and self-control, and provide the follower with the opportunity to exercise competence and experience success, would contribute to OBSE. They found a positive relationship between the degree to which such leader behavior was displayed and followers' OBSE.

Consistent with the perspectives on the origins of self-esteem within the work and organizational context (e.g., Brockner, 1988; Korman, 1970, 1971, 1976) we conclude from these studies that *work environment structures and management practices (e.g., social system design, technology, participatory leadership and management practices, job design) that give rise to opportunities for self-direction and self-control are positively associated with OBSE.*

Interpersonal relationships and organizational culture. Korman (1970) and others (e.g., Baumeister, 1999; Brookover et al., 1964) have suggested that self-esteem finds its roots, in part, in *messages of value* transmitted from the organization to the employee via interpersonal relationships and through the culture of the organization. Insight into this source of self-esteem stems from an examination of a number of sources, among them: trusting relationships, supportiveness, leader–member relationship, pay level and job level/status, and work-place discrimination. In the studies reviewed here, each has been shown to have a relationship with self-esteem.

Pierce et al. (1989) hypothesized that respect displayed by management to the employee is an important signal which affects the beliefs that employees form with regard to themselves within the organizational context. Employing two samples of school personnel, they observed a positive relationship ($r = .30$ and $.52$) between perceived managerial respect (i.e., management's demonstration of positive regard for the individual) and the employee's OBSE. Chattopadhyay and George (2001) report a positive relationship ($r = .52$) between trust and OBSE, suggesting that being in an environment characterized by trust (i.e., trust in the behavior of one's work-group peers) has a positive relationship with one's OBSE (cf. Chattopadhyay, 2003).

The effect of leader–follower relationships on OBSE was explored by Kark and Shamir (2002) and Kark et al. (2003) in their studies of transformational leaders. They observed a positive relationship ($r = .26$) between leader attempts to develop the follower personally and intellectually, two distinctive characteristics of the transformational leader, and the follower's OBSE. Examining the relationship between charismatic leadership and OBSE, they report that followers of charismatic leaders come to believe in their personal competence and worth (i.e., have high OBSE; $r = .16$).

Heck, Bedeian, and Day (in press) report a positive and significant relationship ($r = .67$) between the quality of the leader–member exchange relationship and OBSE. Similarly,

Aryee, Budhwar and Tan (2003) report a correlation of .61 between the same two variables. Lee (2003b) observed a positive relationship ($r = .67$) between OBSE and support from both one's supervisor ($r = .38$ and $.24$) and one's co-workers ($r = .37$ and $.22$) in each of his Korean samples.

Lee also reports a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and OBSE (Lee, 2003b), as did Phillips and Hall (2001) in their American sample ($r = .70$). McAllister and Bigley (2002) observed a positive relationship between organizational care and OBSE ($r = .23$). Employees who work for organizations whose values and principles are centered on fulfilling employee needs and interests report higher levels of organization-based self-esteem.

Distributive and procedural justice are two important dimensions of organizational justice. Heck, Bedeian, and Day (in press) reasoned that employees who perceive that they have been treated unfairly with respect to either decision procedures or outcomes will "feel less valued and fulfilled . . . resulting in a diminished organization-based self-esteem" (p. 12); they report a positive relationship between procedural and distributive justice, and OBSE ($r = .64$ and $.46$, respectively). Chattopadhyay (1999) also reports a positive and significant relationship between OBSE and justice ($r = .53$), and Wiesenfeld, Brockner and Thibault (2000) observed a positive relationship ($r = .64$) between managers' perceptions of procedural fairness in the handling of lay-offs and their OBSE. The more managers felt that a lay-off had not been handled fairly the lower their reported self-esteem. Similarly, McAllister and Bigley (2002) report observing a positive relationship ($r = .39$) between experiences of organizational fairness and organization-based self-esteem. In a somewhat similar vein, Stark et al. (2000) observed a negative relationship ($r = -.30$) between experiences of a violation in the psychological contract and OBSE.

In recent years a large number of organizations have implemented employee stock ownership plans. Pierce and Rodgers (in press) reasoned that giving an employee an equity ownership stake in the organization is potentially a powerful message communicated from the organization to the employee signaling their importance, worth and value to the organization. Pierce (1997) tested the Tannenbaum (1983) suggestion that ownership is ego-enhancing. Specifically, he observed a positive relationship ($r = .58$) between employee organizational ownership (operationalized in terms of equity, information, and influence/control) and OBSE. When OBSE was regressed on the information and influence dimensions of ownership there was a significant increase in the criterion variance explained beyond that accounted for by the equity dimension alone. Each of the ownership dimensions had a significant relationship with OBSE (i.e., $r = .33$, $.54$, and $.55$ for equity, control, and information, respectively).

Tang, Kim and O'Donald (2000) examined the relationship between Japanese organizational culture (i.e., family orientation and loyalty, open communication, team approach) and OBSE in two automobile plants, one Japanese and one American-owned. They found a significant relationship between perceptions of Japanese management culture and OBSE ($r = .61$). In addition, they note that employees in the Japanese-owned plant had significantly higher levels of OBSE than those employees working in the American-owned plant.

Milkovich and Milkovich (1992) noted that compensation is an organizational signal that can communicate to an individual his/her value to the organization. Higher pay levels signal to individuals that "they matter," that "they can make a difference" and that "that

difference is valued” by the organization (p. 56). These types of messages communicate to employees that they are a competent and valuable parts of the organization, which in turn affects employees’ self-esteem. Gardner et al. (2000) examined the pay level-OBSE relationship and observed a positive and significant relationship ($r = .27$) between pay level and OBSE. These observations are consistent with Aryee and Luk’s (1996) observation of a positive relationship ($r = .24$ and $.33$) between self-reported income and OBSE, and as previously noted the positive relationship between an equity stake in the organization and OBSE (Pierce, 1997). Vecchio’s (2000) findings suggest, however, that this relationship may not always materialize. In those situations where an organization’s reward system emphasizes win/lose and zero-sum outcomes, Vecchio (2000) observed a negative relationship ($r = -.22$) between competitive reward systems and OBSE. Experiences of jealousy and envy had a negative association ($r = -.27$ and $-.50$, respectively) with OBSE. It appears that pay level can have positive effects on OBSE as long as the pay system does not foster competitiveness among employees and engender negative emotional reactions.

Tan and Peng (1997) explored the relationship between job status (pay and hierarchical level) and OBSE. They argued that “job status can be viewed as a form of positive feedback to the individual that he/she has done well in the organization. This provides an opportunity for the individual to experience a sense of achievement, which in turn will have a positive impact on OBSE” (Tan & Peng, 1997: 378). Consistent with their hypothesis, they observed a positive and significant relationship between pay and job level, and OBSE ($r = .16$ and $.08$, $p < .05$, respectively). Similarly, Gardner et al. (2000) observed a positive relationship ($r = .36$) between job level and OBSE.

Finally, several investigations focus on discrimination in the organizational context. Yoder and McDonald (1997, 1998) focused their investigations on sex discrimination in the workplace. They found that female fire fighters who reported experiencing sexist events had lower levels of OBSE. Exposure to sexist events results in a personal devaluation and lowered OBSE. Feelings of acceptance, on the other hand, has been observed to have a positive relationship ($r = .57$) with OBSE (Yoder & Aniakudo, 1996). Ragins and Cornwell (2001) examined a model of perceived sexual orientation discrimination in a national sample of 534 gay and lesbian employees. They report a significant and negative relationship ($r = -.41$) between perceptions of workplace discrimination and OBSE.

From these findings, we conclude that *signals from organizations which communicate to employees that they are a valued, important, competent and capable part of the organization (e.g., trust, perceived organizational support, pay level, fairness, ownership) are positively associated with organization-based self-esteem.*

Success-building role conditions. Brockner (1988) and Korman (1970, 1976) among others have posited that successful task/work experiences enhance the individual’s self-esteem. As a result we hypothesize that factors that facilitate successful job performance in an organization would have an effect on OBSE. That is, to the extent that role conditions are either conducive or obstructive to high performance and to the experience of success, we would expect them to have consequences for OBSE. Several areas of empirical inquiry provide insight into the relationship between work conditions and their effects upon OBSE. The observations reported here range between $r = .23$ and $.61$. Negative relationships with adverse role conditions were also found with correlations in the range of $-.27$ to $-.49$.

The time and effort that an organization puts forth in the socialization of new members is most likely an important contributor to the initial development of OBSE. Riordan et al. (2001) argue that organizational socialization tactics represent a set of meaningful experiences that can affect the formation of an individual's OBSE. In their longitudinal study of 162 banking employees during their first six months of employment, Riordan et al. (2001) found that several institutionalized socialization tactics were significantly related to the employee's emerging OBSE with r values ranging between .25 and .51. They conclude by suggesting that "the more an organization provides role models, accepts and respects newcomers' values, and provides information regarding career paths within the organization, the greater the newcomers' perceptions of . . . worth [organization-based self-esteem]" (p. 164). Addressing socialization experiences, Ragins et al. (2000) examined mentoring experiences from the protégé's perspective, and found that mentored individuals had significantly higher levels of OBSE than their non-mentored counterparts. They also found that protégés who reported highly satisfying formal and informal mentoring relationships possessed higher levels of OBSE than protégés who reported marginal or dissatisfying mentoring relationships.

Riordan et al. (2001) found, in their study of new organizational members, a positive relationship between the experience of a good job-self fit and OBSE ($r = .39$) after three months of employment. Similarly, providing employees with a work environment that facilitates task performance in all likelihood will contribute to successful task performance and heightened self-esteem. Pierce et al. (1993) report a positive relationship ($r = .41$) between work environment performance support and OBSE. Perceptions of adequacy of skills and training, information, work procedures, and resources were all positively correlated with OBSE. In addition, supervisory role support, leader initiating structure, and behaviors associated with providing employees with goal clarity and direction had positive relationships (correlations ranged between .23 to .61) with OBSE (Pierce et al., 1993; Tang & Ibrahim, 1998). Covin, Kolenko, Sightler and Tudor (1992) also observed a significant relationship between training adequacy and OBSE ($r = .14, p < .01$).

Existing evidence quite consistently reveals that adverse role conditions are negatively related to OBSE. Pierce et al. (1993) found a negative relationship ($r = -.34$) between role ambiguity and OBSE, while Lee (2003b) reports positive relationships ($r = .47$ and $.27$) between role clarity and OBSE. Jex and Elacqua (1999) observed a negative relationship between two role conditions (role conflict and role ambiguity, $r = -.32$ and $-.34$, respectively) and OBSE. Similarly, Staehle-Moody (1998) reports a significant negative correlation between the amount of role conflict present in the job and OBSE. Neal (2000) concluded that the resolution of role conflict and role ambiguity had a significant positive effect on OBSE in his study of park ranger and manager professionals. These findings suggest that over a period of time people exposed to poor role conditions have a difficult time experiencing themselves as competent and successful organizational members.

Several investigations provide us with insight into the relationship between stress and organization-based self-esteem. As hypothesized, organization-based self-esteem appears to have a negative relationship with stress. Observed correlations ranged from $r = -.21$ to $-.49$. Tang and Ibrahim (1998), for example, found that self-esteem correlated $-.31$ with stress, while Jex and Elacqua (1999) observed a negative relationship between OBSE and frustration ($r = -.24$), depression ($r = -.53$), and physical strain ($r = -.31$). They did

not, however, find a significant relationship between self-esteem and the number of doctor visits, an indicator of physical strain.

Those who design outdoor management education (OME) programs indicate that one of the objectives of their programs is to enhance the self-confidence and self-esteem of its participants. The thrust of an OME program is to provide the participant with difficult challenges and successful experiences as a way of positively affecting self-esteem and self-efficacy, in the hope that successful experiences on challenging outdoor tasks would transfer back to the workplace. McEvoy (1997) reports that there were significant improvements in OBSE for those participants who went through an organizationally sponsored OME training program, and they had significantly higher OBSE than did their randomized counterparts who did not experience the training program (McEvoy, Cragun & Appleby, 1997).

Increasing evidence suggests that feelings of possession (e.g., “this is mine”) operates within the organizational context much as it does within the broader realm of the human condition. Van Dyne and Pierce (2004) report on three samples in which organizational conditions gave rise to feelings of ownership – this is “our” organization. They report significant associations ($r = .46, .57$, and $.45$) between feelings of ownership for the organization (i.e., psychological ownership) and OBSE.

Several investigators focused on the effects of employment status on OBSE. Hui and Lee (2000), and Proenca (1999), observed that there is a negative relationship ($r = -.32$ and $-.40$) between job insecurity and OBSE. Supporting these observations, Lee (2003b) observed positive relationships ($r = .34$ and $.30$) between job security and self-esteem. While it is not known how long it takes for experienced insecurity to have an adverse effect on OBSE, it is reasonable to hypothesize that people who feel that their organizational security is threatened may come to feel that they are no longer an important part of the organization – beliefs that are at the core of OBSE. Chattopadhyay and George (2001) hypothesized that an employee’s work status (temporary or not) would affect the degree to which the employee feels valued by the organization. Supporting their hypothesized relationship, they observe that OBSE was negatively correlated ($r = -.12$) with work status.

From these research findings, we conclude that *positive and success-building role conditions (e.g., performance support, security, role clarity) positively relate to organization-based self-esteem.*

Before we leave this section on antecedents of OBSE we should also note that OBSE itself might have direct and indirect reciprocal effects on these antecedent conditions. Korman (1976), for example, suggested that high and low self-esteem individuals might choose careers consistent with their levels of self-esteem. As a result, high and low OBSE individuals will self-select themselves into the types of jobs that contain the types of antecedent conditions described in this section. In addition, high or low levels of OBSE may result in employees being exposed to different organizational conditions. A high OBSE employee might attract a more supportive leadership style, while a low OBSE might attract a more structured one (as opposed to a predominant leadership style \rightarrow OBSE causal arrow).³ Nevertheless, we believe these antecedent conditions to be primarily (but not entirely) recursive in the normal, stable, organizational environment. The same may be said of OBSE’s consequent conditions, discussed in the next section.

Consequences of Organization-Based Self-Esteem

As previously noted scholars (e.g., Brockner, 1988; Korman, 1970, 1976) have hypothesized that self-esteem affects employee motivation, attitudes, and work-related behaviors. In this section we will summarize the main effect studies that have explored the effects of OBSE in the work and organizational context.

Intrinsic Motivation

Two investigations, based upon four different samples, have looked at the OBSE-intrinsic work motivation relationship. Pierce et al. (1989), in their development and validation of the OBSE scale, observed a positive correlation between OBSE and a measure of work motivation in each of three samples ($r = .21$ to $.47$). Similarly, Hui and Lee (2000) report a significant relationship ($r = .17$) between OBSE and intrinsic motivation.

Work-Related Attitudes

Several empirical investigations provide us with insight into the relationship between OBSE and employee attitudes. Satisfaction and organizational commitment are the two work-related attitudes that have received virtually all of the research attention.

Observations of a positive relationship between OBSE and workplace satisfaction are common. The Pierce et al. (1989) study reports on four different samples in which self-esteem correlated with job satisfaction (accounting for 17–34% of the variance in satisfaction). Several other investigations (e.g., Bowden, 2002; Carson, Carson, Yallapragada, Langford & Roe, 1998; Gardner & Pierce, 1998, 2001; Neal, 2000; Ragins et al., 2000; Riordan et al., 2001; Stark et al., 2000; Tang & Gilbert, 1994, 1998; Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004) reveal a positive relationship between OBSE and most facets of job satisfaction. Covin et al. (1992), for example, found significant relationships between OBSE and several dimensions of job satisfaction (e.g., kind of work, supervision, pay, and general). Along similar lines, Bowden (2002) observes a positive relationship between OBSE and feelings of personal fulfillment. In sum, the correlation between OBSE and job satisfaction is a robust and substantial one ranging between .23 and .70.

Several studies (e.g., Borycki et al., 1998; Covin et al., 1992; Gardner & Pierce, 1998, 2001; Holdnak, Clemons & Bushardt, 1990; Lee, 2003a; Phillips & Hall, 2001; Pierce et al., 1989, 1993; Ragins et al., 2000; Riordan et al., 2001; Tang & Ibrahim, 1998; Tang, Kim, et al., 2000; Tang, Singer & Roberts, 2000; Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004) report a significant and positive relationship between OBSE and commitment (with correlations ranging between .12 and .64). These findings suggest that employees with high levels of self-esteem are more committed to their organizations than their low self-esteem counterparts. The individual-organization relationship is also revealed by the degree to which the individual comes to identify with the organization. Kark and her colleagues (Kark & Shamir, 2002; Kark et al., 2003; Shamir & Kark, 2004) observed a positive relationship between OBSE, and organizational (i.e., work unit) identification ($r = .31$) and personal (i.e., manager) identification ($r = .37$) among a sample of banking personnel. Bowden (2002) also observed a positive relationship between organization-based self-esteem and organizational identification.

Adaptation to Organizational Change

One study focused on adaptation to organizational change among middle managers. Staehle-Moody (1998) reports that those with high OBSE do a better job coping with organizational change than their low OBSE counterparts, and that they are more proactive in their coping style. This observation is also consistent with Brockner's (1988) notions about behavioral plasticity.

Turnover and Turnover Intentions

Several investigators looked at the relationship between OBSE, and employee turnover cognitions (i.e., thinking of quitting, intentions to quit) and turnover behavior. Existing evidence (e.g., Bowden, 2002; Gardner & Pierce, 2001; Matheson & Sterns, 1991; Phillips & Hall, 2001; Riordan et al., 2001; Wei & Albright, 1998; Vecchio, 2000) reveals negative relationships between OBSE and thinking of quitting, turnover intentions, and with turnover. It appears as though those organizational members who have come to believe that they are important and organizationally competent don't think about quitting, nor quit their jobs with the same frequency as those employees who have come to believe that they are not an "important part of this place." These relationships typically range between $r = -.24$ and $-.49$.

Ethical Behavioral Intentions

Hsu and Kuo (2003) explored the relationship between organization-based self-esteem and ethical behavior intentions. In their study of information systems professionals in Taiwan they found OBSE to have a positive association with subjective norms regarding ethical behavior ($r = .51$) and ethical intentions as they relate to information privacy ($r = .23$).

Feedback Seeking Behavior

While the majority of research on global self-esteem would support the prediction that individuals with low OBSE would seek more feedback (Brockner, 1988), two dissimilar studies leave us with inconsistent observations. Van Dyne et al. (1990) hypothesized that high self-esteem individuals would actively engage in feedback seeking behavior, using feedback information as a resource to assist them in performing well – a strategy to maintain high performance levels. They modified the OBSE measure to create a class- and university-based measure of self-esteem, and observed a positive relationship ($r = .25$) between class-based self-esteem (e.g., I count in this class) and feedback seeking behavior. Madzar (2001), on the other hand, argued that a superior's perceived leadership style (e.g., transformational and transactional) affects the feedback seeking behaviors of his/her subordinates. She reasoned that low self-esteem individuals, in need of approval and self-affirmation, and in search of self-diagnostics will take advantage of the developmental support they receive from transformational leaders. High self-esteem individuals, who are less behaviorally plastic, are less influenced by the quality of their relationship with their supervisor and therefore will be less likely to seek feedback. Studying a sample of medical technology employees

in the United States, she found OBSE to be negatively related to the degree of feedback seeking behavior from transformational leaders ($r = -.33$). At this stage, it appears that high OBSE employees will seek and use feedback as a strategy for maintaining high performance (and high OBSE), while low OBSE employees will seek feedback when they perceive opportunities to self-enhance (see [Korman, 2001](#)). Much more research is needed to clarify the nature of the OBSE-feedback seeking relationship, however.

Citizenship Behavior

Organization-based self-esteem had significant relationships with two organizational citizenship behaviors, altruism and compliance ([Tang & Ibrahim, 1998](#)). Global self-esteem failed to predict either citizenship behavior in a US sample, while OBSE accounted for significantly more criterion variance than global self-esteem in a Middle East sample.⁴ [Chattopadhyay and George \(2001\)](#) observed a positive relationship between OBSE and altruism in their study of employees in a computer manufacturer. [Tang et al. \(2002\)](#) examined OBSE and citizenship behaviors with samples in the United States, Taiwan, Poland, and Egypt. In both their US and non-US samples they found significant and positive relationship between OBSE and citizenship behavior. [Chattopadhyay \(1999\)](#) observed a positive and significant relationship between OBSE and altruism. Employing supervisor and peer ratings of citizenship behavior, [Van Dyne and Pierce \(2004\)](#) report significant relationships between OBSE and citizenship behaviors. [Lee \(2003a\)](#) looked at five dimensions of citizenship behavior (i.e., altruism, conscientiousness, courtesy, sportsmanship, and civic virtue) and found significant relationships between OBSE and acts of good organizational citizenship. [Tang, Singer, et al. \(2000\)](#) investigated the effect that public (other serving) and private (self-serving) motives on altruistic and conscientiousness acts of organizational citizenship, and found a positive relationship between public motives and OBSE, and a negative relationship for private motives. They also report a positive relationship between OBSE and both dimensions (altruism and conscientiousness) of citizenship behavior. Across this set of studies OBSE correlated with citizenship behavior in the range between .23 for compliance and .83 for altruism.

Performance

Performance at a high level is one manner through which high self-esteem individuals can engage in behaviors that are consistent with and maintain their level of self-esteem, and by which they can self-enhance. In addition, it has been argued that high self-esteem individuals are more likely to have stronger self-efficacy than their low self-esteem counterparts ([Gardner & Pierce, 1998](#)), which contributes to higher performance levels under almost all role conditions ([Bandura, 1997](#)).

[Pierce et al. \(1989\)](#) observed a positive and significant relation between OBSE and supervisor ratings of employee performance in two of three organizations studied. [Van Dyne and Pierce \(2003\)](#) also observed a positive relationship ($r = .25$) between OBSE and performance. In addition, [Pierce et al. \(1993\)](#) observed an eight-month lagged correlation ($r = .21$) between OBSE and supervisory ratings of performance, while [Gardner et al. \(2000\)](#) observed a nine-month lagged correlation ($r = .37$) between OBSE and an annual

performance rating conducted by management of the host organization. Covin et al. (1992) report significant relationships between OBSE and two indexes of performance ($r = .23$ and $.20$ for a supervisor and self-rating, respectively), while Marion-Landais (2000) observed that subordinates with high OBSE were rated as high performers in her study in Latin American. Wiesenfeld et al. (2000) report a positive relationship ($r = .47$) between OBSE and organizationally beneficial managerial behaviors. Finally, Aryee et al. (2003) report a positive relationship between OBSE and two dimensions of contextual performance ($.25$ for interpersonal facilitation and $.33$ for job dedication).

Carson et al. (1997, 1998) explored the relationship between OBSE and employee attitudes toward performance. Valuing and providing quality service was found to be more important to a group of medical technicians with high OBSE than it was to their low OBSE counterparts. There is fairly convincing evidence that OBSE is correlated with quality of job performance (as has been found for global self-esteem; Judge & Bono, 2001). It should be noted, however, that task success affects self-esteem initially, but over time self-esteem is believed to sustain task performance. Thus, there is likely to be reciprocal causation between OBSE and performance, with performance being the primary causative factor early in one's job/task experience and self-esteem coming to predominate with greater task experience.

Career-Level Outcomes

Carson et al. (1997, 1998) predicted that OBSE would positively impact career commitment, career satisfaction, career tenure, and have a negative relationship with career withdrawal intentions. They report a significant positive relationship between OBSE and career commitment and a significant negative relationship with career withdrawal intentions. Ragins et al. (2000) also report observing a positive relationship between OBSE and career commitment. Career identification had a positive association with OBSE. Similar results have been observed by Tang, Singer, et al. (2000) and Singer and Tang (1996). The career-level outcomes typically correlated $.23$ (career identification) to $.52$ (career commitment) with OBSE.

Mentoring

Mullen (1998) reasoned that mentors who have a strong sense of OBSE would be confident in their organizational role and with that which they have to share. Based upon data from 151 mentor–protégé relationships Mullen (1998) found a significant relationship between mentor OBSE and both mentoring functions. Aryee, Chay and Chew (1996) reasoned that individuals with high OBSE will be motivated to engage in the mentoring role, as it will provide them with the opportunity to demonstrate their organizational competence. They hypothesized and observed a positive relationship ($r = .24$) between OBSE and the motivation to mentor.

Based on these research results we conclude that self-esteem formed around work and organizational experiences is associated with employee motivation, attitudes and behavior. The literature reveals that *organization-based self-esteem has positive relationship with intrinsic work motivation, job and career attitudes (e.g., satisfaction, organizational commitment and identification), behavioral intentions (e.g., turnover and ethical), and constructive*

work-related behaviors (e.g., in- and extra-role performance, adaptation to change, retention, mentoring).

OBSE as a Mediator

Several investigators have used OBSE to provide insight into how or why certain bi-variate relationships unfold. In this section we will review this set of studies by first looking at those investigations that have reported on the relationship between organizational attributes and individual-level outcomes, and second by looking at those that were focused on the linkage between individual constructs. In most cases what we find is that OBSE will mediate relationships between its hypothetical antecedents and consequences.

Organization-Individual Relationships

As discussed above, the findings from several investigations reveal that there is a positive relationship between perceptions of job complexity and OBSE. Lee (2003a) provides us with additional insight into this relationship. Reasoning that work-related experiences play a central role in defining the individual's relationship with the organization, he hypothesized and found that OBSE mediates the job characteristic-citizenship behavior relationship. Similarly, Abbott (2000) found support for the hypothesis that the increases in job complexity that accompany the adoption of team-based systems leads to an increase in employee self-esteem, which in turn leads to an increase in job satisfaction and team commitment.

Gardner et al. (2000) explored the relationship between pay level and employee performance. They theorized that pay level is a form of communication that signals to employees the degree to which the organization values them. This message, when internalized, becomes a part of the employee's organization-based self-esteem, which in turn motivates the employee to engage in behaviors that are consistent with the view of the self as organizationally competent, worthwhile, and valuable. They found evidence in support of the full mediation of OBSE in the pay level-performance relationship.

On numerous occasions organizational scholars have called for an expanded role for influence by organizational members, suggesting that greater levels of influence increases member self-esteem and subsequently their commitment to the organization. Responding to this call, Kostova et al. (1997) found that OBSE partially mediates the relationship between members' perceptions of their level of influence in the organization and their organizational commitment.

Two studies focused on treatment-related issues. Phillips (2000) suggested that OBSE may provide insight into the process through which the effects of organizational support are produced. She found that OBSE mediated the relationship between perceived organizational support, and job performance, and affective and continuance commitment. Riordan et al. (2001) hypothesized and found support for the mediating effects of OBSE in the relationship between an organization's socialization practices and employee work-related attitudes.

Finally, Aryee et al. (2003) report that OBSE mediated the relationship between the quality of the leader-follower relationship (LMX) and contextual performance. In their

study of a large Indian consumer and home appliance manufacturer they observed full mediation of OBSE.

Intra-Individual Relationships

Gardner and Pierce (1998) focused their study on self-esteem and self-efficacy and their respective roles in influencing employee attitudes and behavior. They reasoned that individuals who believe that they are likely to succeed on a wide variety of organizational tasks (high generalized self-efficacy) are likely to view themselves as individuals with a sense of personal adequacy as organizational members (organization-based self-esteem). Thus, they hypothesized generalized self-efficacy to be causally antecedent to OBSE, and that high levels of self-esteem would then lead to positive attitudes towards the organization, and continued successful task performance (especially when combined with high levels of state self-efficacy).

Employing eight-month lagged data with self-reports on self-esteem and self-efficacy at time-one and supervisor-rated performance data collected at time-two, Gardner and Pierce (1998) found that OBSE was the strongest predictor of employee performance ratings and of job satisfaction. In addition, they report observing full mediation effects for OBSE in the relationship between generalized self-efficacy and both employee responses. Gardner and Pierce (2001) conducted a partial replication and extension of their earlier study. They report finding a positive relationship between OBSE and generalized self-efficacy, satisfaction, commitment, and a negative relationship with intent to quit. Consistent with the study hypotheses, OBSE emerged as the stronger self-concept in predicting employee responses. In addition, there is some evidence to suggest that OBSE operates as a complete mediator of generalized self-efficacy-employee response relationships.

In their exploration of the role of individual differences as antecedents of citizenship behaviors, Van Dyne et al. (2000) examined the likelihood that propensity to trust, collectivism, and OBSE play a meaningful role in the promotion of social exchanges. Van Dyne et al. proposed and found that OBSE would mediate the relationship between trust and helping behavior, and the relationship between collectivism and helping. Both propensity to trust and collectivism had a fully mediated effect on helping organizational citizenship behaviors operating through OBSE.

Heck, Bedeian, and Day (in press) investigated workplace whining. They developed a framework that positioned OBSE as mediating the effects of dispositional (i.e., negative affectivity), attitudinal (e.g., job satisfaction), relational (i.e., leader–member exchange), and behavioral (i.e., supervisory performance ratings) antecedents of workplace whining. They found support for the full mediational effects of OBSE in each of the proposed relationships, with the exception of partial mediation in the case of performance. They conclude that “whiners are generally individuals who typically hold a negative view of themselves and the world, find little satisfaction in their jobs . . . and as rated by their supervisors, perform poorly in their jobs” (2001: 21).

Wiesenfeld et al. (2000) provide additional insight into the explanatory role played by OBSE in our understanding of the individual-organizational relationship. They hypothesized that OBSE would mediate the relationship between perceptions of procedural fairness in the handling of layoffs in a downsizing context and the behaviors needed from managers

in times of major organizational change. They found support for full mediation. Adding OBSE to the regression model eliminated the significant relationship between perceived fairness and managerial behaviors.

From this group of research findings we conclude that OBSE will often act as a mediator between certain individual and organizational characteristics on the one hand, and the established consequences of OBSE (motivation, job attitudes, and performance) on the other. The three major sources of self-esteem (e.g., work environment structure) will have effects on other important organizational phenomena (e.g., satisfaction, performance) through their effects on OBSE. While none of these studies employed an experimental design, the evidence reviewed leads us to tentatively conclude that *organization-based self-esteem mediates the relationships between the antecedent variables of work environment structure (e.g., influence, job complexity), organizational signals of personal value (e.g., pay level, fairness, perceived organizational support), successful work experiences (e.g., efficacy, performance ratings), and dispositional states (e.g., negative affectivity), and the consequent variables of employee motivation, attitudes (e.g., satisfaction, commitment), and work-related behaviors (e.g., in- and extra-role performance).*

OBSE as a Moderator

Several investigators have examined the moderating effects of OBSE. In most cases we find that OBSE moderates the relationships between two other variables such that low OBSE individuals are more reactive to environmental cues than high OBSE people.

Two investigations (Jex & Elacqua, 1999; Pierce et al., 1993) looked at the role conditions-outcome relationship. Pierce et al. (1993) found significant interaction effects between OBSE and role ambiguity, conflict, overload, work environment support, and supervisory support on achievement satisfaction. Significant interaction effects between OBSE and role ambiguity, work environment support, and supervisory support were also found for supervisory performance ratings. High OBSE employees were unaffected by these role conditions relative to their low OBSE counterparts. Jex and Elacqua (1999) also looked at the role condition-outcome relationship. They observed significant moderating effects of OBSE in the relationship between role ambiguity and two stress outcomes: depression and physical strain symptoms. They also observed moderating effects in the relationship between role conflict and physical symptoms of stress, providing further support for behavioral plasticity.

Stark et al.'s (2000) investigation was focused on the effects of organizational change (downsizing and reengineering) on job satisfaction. They hypothesized that OBSE would moderate this relationship, and found that high self-esteem employees were more likely to report job satisfaction than their low self-esteem counterparts. Similarly, Hui and Lee (2000) found that employees with high levels of OBSE were less responsive to perceptions of uncertainty than their low self-esteem counterparts.

Brutus, Ruderman, Ohlott and McCauley (2000) explored the question – Does OBSE influence how managers respond to various degrees of job challenge? Based upon the heightened sensitivity of the low self-esteem individual, they proposed that OBSE would moderate the relationship between job challenge and individual development. They found that as job challenge increased, low OBSE managers saw more personal development, while

high OBSE managers reported feeling personal development irrespective of the degree of challenge present in their jobs.

Researchers interested in organizational justice have focused their attention on factors which influence perceptions of procedural justice. The extent to which people are allowed to provide input into the decision making process, often referred to as voice, is one of those factors. Brockner, Heuer, Siegel, Wiesenfeld, Martin & Grover (1998) bring together the results from five studies which test the hypothesis that higher levels of voice are likely to elicit more positive reactions from people who have relatively high levels of self-esteem. Self-esteem is believed to moderate this relationship because people who have high OBSE are more likely to believe that their perspectives are correct and that their actions will make a difference (reinforcing their OBSE). After observing medical doctors in Iceland they found a significant relationship between OBSE and organizational identification, and support for the moderating effects of OBSE in the voice-organizational identification relationship. There was a significant relationship between voice and organizational identification for high self-esteem doctors, and no relationship among participants with low self-esteem.

Our review of the literature on the role of self-esteem formed around work and organizational experiences also provides us with evidence basically supporting behavioral plasticity theory (Brockner, 1988) predictions. *Organization-based self-esteem moderates the relationships between several role conditions (e.g., change, role ambiguity) and employee responses to those conditions such that low OBSE individuals are typically more reactive than high OBSE individuals.*

Summary and Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to provide a review of more than a decade of research focused on organization-based self-esteem. The evidence from our review of more than four dozen empirical studies supports the claim that an individual's self-esteem, formed around work and organizational experiences, as reflected by organization-based self-esteem, may well play a significant role in shaping employee intrinsic motivation, work-related attitudes (e.g., turnover intentions, job satisfaction, organizational commitment) and behaviors (e.g., performance, citizenship behavior, turnover). In addition, the evidence reviewed supports the claim that work environment structures that provide opportunities for the exercise of self-direction and self-control may promote organization-based self-esteem. Signals to employees that they "make a difference around here" and that that difference is valued by the organization are positively related to this self-concept. Organization-based opportunities for positive and successful experiences were also found to have a positive relationship with OBSE. Finally, we note that organizational size, adverse role conditions (e.g., role ambiguity), anticipated organizational change, job insecurity, discrimination and harassment were found to have a negative relationship with OBSE. Each can be seen as having the capacity to undermine experiences of self-worth within the organizational context.

While the literature reviewed provides evidence into what might be the determinants and consequences of OBSE, it is important to recognize that none of the studies were designed to test Korman's (1970, 1971, 1976) theorizing on the origins of self-esteem, nor the role played by self-consistency, self-enhancement, or self-protection motivation. With few exceptions

(Brockner et al., 1998; Pierce et al., 1989; Van Dyne et al., 1990), the investigations reviewed were field studies. Virtually all of the studies rely upon cross-sectional data and correlational designs, though a few (e.g., Gardner et al., 2000; Pierce et al., 1993; Riordan et al., 2001; Taylor & Pierce, 1999; Van Dyne et al., 2000) employed lagged data and a correlational design. The majority of published works report OBSE relationships that are based upon percept-percept data, while only a few studies (e.g., Gardner & Pierce, 1998; Gardner et al., 2000; Van Dyne & Pierce, 2003, 2004) report relationships between self-report OBSE data and different source data for the second variable (e.g., supervisor performance ratings, peer ratings of citizenship behavior). All of this limits the degree to which we can infer causality. Even with these limitations, a relatively consistent pattern of observations has begun to emerge, providing some understanding of OBSE within the work and organizational context. There is, however, a need to replicate these findings with more robust research designs that allow stronger conclusions about causality.

Directions for Future Research

As a result of the research conducted to-date, we have learned a great deal about organization-based self-esteem, its measurement and role within the work and organizational context. This leads to the question – Where else might research on OBSE fruitfully expand so it continues to contribute to our knowledge about organizational behavior? We briefly offer several suggestions in this section.

Measurement and continued construct validation. None of the studies reviewed and published subsequent to Pierce et al.'s. (1989) initial construct validation work had as its primary focus the construct validation of the OBSE instrument. After conducting this review, we note that there are several validation questions that remain unanswered.⁵ First and as previously noted, more research is needed in an effort to identify the boundary conditions that affect the emergence and operation of OBSE across cultures (Sedikides et al., 2003). Second, additional evidence pertaining to convergent validity is needed – How does OBSE relate to measures of self-esteem, self-assurance, and other self-concept related constructs? Third, it is important to ask if relationships between OBSE and performance (as well as other outcomes) can be attributed to other personality variables (e.g., need for achievement, competence), or more proximal constructs such as expectancy and instrumentality perceptions? Fourth, it is important for us to understand the extent to which observed relationships can be attributed to common method/common source variance. Fifth, researchers (see Wylie, 1979) have raised questions as to whether global self-esteem is unidimensional. It would be important to conceptually and empirically examine the dimensionality of organization-based self-esteem in order to ascertain whether it is uni- or multi-dimensional in nature. It may be that there are task-(performance) and maintenance- (non-performance) based feelings of competence and organizational worthiness. Sixth, given the highly skewed distributions typically found in the measurement of OBSE (i.e., high averages), it is important to ask if this is a function of the samples studied or an idiosyncrasy of the instrument *per se* – we should question whether or not the instrument can consistently detect individuals with extremely low levels of organization-based self-esteem as well as high (more about this will be discussed below).

Self-regulatory mechanisms. As noted as a part of our discussion of OBSE theory there are at least four self-regulatory mechanisms (i.e., self-consistency, self-enhancement, self-protection, and behavioral plasticity) that have been employed to explain the motivational effects of self-esteem. While we have found some support for plasticity theory, the same is not true for the other three mechanisms. We note that the differences between self-consistency and self-enhancement are subtle, as they make many of the same predictions. The work reviewed here does not inform our understanding in any systematic manner about these two theories, and as a consequence we cannot offer any firm conclusions about them at this point in time. We also note that none of the studies of OBSE attempted to explicitly test self-protection motivation. It remains unclear (for both global and OBSE) what the exact mechanisms are and the time associated with the operation of these mechanisms by which self-esteem has its effects. Future research in basic and applied psychology should continue to not only clarify when each motive is likely to be stimulated, but also their roles in the OBSE-outcome relationship and associated time dimensions.

OBSE from a dynamics perspective. While our review has focused exclusively upon organization-based self-esteem, its effects are not be isolated. We now envision that an individual's core self-evaluations (Judge & Bono, 2001), which includes global self-esteem, play a significant role in shaping career, organization and job choices. These choices tend to be consistent with the individual's sense of self (Korman, 1976).

Once inside the organization the new employee begins to accumulate a number of experiences (structures, messages from important others, and successes/failures) which start to shape the individual's organization-based self-esteem. At first this aspect of the self-concept is unstable, an outer level conceptualization of the self (Campbell, 1990), that over time becomes increasingly trait-like – quite stable and resistant to change. At this stage, a stable OBSE serves to mediate (e.g., job complexity-performance) and moderate (e.g., adverse role condition-attitude/performance) different organizational experience-outcome relationships. Taken in isolation of its cause, OBSE may well be employed as a predictor (possibly the 'cause') of a number of organizationally important behavioral intentions (e.g., intention to quit), attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction), motivation (e.g., intrinsic work motivation), and behaviors (e.g., acts of good organizational citizenship).

Future research should also provide us with a longitudinal perspective on the emergence of OBSE among new employees and those employees who find themselves exposed to new and changing work and organizational conditions. It is unlikely that employees enter an organization as a 'blank slate.'⁶ Based upon OBSE's consistent relationship with global self-esteem and generalized self-efficacy, for example, we would expect individuals high on those two variables would be more likely to develop high OBSE than low global self-esteem/low generalized self-efficacy individuals. In the same sense, we would expect that individuals who have developed high levels of OBSE in one organizational context will generalize that belief system to new organizational contexts, at least initially. Ultimately such knowledge about OBSE potential (or predisposition) might prove useful in human resource selection systems.

Regarding the development of OBSE, we know nothing about the time element involved. Hopefully future work will not only elucidate the time element that is related to the

emergence of OBSE, but also to changes in OBSE that accompany evolutionary and revolutionary changes in its organizational antecedents.

Personality traits. At the outset of our review of the antecedents of organization-based self-esteem, we asked – What has research taught us about the person who develops a strong and positive organization-based self-esteem? While some insight into this question can be gleaned from the studies conducted, no work was found that built and tested theory addressing personality and OBSE *per se*. We believe that such research is important and we offer some suggestions for future research in this area.

Judge and co-workers (Erez & Judge, 2001; Judge & Bono, 2001) have in recent years written about the centrality of self-esteem to employee motivation and satisfaction. Self-esteem, along with locus of control, emotional stability, and generalized self-efficacy have substantial and consistent effects on employee performance and satisfaction. The vast majority of the research reviewed in this article may be considered to be further support for these basic premises and their corollaries (e.g., commitment as the dependent variable instead of job satisfaction), yet with a focus on organization-based instead of global self-esteem effects. In addition, we believe that more research needs to be done which examines the *incremental* value of these other dispositions (e.g., locus of control) over and above the effects of self-esteem (though see Erez & Judge, 2001). The previously reviewed research by Gardner and Pierce (1998, 2001) calls into question the value of generalized self-efficacy as one of the “four horsemen” of human motivation. We also believe that it would be beneficial to examine OBSE in relation to the Big Five.

Related to personality-OBSE research, Baumeister, Smart and Boden (1996) write that there are, in reality, two types of people who score high on self-esteem scales. One is the individual who has, over time, developed a healthy and stable level of self-esteem. The other is a person who professes to have high levels of self-liking and self-competence, but whose self-beliefs are in fact unstable and maybe even inflated. This type of high self-esteem scorer is one who has been variously called an egotist (Baumeister et al., 1996), a narcissist (Baumeister, 1999), and one who possesses false self-esteem (Locke, 1976). Baumeister is quite blunt in describing the narcissist: “Narcissism may thus capture an important segment of people with high self-esteem, indeed, the more nasty, conceited sort. Narcissism refers to a tendency to regard oneself as superior to others and to expect other people to treat oneself as superior” (1999: 220). The consequences associated with the two types of high self-esteem people are quite dramatic. Whereas genuine high self-esteem people are comfortable with themselves and engage in constructive, self-enhancing behaviors, narcissists do not and may in fact be quite aggressive towards anyone who questions or threatens their high self-esteem.

It is possible, therefore, that high OBSE scorers may include both the genuine and the false self-esteem types (i.e., not all high scorers truly think they “make a difference around here” but want to believe it is so). It may be worthwhile exploring new operationalizations of OBSE, in an attempt to separate these different types of people. Teasing out the false from the genuine self-esteem may be a difficult task. Distinguishing between the two groups of high self-esteem individuals may require moving beyond self-reports, possibly soliciting of validating evaluations of competence from knowledgeable others, or perhaps through the use of projective techniques (like the Thematic Apperception Test).

Alternatively, separate measures of narcissism could be used in conjunction with any self-esteem research, the variance of which could be partialled out of substantive self-esteem relationships.

Conclusions

It is clear that OBSE has demonstrated its empirical utility in research on a broad range of constructs in the organizational sciences. At this point we can conclude that self-esteem, both global (Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach & Rosenberg, 1995) as well as organization-based (Pierce et al., 1989) plays a central role in the direction and motivation of human behaviors. What remains unclear are the exact mechanisms (e.g., self-consistency, self-enhancement) and the time associated with the operation of these mechanisms by which self-esteem has its effects. Just as importantly, the organizational policies, programs, and procedures that lead to the healthy development of employee self-esteem require further study. Though some ground-breaking work in this area has been completed (e.g., Gardner et al., 2000) much more needs to be done in real work organizations. We also believe that the OBSE scale can safely be used to branch out into a number of new areas of organizational research.

Notes

1. We have attempted to identify and include as a part of this review all of the studies that have been published that included the measurement of OBSE.
2. It is important to note that Korman's (1970, 1971, 1976) theorizing on the origins of self-esteem has not been directly examined. The scheme that we employ to organize the vast number of studies is quite crude in nature.
3. We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.
4. While preliminary in nature, there are several instances (cf. Chattopadhyay & George, 2001; Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995; Song & Hattie, 1985) where measures of self-esteem that are operationalized at the same level of analysis as its correlate have a stronger and more consistent relationship than observed with measures of global self-esteem. In the initial construct validation studies (Pierce et al., 1989), OBSE was shown to be a better predictor of other organization-related measures than either global or task self-esteem.
5. We wish to thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing to our attention these questions, along with insight into the dynamics associated with the emergence of OBSE.
6. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

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Jon L. Pierce is Professor of Organization and Management at the University of Minnesota Duluth. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. His current research focuses on the psychological relationships that connect individuals with organizations in general and psychological ownership in particular, and the self within the work and organizational context.

Donald G. Gardner (Ph.D. Purdue University) is Professor of Management and Organization at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs. He has also held visiting appointments at the University of Wisconsin, the Australian Graduate School of Management, and James Cook University. He conducts research on employee attitudes, motivation and behaviors, performance appraisals, and construct validation. His research publications have appeared in such journals as the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Group and Organization Management*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, and *Research in Organizational Behavior*.