

# When one's group is beneficial: The effect of group-affirmation and subjective group identification on prejudice

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Adrian J. Villicana,<sup>1</sup> Luis M. Rivera,<sup>2</sup> and Donna M. Garcia<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

In three experiments, we examined whether group-affirmation reduces prejudice against outgroups. In Experiments 1 and 2, White participants completed a test of abilities then were assigned to one of three affirmation conditions. Participants either received positive feedback about their ingroup's performance, positive feedback about their personal performance, or no feedback. Participants then provided judgments toward Blacks. Across both experiments, participants who received the ingroup performance feedback expressed the lowest levels of anti-Black prejudice, but Experiment 2 indicated this effect was limited to strongly White-identified participants. In Experiment 3, we used a different group-affirmation procedure (writing about American values) and outgroup target (Middle Easterners). Among strongly American-identified participants, those who explained why a value was important for Americans expressed lower levels of prejudice against Middle Easterners compared to those in a control condition. We suggest that affirming one's group—or social identity—can serve as a beneficial resource in the domain of prejudice.

## Keywords

group-affirmation, prejudice, self-affirmation, social identity

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According to social identity theory, people engage in different identity-based motivational strategies to maintain or enhance a positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). One such strategy is to derogate outgroups (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Hogg, 2003; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1985; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). If prejudice functions to protect the ingroup's overall positive social identity, then providing an alternative

route to fulfilling identity-based motivations should augment the group's image and reduce

<sup>1</sup>University of Kansas, USA

<sup>2</sup>Rutgers University – Newark, USA

<sup>3</sup>California State University, San Bernardino, USA

## Corresponding author:

Adrian J. Villicana, Department of Psychology, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045, USA.

Email: [ajvillicana@ku.edu](mailto:ajvillicana@ku.edu)

the need to express prejudice. The purpose of this paper is to examine if group-affirmation, or enhancement of positive ingroup characteristics, reduces the expression of prejudice against outgroups.

### Self-Affirmation and Prejudice

Self-image maintenance theories posit that people face daily threats to their self-concept, which they attempt to counteract by engaging in identity-protective and identity-enhancing strategies (Fein, Hoshino-Browne, Davies, & Spencer, 2003; Fein & Spencer, 1997). Prejudice is one strategy people use to self-enhance and maintain a positive self-image, but this strategy can be counteracted if people are provided with an opportunity to *self-affirm*, which makes salient an important aspect of the self-concept (see Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Sherman & Hartson, 2011, for reviews). Fein and Spencer (1997, Study 1) were the first to demonstrate that individuals who self-affirmed rated a negatively stereotyped individual more positively than those who were not affirmed (also see Florack, Scarabis, & Gosejohann, 2005; Lehmiller, Law, & Tormala, 2010, Studies 2 & 3; Shrirra & Martin, 2005, Study 2; Zarate & Garza, 2002, Study 1). This research suggests that self-affirmation can be a preemptive tactic that alleviates individuals' tendencies to express prejudice against outgroups, a benefit that can occur even in the absence of a direct threat to their self-image.

### Group-Affirmation and Prejudice

The aforementioned research on self-affirmation and prejudice focuses on affirming a personal value that is linked to an individual's personal identity; however, personal identity does not wholly represent the self-concept. Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory (1979, 1985) suggests that the self-concept consists of one's *personal* identity and one's *social* identity. Personal identity is the individual self, defined by important and distinct individual attributes. By comparison, social identity is the collective self,

defined by group memberships and important and distinct group attributes. Because individuals develop a positive emotional attachment to their social groups (Hogg, 2003; Tajfel, 1982; Turner, Reynolds, Haslam, & Veenstra, 2006), social identities can be a source of value and positive distinctiveness (Swann & Bosson, 2010). Moreover, Turner et al. (1987) propose that social contexts can lead individuals to self-categorize with their social versus personal identities. Situations that require an individual to interact with outgroup members can induce categorization of the self-concept with a social (group) identity, which can motivate ingroup members to engage in defensive identity management strategies (e.g., prejudice) if outgroups are perceived to threaten the distinctiveness of the ingroup (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1985).

Recently, researchers have extended self-affirmation theory to propose that one's social identity may also serve as a source of affirmation that can mitigate social identity needs (Sherman & Hartson, 2011; Sherman, Kinias, Major, Kim, & Prenovost, 2007). Based on the assumption that the self-system is designed to protect all of the important aspects of one's self-concept from threat, group-affirmation may serve as an alternative to self-affirmation by reminding individuals of important ingroup attributes (see Sherman & Hartson, 2011). Group-affirmation might meet the psychological need to feel good about one's group, thus allowing ingroup members to maintain positive social comparisons without resorting to protective strategies (Derks, van Laar, & Ellemers, 2006, 2009; Glasford, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009; Sherman et al., 2007). The present research tests if group-affirmation can be an effective and alternative (to self-affirmation) strategy to reduce prejudice.

McGregor, Haji, and Kang (2008) found partial evidence to suggest that group-affirmation may reduce prejudice, but a close examination of their research raises methodological limitations that leave some questions unaddressed. The first study was correlational in which all participants spontaneously affirmed any group to which they belonged via a writing task, so group-affirmation

was not manipulated. In the second study, participants identified a social group they belonged to, described how their personal values were similar or different from those of the group, and then described bad or good qualities of their group. With this complex design coupled with the absence of a control condition, it is unclear whether group-affirmation reduces prejudice or group-threat (when participants were reminded of bad group qualities) increases prejudice.

We extend McGregor et al.'s findings (2008) by presenting three experiments that provide a more rigorous experimental test of the beneficial effect of group-affirmation on prejudice, but also by testing the moderating role of subjective group identification. Although people categorically identify with their social group, they vary in their identification with that group (e.g., Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Phinney, 1992). Some group members consider their social identity and associated group characteristics as more central to their self-concept than other group members (Derks et al., 2009). It follows, then, that strongly identified group members are more likely to benefit from group-affirmation than are weakly identified group members when judging outgroups, especially because strong identifiers (but not weak identifiers) are motivated to restore their group's distinctiveness as well as establish a positive ingroup evaluation (e.g., Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Gabarrot, Falomir-Pichastor, & Mugny, 2009; Mummendey, Klink, & Brown, 2001). Because they strive to maintain a positive ingroup identity, strongly identified individuals also express greater prejudice than do weakly identified individuals (Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Mummendey et al., 2001). Thus, we expect that strongly identified ingroup members who group-affirm will express less prejudice relative to those who do not. Among weakly identified group members, the expression of prejudice should not vary as a function of group-affirmation because those individuals are less likely to base part of their self-concept on group characteristics, less motivated to maintain their group's distinctiveness and, consequently, express relatively low levels of prejudice.

## **Group- Versus Self-Affirmation and Prejudice**

Given that both group- and self-affirmations are presumed to reduce defensive responding by providing people with an alternative identity-protection strategy, one might expect for these two types of affirmations to produce similar effects on prejudice reduction. However, social identity and self-categorization theories suggest that in intergroup contexts, group-affirmation might be a better resource than self-affirmation because the former would promote a categorization at the group level and allow people to draw on positive aspects of their social self in contexts that require an intergroup judgment. Furthermore, group-affirmations are expected to substitute for prejudice as a strategy to enhance or protect the salient social identity, whereas self-affirmations are directed at the individual self. Thus, the psychological overlap is likely greater between prejudice and group- rather than self-affirmation. As psychological overlap increases, the effect of an affirmation on prejudice plausibly increases. Indeed, past research supports the proposition that group-affirmations lead to a different focus than do self-affirmations. Ehrlich and Gramzow (2015, Study 3) found that group-, but not self-affirmation induced people to focus on concepts specific to their affirmed group identity. Finally, although self-affirmations can reduce prejudice, individuals may not have the opportunity to self-affirm in an intergroup context because such contexts trigger self-categorization with one's group identity.

### **Experiment 1**

The main goal for Experiment 1 was to conduct an initial test of the effect of group-affirmation on prejudice. The main prediction was that group-affirmation would decrease prejudice relative to not receiving group-affirmation, which is consistent with research suggesting that group-affirmation can minimize social identity concerns. We manipulated group-affirmation by providing White participants with bogus positive

feedback about their group's performance on a "cognitive test" (see Derks et al., 2006, 2009). In addition, we manipulated self-affirmation by providing participants with bogus positive feedback about their *individual* performance. After completing a feedback condition, participants were given the opportunity to express prejudice against Blacks. If affirming an important personal- or group-level aspect of one's self-concept decreases prejudice, then group- and self-affirmation should reduce prejudice when each is compared to a no affirmation condition.

### Method

*Participants.* Fifty-one White students from a southern California university participated in exchange for extra course credit. Two participants were dropped because they correctly guessed the hypothesis. The final sample consisted of 49 participants (43 women;  $M_{age} = 26.26$  years,  $SD = 8.26$ , age range: 18–54).

#### Manipulated variable

*Group- versus self-affirmation.* Participants completed a computerized test with two main tasks that ostensibly assessed cognitive abilities. The first task was to unscramble 10 sets of letters to form English words (e.g., for the letters "KIML," the correct answer was the word "MILK"). The second task was to read 15 sets of three words and then to find an associated word for each set (e.g., for the set of words *elephant*, *lapse*, and *vivid*, the correct answer is *memory*; similar to Derks et al., 2009; also see McFarlin & Blascovich's [1984] Remote Associates Test). After completing both tasks, participants were informed that the "test was being administered to numerous students" and that it was related to professional success. Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of three feedback conditions. Those in the group-affirmation condition were told that the test investigated "group differences in cognitive ability," and that although they would not be able to learn their "individual score at that time, the average performance of White students who had taken the test was at the 93rd percentile." Participants in

the self-affirmation condition were told that the test investigated "individual differences in cognitive ability," and that compared to the "average performance of other individuals who had taken the test, their individual score was at the 93rd percentile." Finally, those in the control condition were not given feedback, but instead were told that their responses would be "entered in a bank for later analyses."

#### Measured variables

*Feeling thermometer.* Participants reported their feelings toward Blacks on a single scale, ranging from 0 degrees (cold or unfavorable feelings) to 99 degrees (warm or favorable feelings). Results were reverse-scored so that higher numbers indicated colder, unfavorable feelings.

*Anti-Black attitudes.* Participants reported the extent to which they felt 12 emotional or evaluative reactions toward Blacks (e.g., the extent to which they felt warmth vs. hostility for Blacks; modified from Corenblum & Stephan, 2001). Each item was measured on a 10-point scale and higher numbers indicated stronger negative evaluations ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

*Procedure.* Participants were told that they would complete two separate experiments. The "first experiment," allegedly an investigation of cognitive abilities, allowed us to administer the affirmation manipulation. The "second experiment," presented as an experiment on social beliefs, allowed us to measure participants' attitudes toward Blacks.

### Results and Discussion

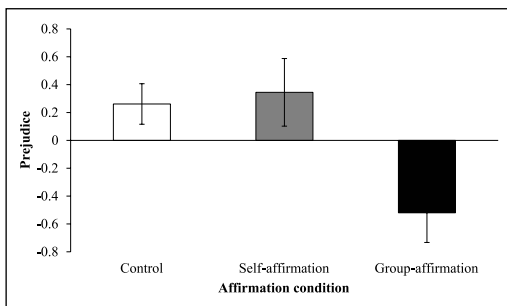
Table 1 lists the means and standard deviations of all measured variables as a function of condition.

Scores on the feeling thermometer and anti-Black measures were strongly correlated,  $r(49) = .63, p < .001$ , so they were standardized and averaged into a single index of prejudice. As displayed in Figure 1, a one-way ANOVA revealed a main effect of affirmation condition on the prejudice index,  $F(2, 46) = 5.69, p = .006, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .20$ .

**Table 1.** Summary of means and standard deviations for all experiments as function of condition.

Manipulated variable	Measured variable		
	Feeling thermometer	Anti-Black or anti-Middle Eastern attitudes	White or American identification
<b>Experiment 1</b>			
Control	-54.12 <sub>a</sub> (13.67)	3.55 <sub>ab</sub> (1.20)	-
Self-affirmation	-54.27 <sub>a</sub> (21.05)	3.80 <sub>a</sub> (1.51)	-
Group-affirmation	-74.78 <sub>b</sub> (18.35)	2.76 <sub>b</sub> (1.50)	-
<b>Experiment 2</b>			
Control	-70.50 <sub>ab</sub> (18.56)	3.83 <sub>a</sub> (0.99)	6.12 (0.73)
Self-affirmation	-64.97 <sub>a</sub> (17.67)	3.67 <sub>ab</sub> (1.32)	6.19 (0.82)
Group-affirmation	-77.58 <sub>b</sub> (18.74)	3.29 <sub>b</sub> (1.08)	6.22 (0.86)
<b>Experiment 3</b>			
Control	-56.03 <sub>a</sub> (18.32)	3.35 <sub>a</sub> (0.75)	4.78 (0.81)
Self-affirmation	-	-	-
Group-affirmation	-57.22 <sub>a</sub> (18.97)	3.11 <sub>b</sub> (0.72)	4.68 (0.89)

*Note.* Standard deviations are in parentheses. Means between conditions within each experiment that do not share a subscript are significantly different from each other at  $p = .05$ . Mean difference between the group-affirmation and control conditions within Experiment 2 is marginal ( $p = .06$ ).



**Figure 1.** Experiment 1: Effect of affirmation condition on prejudice against Blacks. Higher numbers on the Y-axis indicate more prejudice. Error bars are standard errors of the means.

Participants in the group-affirmation condition ( $M = -0.52, SD = 0.90$ ) exhibited less prejudice

relative to those in the control condition ( $M = 0.26, SD = 0.58$ ),  $t(46) = -2.76, p = .008, d = 1.03$ . However, those in the self-affirmation condition did not vary in their expression of prejudice against Blacks when compared to those in the control condition,  $t(46) = 0.28, p = .77$ .

In Experiment 1, we experimentally manipulated group-affirmation and directly examined its effect on prejudice against an outgroup. Consistent with our main prediction, White participants in the group-affirmation condition reported less prejudice against Blacks when compared to White participants who did not receive an affirmation. We posit that group-affirmation satisfies people’s need to enhance their ingroup image and reduces the identity-enhancement functional role of prejudice. These data contribute to the literature by demonstrating that the

beneficial effects of group-affirmation extend to intergroup relations. To the list of group-affirmation effects—reducing defensiveness to accept various types of threatening information (Sherman & Hartson, 2011; Sherman et al., 2007), restoring the positive integrity of the group after dissonant information (Glasford et al., 2009), transforming a threat into a challenge response (Derks Scheepers, van Laar, & Ellemers 2011; Derks et al., 2009), and acknowledging the ingroup's collective wrongdoings (Gunn & Wilson, 2011)—we add that ingroups can serve as a prejudice-reduction resource. This finding is particularly compelling because intergroup settings typically draw ingroup versus outgroup boundaries that can lead to intergroup discrimination. However, our findings from Experiment 1 suggest that if ingroup members learn that their group possesses a positive and important characteristic, this knowledge can reduce the need to express prejudice against outgroups.

Although the results from Experiment 1 are consistent with the group-affirmation and prejudice literature reviewed in the introduction, the relatively small sample size should lead one to interpret the data with caution. However, a post hoc power analysis with an effect size  $f$  at .50 (computed by transforming our  $\eta^2_{\text{partial}}$  at .20), alpha level of .05, and a sample size of 49, yielded power = .86, adequate statistical power. Although this analysis suggests a meaningful effect of group-affirmation on prejudice, we sought to replicate the effect with larger sample sizes in Experiments 2 and 3.

In Experiment 1, we did not find that self-affirmation reduces prejudice. Although this finding is theoretically inconsistent with that of Fein and Spencer (1997), it is empirically consistent with Collange, Fiske, and Sanitioso (2009). In their study, Collange et al. provided participants with either positive (self-affirmation condition), negative (self-threat condition), or no feedback (control condition) about their individual performance on a bogus intelligence test, followed by an opportunity to evaluate an outgroup job candidate. No differences in the evaluations between the self-affirmation and control conditions were reported. To test

the consistency of our null self-affirmation effect, we again included both group- and self-affirmation conditions in the next experiment.

## Experiment 2

In Experiment 1, we demonstrated that group-affirmation reduces prejudice against an outgroup. However, it is plausible that not all ingroup members benefit from group-affirmation because individuals vary in their identification with their group (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Phinney, 1992), and, consequently, the extent to which they perceive a trait to be valuable to their group (Derks et al., 2009). Thus, our main goal in Experiment 2 was to replicate and extend our findings from Experiment 1 by testing if group identification moderates the group-affirmation effect on prejudice. We predicted that group-affirmation would reduce prejudice against outgroup members among strongly identified ingroup members because strong group identifiers should be especially likely to perceive positive group performance consistent with an important trait that their group should possess. Among weakly identified participants, the expression of prejudice should not vary as a function of group-affirmation because they are less likely to base part of their self-concept on group characteristics.

In Experiment 2, participants completed a dot estimation task (instead of a cognitive abilities task) to demonstrate the reliability of receiving positive group performance feedback on a different performance task. The feedback procedures to manipulate group- and self-affirmation were identical to Experiment 1. Given the results and discussion in Experiment 1, we did not expect self-affirmation to affect prejudice nor for group identification to be a moderator because self-affirmation leads individuals to self-categorize more with their personal identity as opposed to their group identity.

### Method

*Participants.* We used G\*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) to calculate an a priori

power analysis. Analysis set at a medium effect size, alpha of .05, power of .80, and five predictors (two dummy-coded variables, identification, and two interactions) yielded a sample size of 92. We recruited 104 White students from a Midwestern university who participated in exchange for course credit (67 women;  $M_{age} = 19.88$  years,  $SD = 2.35$ , age range: 18–31).

#### *Manipulated variable*

*Group- versus self-affirmation.* Participants were presented with a dot estimation task that included 11 different pictures varying in the number of yellow dots against a blue screen. After each picture was shown for 2 seconds, participants estimated the number of dots they saw (for a similar procedure, see Mussweiler, Gabriel, & Bodenhausen, 2000). After completing the task, participants were randomly assigned to one of the three feedback conditions, identical to those reported in Experiment 1.

#### *Measured variables*

*Subjective White identification.* The White Racial Identification Measure (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Schiffhauer, 2007) is a five-item measure that assessed the degree to which participants identified with their ethnic/racial group (e.g., "I am comfortable being White") on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). Higher scores indicate stronger identification with being White ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

*Feeling thermometer and anti-Black measures.* We administered the same measures of prejudice against Blacks from Experiment 1 (anti-Black attitudes measure,  $\alpha = .83$ ).

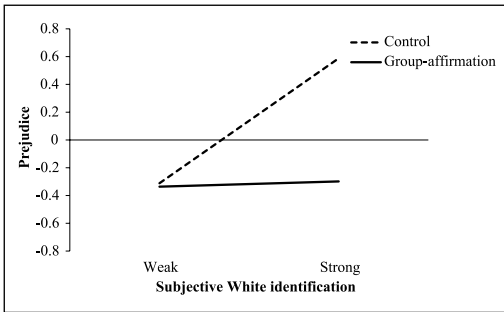
*Procedure.* The procedure was identical to Experiment 1 with the exception that participants completed a brief online demographics survey that contained the White identification measure at least 24 hours before attending the laboratory session.

#### *Results and Discussion*

Table 1 lists the means and standard deviations of all measured variables as a function of condition.

*Plan of analyses.* First, we created a prejudice index by standardizing and averaging the scores on both prejudice measures given that the scores on the two prejudice measures were correlated,  $r(104) = .59, p < .001$ . Next, following Aiken and West (1991), we created planned comparisons to test if White identification moderates the effect of affirmation on prejudice. To examine the separate effects of group-affirmation and self-affirmation, each relative to a no affirmation (control) condition, we created two dummy-coded variables: (a) group-affirmation condition compared to the control (group-affirmation coded 1 and the self-affirmation and control coded 0); (b) self-affirmation condition compared to the control (self-affirmation coded 1 and the group-affirmation and control coded 0). Dummy codes provide the most direct test of our first prediction that group- (not self-) affirmation would reduce prejudice because the codes test the difference between two means when the conditions are mutually exclusive. Finally, we conducted a hierarchical multiple regression in which we regressed prejudice scores on the two dummy variables in the first step. Because they are entered simultaneously in the regression analysis, the first dummy code examines whether the group-affirmation condition differs from the control condition, and the second dummy code tests whether the self-affirmation condition differs from the control. Then, we added White identification (centered) and the two interactions between the dummy-coded variables and identification in the second step.

*Effect of subjective White identification and affirmation type on prejudice.* The first dummy variable that tested the mean difference in prejudice between the group-affirmation and control conditions was significant,  $b = -.42, SE = 0.22, t(98) = -1.95, p = .05, 95\% CI [-0.85, 0.00]$ ; participants in the group-affirmation condition ( $M = -0.32, SD = 0.82$ ) exhibited less prejudice relative to those in the no affirmation condition ( $M = 0.10, SD = 0.86$ ),  $d = 0.50$ . However, and consistent with Experiment 1, the second dummy variable that tested the mean difference in prejudice between



**Figure 2.** Experiment 2: Interaction between affirmation condition and White identification on prejudice against Blacks. Higher numbers on the Y-axis indicate more prejudice.

the self-affirmation and control conditions was not significant,  $b = .08, t < 1$ .

There was a White identification effect, such that increased White identification predicted increased prejudice,  $b = .56, SE = 0.21, t(98) = 2.70, p = .008, 95\% CI [0.15, 0.98]$ .<sup>1</sup> Most importantly, the predicted Group-Affirmation x White Identification interaction was significant,  $b = -.54, SE = 0.27, t(98) = -1.98, p = .05, 95\% CI [-1.08, 0.00]$ . To probe the interaction and examine our planned comparison, we conducted simple slope analyses and estimated the values of the prejudice index at 1 *SD* above and below the mean on the identification measure using the online statistical utilities developed by Preacher, Curran, and Bauer (2006). Consistent with our main prediction, Figure 2 shows that strongly identified White participants who received a group-affirmation expressed less prejudice compared to strongly identified White participants who did not receive an affirmation,  $b = -.89, SE = 0.31, t(98) = -2.90, p = .005, 95\% CI [-1.47, -0.29]$ . By comparison, prejudice did not vary between the group-affirmation and control conditions among weakly identified White participants,  $b = -.03, t < 1$ . Finally, the Self-Affirmation x White Identification interaction was not statistically significant,  $b = -.38, t(98) = -1.44, p = .15$ .

In summary, findings from Experiment 2 replicate Experiment 1 by demonstrating that group-affirmation (relative to a control) can reduce

prejudice against an outgroup. Furthermore, Experiment 2 shows that the prejudice-reducing benefit of group-affirmation only emerges among strongly (but not weakly) identified ingroup members. Lastly, as in Experiment 1, self-affirmation provided no prejudice-reduction benefit.

### Experiment 3

In Experiment 3, we sought to extend the effect of group-affirmation on prejudice among strongly identified ingroup members to a different type of group-affirmation and outgroup judgment. In Experiments 1 and 2, a group-affirmation was manipulated by providing participants with bogus positive feedback about their ingroup’s performance on either a cognitive ability or dot estimation task. It is plausible that this feedback procedure primed feelings of superiority over other groups. The fact that participants were led to believe that the tests measured “group differences in cognitive ability” and that their ingroup performed very well on the task (93rd percentile) may have suggested that other groups did not do as well. Although past research suggests that this may lead to social comparison processes underlying increased prejudice (e.g., see Brewer, 1999; Mummendey et al., 2001), as opposed to decreased prejudice as our data demonstrate, an alternative explanation for our results is that our manipulation activated a positive social comparison that reduced prejudice. Therefore, to address this alternative explanation, we changed the affirmation procedure to one that affirmed participants’ American identity using a well-established value-based group-affirmation procedure (e.g., Glasford et al., 2009; Gunn & Wilson, 2011; Sherman et al., 2007). In Experiment 3, we group-affirmed participants’ American identity (as opposed to their White identity) and provided them with the opportunity to express their attitudes toward Middle Eastern people (as opposed to Blacks).

Finally, given that we found no effect of self-affirmation on prejudice in the previous experiments, we eliminated the self-affirmation condition to focus on the effect of group-affirmation on prejudice, which is the main goal of the present research.



## Method

*Participants.* We used G\*Power to calculate an a priori power analysis. Analysis set at a medium effect size, alpha of .05, power of .80, and three predictors (one dummy-coded variable, identification, and one interaction) yielded a sample size of 77. We recruited 154 White American students from a Midwestern university who participated in exchange for course credit (75 women;  $M_{age} = 18.93$  years,  $SD = 1.39$ , age range: 18–28).

### Manipulated variable

*Group-affirmation versus control.* Participants completed a procedure similar to a values-based affirmation typically used in the literature. Following Glasford et al. (2009), participants were first asked to read through a list of values (e.g., freedom of speech, personal freedom) and then rank the values in order of importance to Americans. Participants in the group-affirmation condition wrote about the value they ranked most important and why it was important to Americans, whereas participants in the control condition wrote about the value they ranked as least important to Americans and why it may be important to people in another nation.

### Measured variables

*American identification.* We administered seven items from Leach et al.'s (2008) ingroup identification measure, namely their centrality and satisfaction components, to assess the extent to which participants identified with their national (American) group (e.g., "Being American is an important part of how I see myself"). The scale for each item ranged from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). Higher scores indicate stronger identification with being American ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

*Feeling thermometer and attitudes toward Middle Easterners.* We administered the same prejudice measures from the first two experiments except that the outgroup was Middle Easterners (Middle Eastern attitudes measure,  $\alpha = .89$ ).

*Procedure.* Participants first completed the American identification measure, followed by the affirmation procedure. Finally, participants indicated their attitudes toward Middle Easterners.

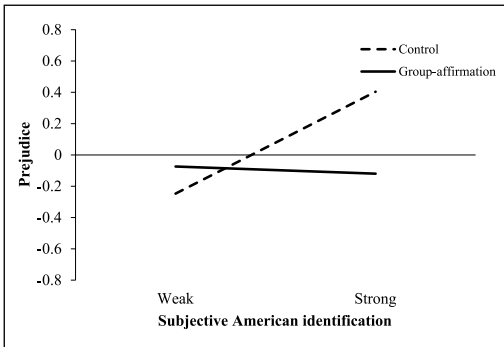
## Results and Discussion

Table 1 lists the means and standard deviations of all measured variables as a function of condition.

*Plan of analyses.* We first standardized and averaged the scores on both prejudice measures into an index of prejudice given that both measures were correlated,  $r(154) = .54, p < .001$ . We next conducted a hierarchical multiple regression where we regressed the prejudice index on the affirmation dummy variable (0 = control, 1 = group-affirmation) in the first step and added American identification (centered) along with the interaction between the affirmation dummy code and identification in the second step.

*Effect of subjective American identification and group-affirmation on prejudice.* The first model of the hierarchical multiple regression showed that the group-affirmation dummy code was not significant,  $b = -.19, t(152) = -1.37, p = .17$ . The second model revealed that strong American identification was associated with higher prejudice against the outgroup,  $b = .38, SE = 0.12, t(150) = 3.15, p = .002, 95\% CI [0.14, 0.63]$ .<sup>2</sup> Most importantly, the predicted Group-Affirmation x American Identification interaction was significant,  $b = -.41, SE = 0.16, t(150) = -2.51, p = .01, 95\% CI [-0.74, -0.09]$  (see Figure 3). We used the Preacher et al. (2006) tools to probe the interaction (described in Experiment 2). Among strongly American-identified participants, group-affirmation led to less prejudice when compared to a control (no group-affirmation) condition,  $b = -.52, SE = 0.20, t(150) = -2.68, p = .008, 95\% CI [-0.91, -0.14]$ . However, the effect did not emerge for those who were weakly identified,  $b = .17, t < 1$ .<sup>3</sup>

Our findings from Experiment 3 replicated the findings from Experiment 2—group-affirmation reduces prejudice among those who strongly



**Figure 3.** Experiment 3: Interaction between affirmation condition and American identification on prejudice against Middle Easterners. Higher numbers on the Y-axis indicate more prejudice.

identify with the group. Most importantly, Experiment 3 included a different affirmation manipulation from Experiment 2. In Experiment 2, participants received positive performance feedback about the group, which may have made participants’ social identity salient and/or feel intellectually superior. These alternative explanations may have led to reducing prejudice when compared to not receiving any positive performance feedback. Although one might intuitively expect for these group-affirmation manipulations to lead to greater prejudice (see General Discussion section), the different affirmation manipulation utilized in Experiment 3 undermines these explanations because it makes salient the ingroup across all conditions and it does not provide feedback about intellectual performance. The consistent findings across the experiments suggest that an affirmation, rather than an increased sense of ingroup salience and/or superiority, led to prejudice reduction.

*Supplemental analysis.* Although the main effects of group-affirmation on prejudice across all three experiments were in the predicted direction, the significance levels did not all meet conventional standards ( $ps = .008, .05, .17$ ). Therefore, we conducted a mini meta-analysis of the three experiments using mean effect sizes ( $d$ ) and adopting an inverse variance weighting procedure (Lipsey &

Wilson, 2001). Collectively, participants in the group-affirmation conditions reported less prejudice than those in the control conditions,  $d = -0.68$ , 95% CI  $[-1.25, -0.01]$ . In summary, this supplemental analysis suggests a meaningful group-affirmation effect on reducing prejudice.

## General Discussion

### *Group-Affirmation and Prejudice*

The current research examined whether the beneficial effect of group-affirmation extends to intergroup settings. According to social identity and self-categorization theories (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987), the presence of an outgroup can cause individuals to self-categorize with their social identity and activate the motivation to protect positive ingroup distinctiveness. Because group-affirmation should satisfy group-image needs, we predicted that group-affirmation would attenuate prejudice. Moreover, because some group members consider their social identity and associated group characteristics more central to their self-concept than other group members, we predicted that the beneficial effect of group-affirmation on prejudice should emerge particularly among strongly (but not weakly) identified group members. Consistent with our predictions, three experiments demonstrated that White American participants whose ethnic/racial (Experiments 1 & 2) or national (Experiment 3) group was affirmed subsequently exhibited *less* prejudice against an outgroup, and that this effect emerged among strongly identified White (Experiment 2) or American (Experiment 3) participants. These effects were obtained across two different types of affirmations (performance affirmation in Experiments 1 & 2; value affirmation in Experiment 3), two different performance tasks (a cognitive abilities test in Experiment 1; an intelligence test in Experiment 2), and two different targets of prejudice (Blacks in Experiments 1 & 2; Middle Easterners in Experiment 3). Thus, our results suggest that the beneficial effect of group-affirmation on reducing prejudice is replicable and generalizable.

Our findings extend McGregor et al.'s (2008) who demonstrated partial evidence that group-affirmation can reduce prejudice. First, the present work adopts a more rigorous experimental methodology by including a manipulation of group-affirmation and a control condition, which McGregor et al. did not; we demonstrate that, relative to no affirmation, group-affirmed participants expressed less prejudice against outgroup members. Second, McGregor et al. (2008) demonstrated that their alleviating effects of group-affirmation emerged among individuals who have a personal need for structure. These individuals rely on basic social categorizations such as stereotyping and its related attitudes to meet their basic need to simplify their worlds. Therefore, group-affirmation presumably satisfies such a need (at least temporarily) and thus the motivation to express prejudice. We extend this work by demonstrating that subjective group identification also moderates the effect of group-affirmation on prejudice. From a social identity perspective, identity-based motives are another source of stereotyping and prejudice. Strongly identified group members consider their social identity and associated group characteristics as more central to their self-concept and may go to great lengths to sustain their group's positive image (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1985). Thus, these group members may approach and engage in intergroup relations in harmful ways by expressing greater prejudice than weakly identified group members (Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Mummendey et al., 2001). However, our research suggests that group-affirmation alleviates strongly identified individuals' need to express prejudice toward outgroups. Altogether, McGregor et al. (2008) and the present research demonstrate the conditions under which group-affirmation may benefit intergroup relations.

### *Self-Affirmation and Prejudice*

In Experiments 1 and 2, we did not demonstrate that self-affirmation decreases prejudice, which is inconsistent with some past studies (Fein & Spencer, 1997; Gramzow & Gaertner, 2005, Study 3; Zarate & Garza, 2002, Study 1).

According to these studies, affirming an important aspect of one's self-concept bolsters psychological resources that should attenuate the motivation to express prejudice against outgroups. However, not all experiments show that self-affirmation reduces prejudice (Collange et al., 2009; Lehmler et al., 2010, Study 1; McGregor et al., 2008, Study 3). Our data do support our hypothesis concerning the differential prejudice-reduction benefits of group-affirmation versus self-affirmation by showing that although group-affirmation reduces prejudice against outgroups, self-affirmation might not always be enough to reduce prejudice.

We propose that an affirmation's effect on prejudice depends upon the degree of psychological proximity, or overlap, between the aspect of self being affirmed and the outgroup being evaluated. Plausibly, there is greater overlap between prejudice and group- rather than self-affirmation because both prejudice and group-affirmation involve intergroup processes and are relevant to the same social identity, whereas self-affirmation involves intrapersonal processes that are not directly relevant to a specific social identity. Group-affirmations could eliminate the need to express prejudice because they bolster the specific aspect of the self-concept (i.e., the social identity) that is directly threatened by the salience of an outgroup. This hypothesis is consistent with Ehrlich and Gramzow (2015, Experiment 3) who showed that group-affirmation leads people to focus on words specifically related to their ingroup, whereas self-affirmation leads people to focus on positive words in general. A focus on the ingroup rather than nonrelated ingroup factors feasibly provides a better opportunity to enhance or protect the relevant social identity.

Another plausible explanation for our null effects concerning self-affirmation is that for some people, self-affirmation increases people's sense of personal superiority, which leads to a callous disregard for others (McGregor, Nail, Kocalar, & Haji, 2013). For example, McGregor et al. (2013) found that receiving positive performance feedback reduced concern for others among participants who were high in narcissism

but low in implicit self-esteem. This finding suggests that self-affirmation might reduce prejudice in some participants but increase it in others; that is, the effects of self-affirmation on prejudice might be moderated by individual-level (as opposed to group-level) attributes (e.g., implicit self-esteem and narcissism). It might be fruitful for future research to examine additional moderators of self-affirmation effects on prejudice. Because our main focus was on the specific benefits of group-affirmation, we included a measure of subjective group identification, a group-level moderator.

### *Role of Threats to the Self-Concept*

Self-affirmation theory, and its extension to group-affirmation, posits that individuals face daily threats to their self-concept (Sherman & Hartson, 2011). In fact, the elegance of an affirmation is its function to buffer individuals from the effects of threats or alleviate threatened individuals (see McQueen & Klein, 2006). The presence of an outgroup in particular can lead some individuals to feel chronically threatened (e.g., those who endorse the social dominance orientation belief that group hierarchies are inevitable and desirable) or lead individuals in general to feel threatened in certain contexts (e.g., when group-based symbolic or realistic threats are primed), which in turn may lead to the expression of prejudice (Esses, Dovidio, & Jackson, 2001; Stephan, Renfro, Esses, Stephan, & Martin, 2005). Although the present experiments neither measured nor manipulated direct threats to participants, they demonstrate that group-affirmation can potentially buffer individuals from a direct threat from the outgroup. Consistent with this hypothesis, Craig, DeHart, Richeson, and Fiedorowicz (2012) directly manipulated self-threat by reminding White female students of sexism and its social and economic consequences. When given an opportunity to evaluate ethnic/racial stigmatized groups (e.g., Blacks), they expressed less prejudice following group-affirmation to their student group. Craig et al. (2012), the present group-affirmation experiments, and Fein and Spencer's seminal research (1997, Study 1)

collectively demonstrate the beneficial role of an affirmation addressing direct and indirect threats.

### *Future Research*

The present research raises the provocative alternative hypothesis that affirming the positivity of an ingroup will generate within its members a sense of ingroup superiority and outgroup inferiority, leading to an increase in prejudice expressions (Ehrlich & Gramzow, 2015). In fact, Ehrlich and Gramzow (2015) reported that participants who affirmed a value important to their political group evaluated the competing political party more negatively than those in a control or self-affirmation condition (Study 1), and that this effect was limited to those who highly identified with their political party (Study 2). However, a close inspection of their Study 1 results suggests that the group-affirmation condition was not significantly different from the control condition; direct comparisons were not reported and the group-affirmation mean was within the confidence interval of the control condition mean. Similarly, Study 2 did not include a direct comparison between the group-affirmation and control conditions as a function of group identification.

Theoretically, and as noted by the Ehrlich and Gramzow (2015, p. 1113), political party membership as a group identity may differ in important ways from other research on group-affirmations reducing defensive strategies (e.g., Gunn & Wilson, 2011). First, political parties are self-selected, whereas ethnicity and nationality, which are the focus of the present research, typically are not. Second, political parties have clearly defined opponents and often are highly competitive and even hostile. Third, when members of ideologically based groups affirm an important group value, they might regard that value as ideologically distinguishing them from their primary opposition group. The group-defining properties of a value might be less relevant when people affirm ethnic identity and have no clear outgroup in mind. Given the latter ideas regarding Ehrlich and Gramzow's findings on group-affirmation and prejudice, and consistent with past research (e.g., Derks et al., 2009), we maintain that group-affirmation will

reduce prejudice and this effect is most likely to occur among high identifiers.

## Conclusion

In sum, our research suggests that group-affirmations can be effective at enhancing people's social identity and thereby reducing their need to derogate an outgroup. These benefits of group-affirmations on prejudice reduction, however, are limited to people who highly identify with the social identity that is affirmed. Group-affirmations might be more effective than are self-affirmations in the domain of intergroup judgments; however, more work is needed to understand the contexts in which both forms of affirmations are (in)effective at reducing prejudice or even lead to increases in the derogation of others.

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## Notes

1. Given the nature of the dummy-coded variable, the identification effect can only be interpreted for participants in the control condition. However, when identification alone is entered in a model, the identification effect generally holds,  $b = .21$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $t(102) = 1.94$ ,  $p = .056$ , 95% CI [-0.005, 0.42].
2. Following Endnote 1, when identification alone is entered in a model, the identification effect holds,  $b = .16$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $t(150) = 1.96$ ,  $p = .05$ , 95% CI [0.00, 0.33].
3. In Experiment 3, we also measured political orientation (the extent to which participants described their political outlook as very liberal ranging to very conservative) to address the

possible alternative explanation that it rather than group identification moderates the group-affirmation effect on prejudice. Although political orientation was related to prejudice  $b = .23$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $t(148) = 2.25$ ,  $p < .05$ , it did not interact with group-affirmation,  $b = .12$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ,  $t(148) = 1.17$ ,  $p = .24$ ; but the American identification and group-affirmation interaction remained significant,  $b = -.32$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ,  $t(148) = -2.59$ ,  $p = .01$ . In addition, when we controlled for political orientation in the regression (affirmation condition, group identification, and their interaction), the interaction effect remained significant. These results suggest that political conservatism does not provide an alternative explanation for our data.

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