

# The effect of self-affirmation on perception of racism <sup>☆</sup>

Glenn Adams <sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Teceta Thomas Tormala <sup>c</sup>, Laurie T. O'Brien <sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Psychology, University of Kansas, 1415 Jayhawk Blvd., Lawrence, KS 66045, USA

<sup>b</sup> Department of Psychology, University of Toronto, 100 St. George Street, Toronto, Ont., Canada M5S 3G3

<sup>c</sup> Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, Indiana University, 1101 E. 10th Street, Bloomington, IN 47405, USA

<sup>d</sup> Department of Psychology, Tulane University, 2007 Percival Stern Hall, New Orleans, LA 70118, USA

Received 5 August 2004; revised 24 August 2005

Available online 22 December 2005

## Abstract

Two studies tested the hypothesis that a self-affirmation manipulation can eliminate group differences in perception of racism. Latino and White students completed a questionnaire manipulation of self-affirmation followed by a survey measuring perception of racism against stigmatized groups. Results in both studies revealed a predicted main effect such that Latino participants perceived greater racism than did White participants. However, this difference was qualified in both studies by a hypothesized interaction. The group difference in perception of racism was true only of participants in the no-affirmation condition; it was reduced (Study 1) or eliminated (Study 2) among participants who received a self-affirmation treatment. Additional analyses challenge prevailing discourse about motivational sources of ethnic differences in racism perception. Although results provide tentative evidence that the affirmation treatment *attenuated* perception of racism among Latino participants, they provide stronger evidence that the affirmation treatment *facilitated* perception of racism among White participants. © 2005 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

**Keywords:** Perception of prejudice; Defensive motivation; Self-affirmation; Identity; Racism

## Introduction

The contrast between the memories of many of the black New Yorkers who were summoned and those of many of the white potential jurors displayed a racial divide in perceptions about the case. Many of the blacks described [the victim's] ordeal as they would a cultural touchstone ... For some of the whites, the [victim's] case was a half-forgotten news story (Glaberson, 2002).

The preceding quote refers to the well-publicized case of a White police officer accused of torturing Haitian immigrant Abner Louima. A similar “racial divide in perceptions” exists for other events, such that Black respondents were more likely than White respondents to perceive racism in the proceedings of the O.J. Simpson trial (Mixon, Foley, & Orme, 1995) and the decision of the United States government to invade Iraq (Kennedy & Cardwell, 2003). In a poll conducted two weeks after Hurricane Katrina, 60% of Black respondents, but less than 20% of White respondents, believed race was a factor in the slow response of the federal government to those affected by the Hurricane (Page & Puente, 2005). More generally, people identified with stigmatized groups that have been chronic targets of societal racism (i.e., *target groups*) are more likely than people identified with groups that are typically associated with perpetration of racism (i.e., *perpetrator groups*) to perceive racism directed against stigmatized groups (Johnson, Simmons, Trawalter, Ferguson, & Reed, 2003; Operario & Fiske, 2001; Rodin, Price, Bryson, & Sanchez, 1990).

<sup>☆</sup> Support for this research came from a National Institute of Mental Health Postdoctoral Training Fellowship from the University of California, Irvine to the first author. We thank Monica L. Bergandi for her assistance with data collection and Roxanne Cohen-Silver for permission to collect data in her class. We like to thank David K. Sherman, Donna Garcia and the Culture and Psychology Research group at the University of Kansas for their comments on earlier versions of the chapter.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [adams@psych.utoronto.ca](mailto:adams@psych.utoronto.ca) (G. Adams).

Why do some people tend to perceive racism against stigmatized groups while others tend to minimize or deny racism in the same set of events? One explanation is that people from different groups base their judgments of events on different sets of information (Nelson, Branscombe, Schmitt, & Adams, 2004). People from stigmatized groups tend to inhabit worlds where racism figures prominently in collective representations and everyday discourse (Feagin, 1991; Turner, 1993). They may rely upon this set of information when making judgments about events and conclude that racism is a plausible explanation. In contrast, people from perpetrator groups tend to inhabit worlds where the possibility of racism figures minimally in collective representations and everyday discourse. They may rely upon this set of information when making judgments about events and conclude that racism is not a plausible explanation.

The goal of the present study is to explore a different explanation: that people from stigmatized and perpetrator groups face different configurations of threats to the self that motivate either the perception or the minimization of racism. We consider this question within the framework of self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988). Specifically, we test the hypothesis that a self-affirmation treatment—the act of endorsing and writing about an important personal value—will reduce the force of ego-defensive motivations and thereby reduce or eliminate group differences in perception of racism toward stigmatized groups.

#### *Motivational influences on perception of racism*

Individuals from different groups may face different configurations of ego-relevant threats that motivate the denial or perception of racism. One example of an ego-defensive motivation that may apply to members of both target and perpetrator groups is the need to experience the social order as just or legitimate (Lerner, 1980; Major et al., 2002; Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002; see Jost & Major, 2002, for multiple perspectives on the psychology of legitimacy). Perceptions of racism may be threatening to the extent that they imply that the social order is not just or legitimate, and people from both target and perpetrator groups may be motivated to deny the prevalence of racism to defend against threatening implications for the sense of fairness and justice (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Lerner, 1980). However, a motivational account of group differences implies that at least some of the forces that influence perception and minimization of racism differ for members of perpetrator and target groups.

#### *People from target groups*

On one hand, a variety of perspectives suggest that people from target groups may sometimes be motivated to perceive rather than minimize racism in everyday events. For example, a vigilance perspective emphasizes the reality of racism as an environmental threat and a corresponding motivation for people from target groups to maintain a relatively low threshold for perceiving racism as a way to protect themselves against this threat (e.g., Sechrist, Swim, &

Stangor, 2004; see also Major et al., 2002). In addition, people from target groups may be motivated to perceive (rather than minimize) racism to deflect blame for ingroup disadvantage away from the alleged shortcomings of their own group and instead locate it in the moral shortcomings of the advantaged group (i.e., racist discrimination; see Major et al., 2002). A related possibility is that group-protective explanations for ingroup position may come to feature prominently in cultural worldviews or group consciousness of target-group communities (Gurin & Townsend, 1986; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). People from target groups may be motivated to perceive racism in everyday events not to deflect blame from the group, but as a means to maintain and affirm an important ingroup reality (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991). As a possible indication of this process, perception of racism in ambiguous events tends to be greatest among those members who are most strongly identified with the target group (Adams, Fryberg, Garcia, & Torres, 2004; Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Major, Quinton, & Schmader, 2003; Operario & Fiske, 2001; Sellers & Shelton, 2003).

On the other hand, a variety of perspectives suggest that people from target groups are motivated to minimize (rather than perceive) racism in everyday events (Crosby, 1993; Thomas, 2003; for reviews, see Major et al., 2002; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). For people from target groups, the perception of racism implies the threat of chronic, stable, and systematic obstacles to desired outcomes. This threat is associated with increased depression (Kobrynowicz & Branscombe, 1997), hypertension (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996), and hostility towards members of perpetrator groups (Branscombe et al., 1999). People from target groups may be motivated to minimize the extent of racism to protect against these emotional and psychological costs (Branscombe et al., 1999). In addition, people from target groups who claim discrimination suffer social costs (Kaiser & Miller, 2001) and may be motivated to minimize racism in public reports in order to avoid being perceived negatively by others.

#### *People from perpetrator groups*

Most discussions of motivational influences on perception of racism focus on people from target groups, implying that they are the source of group differences in perception of racism. However, people from dominant groups do not have privileged access to an objective reality that they dispassionately perceive through an unbiased lens. Instead, their experience of social reality is also subject to a variety of ego-defensive motivations that may account for ethnic differences in perception of racism.

Despite a historical legacy of slavery and racial oppression, a normative climate proscribing overt expressions of racism has developed in the United States over the past half century (e.g., Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002; Plant & Devine, 1998). Many individuals from perpetrator groups strive to maintain an unprejudiced self-image

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات