Recognizing discrimination explicitly while denying it implicitly: Implicit social identity protection ☆

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ABSTRACT

Past research suggests that members of devalued groups recognize their groups are discriminated against. Do the implicit responses of members of these groups demonstrate the same pattern? We argue that they do not and that this is due to a motivated protection of members of devalued groups' social identity. Study 1 demonstrates that, at an explicit level African-Canadians recognize that their group is discriminated against, but at an implicit level African-Canadians think that most people like their group to a greater extent than do European-Canadians. Study 2 replicates this implicit finding with Muslim participants while demonstrating that, when affirmed, this group difference disappears. Study 3 demonstrates that implicit normative regard can predict collective action over and above implicit attitudes and explicit normative regard. The implications for changing the status quo are discussed.

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Members of devalued groups are often aware of the discrimination that their groups face (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994) and the recognition of this pervasive discrimination can negatively impact their self-esteem (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). Yet, according to social identity theorists (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), members of these groups are motivated to have a positive social identity. How do members of devalued groups reconcile their desire to have a positive social identity with the social reality that their group is not regarded positively? We suggest that members of devalued groups' motivation to maintain a positive social identity is limited by the reality of the inequality that their group faces, making it difficult for members of such groups to believe that others view their group positively at an explicit level. We reason, however, that this motive might be evident when others' regard is measured implicitly (what we call implicit normative regard) and predict that it will be a potent predictor of behavior.

Theorizing and research on maintaining a positive social identity has almost exclusively focused on maintaining this identity at a conscious level. Such maintenance strategies have included exiting one's group to join a higher status group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), forming a positive attitude towards one's group, perhaps by devaluing domains in which one's group does not perform well, or engaging in collective action in an effort to improve the actual social standing of one's group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Because using these methods of social identity maintenance may require consciously recognizing that one's group has low status in society, however, they may all be restricted by reality. For example, it may be difficult for Blacks to engage in collective action to improve their group's condition if they believe such actions can never lead to advancement of their group due to the prevalence of discrimination. Similarly, it is difficult for members of devalued groups to explicitly believe that most people value their group while also recognizing that their group is discriminated against, making it challenging to use this method to maintain a positive social identity at an explicit level.

In contrast, when beliefs about how most people view one's devalued group are measured outside of awareness (i.e., implicitly, Yoshida, Peach, Spencer, & Zanna, 2010), we believe that there may be little conflict between explicitly believing that one's group is devalued and implicitly believing that one's group is valued. But can the motive to maintain a positive social identity affect implicit processes? There is reason to believe that it can. According to Bargh's automotive model (Bargh, 1990, 2007; Chartrand & Bargh, 2002) whenever people repeatedly pursue a goal in the presence of a social cue, this goal can be automatically activated (i.e., through implicit processes). Based on this theorizing we reason that if members of devalued groups repeatedly pursue the goal of perceiving their group as valued, for example, in the presence of members of their group, then the goal to maintain a positive social identity would be automatically activated (i.e., through implicit processes) whenever they encounter members

of their group.[1] This reasoning suggests that people may develop positive implicit normative regard about their groups without this positive implicit normative regard conflicting with negative explicit normative regard.

We refer to this construct as implicit normative regard because we wish to draw a similarity between our concept and public regard (e.g., Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) but also want to highlight the normative nature of our measure. In other research (Spencer, Peach, Yoshida, & Zanna, 2010; Yoshida, et al., 2010) we have suggested that in order to function in society, individuals need to have a readily-accessible (or, implicit) sense of how others react to social groups, their own included. Based on this theorizing and research, we reason that implicit normative regard is related to, but not redundant with implicit attitudes, which measure personal associations with social groups. Implicit normative regard and implicit attitudes should be related because they both assess automatic associations with the same social groups. For example, individuals' implicit associations between what society likes and feminists should be related to individuals' implicit associations between what they personally like and feminists because both are likely to be influenced by characteristics of feminists. In addition, over time implicit normative regard and implicit attitudes are likely to influence one another, thus increasing the extent to which they are related.

Our theorizing suggests that these constructs will not be redundant, however, for two reasons. First, implicit attitudes and implicit normative regard may have different antecedents. Based on the research of Fazio and his colleagues (Fazio, Sanbonmatsu, Powell, & Kardes, 1986; Fazio & Williams, 1986; Olson & Fazio, 2004) we argue that implicit attitudes often form from direct experience with members of social groups. In contrast, we argue that implicit normative regard is derived from exposure to how groups are depicted and treated in society. For example, when participants were exposed to a negative joke about Muslims at which the audience laughed they had more negative implicit normative regard towards Muslims than when the audience did not laugh. The audience's reaction, however, did not influence participants' implicit attitudes towards Muslims (Yoshida et al., 2010). We are not arguing, however, that implicit normative regard is formed simply by passively receiving cultural media depictions of one's group. Instead, we theorize that people actively develop associations between their group and society's view of their group and that their social identity influences the development of these associations. From this perspective cultural portrayals of one's group provide the clay, but social identity related motives sculpt the final shape of implicit normative regard.

Second, we suggest that implicit normative regard and implicit attitudes are related but not redundant because, at least at times, individuals may be motivated to not conform with society (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953; Thrash, Elliot, & Schultheiss, 2007). This motivation may lead them to adopt different perspectives and behavior, creating different individual associations with social groups than societal associations with these same groups. For example, an individual who is allergic to flowers may know others like flowers (i.e., they may have positive implicit normative regard towards flowers), but may have negative implicit attitudes towards flowers themselves.

In order to measure a more personalized implicit attitude, past researchers (Olson & Fazio, 2004) have modified the Implicit Association Test (IAT, Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) to include the category labels "I like" and "I don't like." Following this assessment technique, to measure implicit normative regard, we have modified the Implicit Association Test to assess the association between what most people like or do not like and social groups (Spencer et al., 2010; Yoshida et al., 2010). In this measure, stronger associations between a social category (such as "Black") and the category "most people like" (and between the categories "White" and "most people don't like") indicate that an individual has relatively positive implicit normative regard towards the social category "Black." Specifically, we believe that when two concepts are associated in memory and these two concepts share a response key, participants are faster to respond, and when these concepts are not associated, participants are slower to respond. Thus, our IAT merely measures associations between the concept "most people like" and "most people don't like" and corresponding social groups.

Although we cannot review all validating data here, we have evidence that this measure is influenced by normative information, predicts behavior, and is distinct from implicit attitudes and explicit normative regard. As previously mentioned, in other research (Yoshida et al., 2010), we have found that whether or not an audience laughed at a racist joke about Muslims impacted participants' implicit normative regard towards Muslims. Specifically, when the audience laughed at the joke, implicit normative regard towards Muslims became more negative than when the audience did not laugh at this joke, indicating that normative information can influence this measure of implicit normative regard. In addition, the more negative their implicit normative regard towards Muslims became, the less money participants allocated to a Muslim student organization, indicating that implicit normative regard can predict meaningful behaviour. Moreover, audience reactions did not influence participants' implicit attitudes, which also did not predict discriminatory behavior, indicating that implicit attitudes and implicit normative regard are distinct (Yoshida et al., 2010).

In the present research, we utilize this measure to test our prediction that members of devalued groups will show more positive normative regard on implicit measures than on explicit measures. Based on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) we argue that members of devalued groups are motivated to maintain positive implicit normative regard about their group, but the reality of discrimination impedes this motivation at an explicit level. Stating explicitly that most people like one's group when often confronted with discrimination is a difficult proposition to maintain when consciously considered. In contrast, at an implicit level when such contradictions are not consciously considered, maintaining a belief that one's group is viewed positively should be easier. We test this possibility in Study 1.

Although the reality of discrimination may make it difficult for members of devalued groups to maintain positive explicit normative regard about one's group, it should not affect their ability to like their group. We therefore suggest that members of devalued groups will have positive explicit attitudes, as well as positive implicit attitudes towards their group. We also test this possibility in Study 1.

We suggest that people maintain positive implicit normative regard in order to protect their social identity, but there may be many ways that a positive social identity can be maintained. Because positive implicit normative regard is influenced by members of devalued groups' motivation to see their group positively and consequently to see themselves positively, when this motivation is satisfied using another means (such as through an affirmation (Steele, 1988)), we predict that members of these groups will have less positive implicit normative regard toward their group. We test this possibility in Study 2 by affirming participants' group identity and then assessing their implicit and explicit normative regard. We expect that, because implicit normative regard is used to affirm members of devalued groups' social identity, an affirmation will actually lead to less positive implicit normative regard.

Finally, we suggest that implicit normative regard can predict meaningful behavior, specifically collective action. We further suggest

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[1] Of course, there may be extreme situations in which members of some groups (such as Jews during the Holocaust) may be unable to deny the discrimination towards their group even at an implicit level, and so it may be the case that not all devalued groups show this effect, but in general we believe the pattern outlined above will be true.