

Impact of Group Identification Level and Group-Affirmation on the Evaluation of In-group Dissenter

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The present research examined whether group-identification level and group-affirmation affect the evaluation of in-group dissenter. When faced with a dissenter who argues against the in-group norm, other group members with high group-identification level usually regard him as a threat. However, it was hypothesized that when group-affirmation is given, group members with a high identification level would no longer feel threatened by a dissenter and thereby evaluate the dissenter more favorably. To test this, the present study manipulated group-identification levels (high/low) and group-affirmation. The attitude toward the dissenter was then measured. Although the result did not support this hypothesis, the present study suggests a possible way to reduce unconditional exclusion towards the dissenter.

Keywords: dissenter, group identification, group-affirmation, threat, group

Cette recherche examine comment le niveau d'identification au groupe et d'affirmation de groupe affecte l'évaluation de la dissidence dans l'endogroupe. Quand les individus sont confrontés à la contestation d'un de leur membres, les autres membres du groupe ayant un niveau d'identification au groupe élevé perçoivent le membre dissident comme étant une menace. Cependant, il était prévu que lorsque l'affirmation de groupe est donnée, les membres du groupe avec un niveau d'identification élevé ne se sentiront pas menacés par le membre dissident et, de ce fait, évalue le membre dissident plus favorablement. Pour tester cela, la présente étude manipulait les niveaux d'identification au groupe (élevé/faible) et d'affirmation de groupe. L'attitude à l'égard du membre dissident a été mesurée par la suite. Bien que les résultats ne supportent pas l'hypothèse, la présente étude suggère des moyens de réduire l'exclusion inconditionnelle du membre dissident.

Mots-clés : membre dissident, identification au groupe, affirmation de groupe, menace, groupe

Who likes the dissenter? It's hard to like someone who says you're wrong, especially when everybody else agrees with you. Therefore, the dissenter is usually silenced, ignored, or even hated by the group. In the movie *12 Angry Men* (1957), an 18-year-old boy was sent before court, having been suspected of murdering his father. Without a second thought, most of the jury wished to convict him as guilty based solely on the nature of the crime. However, one juror

opposed the conviction, insisting that the boy might not be guilty and directed them to take a close look at any fact that suggested the boy's innocence. The angry jurors accepted his point and examined the facts closely without prejudice. When the final decision was announced, the boy was found to be not guilty. This story seems too dramatic and captivating to be true, but it was based on a true story. Furthermore, the main point here can be applied to everyday life: you sometimes need to listen to a dissenter, even though it opposes what your group thinks.

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Groups are maintained by people who support norms, values, and the purpose of the group. However, sometimes there are people in the group who do not agree with that group's norm (like the juror who

opposed to the jury). Those who go against the group's norm or prototype show dissent, deviance, difference and defiance (Jetten & Hornsey, 2011). Among these behaviors, dissenting can be defined as a minority group member exerting influence on the majority by expressing opposition towards the preexisting group norms or opinions (Jetten & Hornsey, 2014).

The movie scene mentioned above is an example of a wrong decision made by a group of overly confident people. When the group veers in the wrong direction, the dissenting member may question the direction of the group. This dissenter might, thereby, lead to reconsiderations in their decision and the various arguments. Along with this second-thought provoking role, the positive roles of dissenting were studied by many researchers (Gruenfeld, 1995; Nemeth, Brown, & Rogers, 2001; Nemeth & Kwan, 1985; Nemeth & Wachtler, 1983). Gruenfeld (1995) analyzed verbatim records and found that group decision-making was higher in integrative complexity when the group had a dissenter than when there was no dissenter. Listening to a dissenting opinion can be a good starting point which guides the groups to consider various viewpoints. Furthermore, the minority's opinion can suggest possible solutions that the majority may have missed (Nemeth & Wachtler, 1983) and provide conditions which make the majority think about a creative solution, differing from conventional thoughts (Nemeth et al., 2001; Nemeth & Kwan, 1985).

However, in spite of the positive influence the dissenter posits, a line of research found out that group members usually exclude or derogate the dissenter and put distance between them (e.g., Festinger, Pepitone, & Newcomb, 1952; Festinger & Thibaut, 1951). In fact, previous studies provide simplified results showing that the higher the group members' identification is, the more they derogate the dissenter. However, this study doesn't give insight about the circumstances under which highly identified group members may accept the dissenter's opinion.

Why does a high identifier reject dissenting opinions and what factor might guide the high identifier to support and accept dissenting opinions? Based on the Social Identification Theory (Jetten & Hornsey, 2011), it is inferred that high identifiers are unwilling to accept dissenting opinions because they are threatened by it, which contradicts the status quo of their group. If this is the case, there may be a way to buffer the high identifier's feeling of threat towards

the dissenter. Group-affirmation, a concept that comes from self-affirmation (e.g., Branscombe & Doosje, 2004), can be a way to reduce the threat caused by the dissenter toward the high identifier.

The present study aims to examine whether highly identified in-group members can accept dissenters under certain conditions; group-affirmation being one of those conditions. The study has practical and theoretical implications in that it provides broad insights into which conditions will make in-group members accept and support dissenting opinions, which is essential to the development of the group.

Group Identification

Being in a group has cognitive, affective and motivational influences on self-concept. It also serves as a basis for self-identity. However, it is important to point out that not all groups are the basis for identity (Jetten & Hornsey, 2011). When one's notion of membership in a particular group that one considers as valuable becomes salient, the self-representation changes. In other words, the locus of self-definition changes from "I" to "we". This accompanies changes in the self-concept and the reference frame to evaluate self-worth (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). This is defined as group identification which is one of the factors that influence how in-group members evaluate the dissenter.

Group Identification and Evaluation of the In-Group Dissenter

As it can be seen in the norm formation literature (Sherif, 1936) and conformity phenomenon literature (Asch, 1956), the group pressures its members to adopt its attitudes or values. However, when a group member disagrees with the group's norms, the other group members exclude or derogate that dissenter (e.g., Festinger et al., 1952; Festinger & Thibaut, 1951). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) gives insight into how the group will treat the dissenting behavior. According to this theory, a high identifier's self-concept is closely bound to their group. When evaluating the self, these high identifiers evaluate themselves based on their group's characteristics rather than their own, unique self-characteristics (Hogg, 2001; Turner, 1999; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

Moreover, when it comes to evaluating in-group members, high identifiers maintain a positive social identity by evaluating the other group members based

on how much they correspond with the group's typicality and by excluding those who are atypical (Marques & Paez, 1994; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001). To these high identifiers, criticism towards their group is as threatening as criticism towards oneself (Thai, Barlow, & Hornsey, 2014). Therefore, people who have high group identification will perceive criticism towards their group as more threatening than people who have low group identification. For example, when an in-group dissenter expresses an opinion such as "it's wrong, we need change", it would make high identifiers ostracize or derogate the dissenter, in order to protect their social identity from threats. Consistent with this, previous studies indicate that the higher the group member's identification is, the more they evaluate in-group dissenters negatively and distance themselves from these people (e.g., Abrams, Marques, Bown, & Henson, 2000; Marques, Abrams, Paez, & Martinez-Taboada, 1998; Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988).

This does not mean that the group always rejects the dissenter. Although less attention has been given to the situation when the group members accept the dissenter, research indicates that in-group members could accept a dissenter's opinion, and in doing so, improve the group's success (Kelley & Shapiro, 1954). Beyond this research, the present study examines the condition in which the high identifiers accept dissenting, even if there is no explicit benefit to the group. If people who highly identify with their group derogate the dissenter mainly because the dissenting opinion is perceived as a threat, methods that lessen the threat can be used to reduce derogation of the dissenter. Self-affirmation could be an effective buffer against the threat of the dissenter.

Self-Affirmation and its Effect in the Group

People are motivated to maintain a positive self-concept (e.g., Greenberg et al., 1992; Taylor & Brown, 1988; Tesser, 1988). This motivation is more salient when one's positive self-concept is threatened. People use various psychological defense mechanisms when they perceive that their self-concept is threatened. For instance, they deny the validity of threatening information or devalue the information source. These defense mechanisms are functional in that they help to maintain the positive self-concept of the group, but people do not always hide behind these illusions.

Self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988) postulates that when an important aspect of the self is affirmed, people do not avoid the threat, but accept the threat and learn from it. Steele refers to self-affirmation as maintaining or restoring a general positive self-view from a threat, by affirming other important aspects of their self-concept that were not threatened. By doing so, it buffers against the threat to self and retains psychological resources from dealing with the threat (Steele & Liu, 1983). Whereas the psychological defense mechanisms respond directly to the threatening information, the self-affirmation serves the purpose of maintaining an integrated self-concept by extending an important aspect of the self, unrelated to the threat. Therefore, self-affirmation can make people accept threatening information in a receptive manner without distortion or misinterpretation (Cohen, Aronson, & Steele, 2000; Correll, Spencer, & Zanna, 2004; Reed & Aspinwall, 1998; Sherman, Nelson, & Steele, 2000).

Traditionally, self-affirmation has been studied at the individual level, but there has been an increasing number of studies dealing with self-affirmation at the group level (e.g., Čehajić-Clancy, Effron, Halperin, Liberman, & Ross, 2011; Derks, van Laar, & Ellemers, 2009; Sherman & Kim, 2005; Sherman, Kinias, Major, Kim, & Prenovost, 2007). According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), a group member's self is closely related to their social identity, which comes from a sense of belonging to the group. Consequently, highly identifying in-group members are more biased to enhance their group in order to protect their own social identity (Castano, Yzerbyt, Bourguignon, & Seron, 2002). Recent research has found that self-affirmation suppressed group enhancing biases after a failure or success of a sports team (Sherman & Kim, 2005; Sherman et al., 2007). Additionally, other research found that self-affirmation made highly patriotic people less defensive towards information which harms their patriotic beliefs (Adams, Tormala, & O'Brien, 2006; Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2011, Cohen et al., 2007). This research suggests that when social identity is threatened, self-affirmation can reduce group-enhancing biases.

Group-Affirmation and Evaluation of the In-Group Dissenter

While self-affirmation focuses on affirming the positive aspects of individual self and enhances self-identity, group-affirmation lets group members focus

on the positive aspects of the group and, therefore, enhances social identity (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004). As mentioned earlier, when people are faced with a crime their nation committed in the past, they emphasize positive behaviors done to the victimized nation rather than focus on the wrong doing. This allows them to successfully cope with the threat, while maintaining their social identity (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). Research on group-affirmation found similar outcomes with self-affirmation (e.g., Sherman et al., 2007). However, the effects of group-affirmation are determined by how much individuals identify themselves with their group. Previous studies on group-affirmation and in-group identification suggested that group-affirmation is more effective than self-affirmation only among members with high identification (Derks et al., 2009). Since the present study focuses on the acceptance of threats among high identifiers whose social identity became salient, rather than self-affirmation, group-affirmation might be more appropriate for reducing the threat caused by dissenting.

According to Sherman et al. (2007), group-affirmation can make the high identifiers open to the threatening information about their group by affirming the important values of the group. Expanding this context, the present study predicts that group-affirmation can allow the high identifiers to have a more receptive and open mind towards the in-group dissenter.

Hypothesis

Previous studies show that evaluation of the in-group dissenter can vary based on identification level. In the present study, we predicted that people who highly identify with the group would evaluate the dissenter favorably if the group is affirmed, while their counterparts (non-affirmed group) would negatively evaluate the dissenter. As mentioned in the literature, high identifiers should evaluate the dissenter more negatively because the opinions expressed by these individuals are seen as a threatening. This is because they evaluate themselves based on the group's characteristics. However, if it is possible to secure a positive value through group-affirmation, high identifiers should be more receptive and open to criticism. On the other hand, the group's identity should not be important for low identifiers, so the in-group dissenter should not threaten them, and there should be no effect of group affirmation on evaluating the dissenter. To summarize, the effect of

identification on evaluating the dissenter should be moderated by group-affirmation. Specifically, in a high identification condition, people who received group-affirmation will evaluate the in-group dissenter more positively than people who do not receive it. In contrast, in a low identification condition, group-affirmation should not make a difference in the evaluation of the in-group dissenter.

Method

Participants

Participants were 96 undergraduate students from a university in South Korea. However, two participants (both female) were excluded from the analysis because they failed to understand the procedure of the experiment. Therefore, a total of 94 participants' data (female $n = 57$) were used in analysis. Participants' age ranged from 18 to 30 years ($M = 21.78$, $SD = 2.36$).

Procedure and Measures

Participants were invited to the laboratory in groups of five. Among them, one person was an experimental confederate, which was not known to the other participants. As a cover, participants were told that this experiment was about the in-group decision making process. Participants were informed that they would work as a team in the human resource department and were going to do a personnel selection task.

Group Identification Manipulation

First, the group identification level was manipulated using a team forming procedure; we referred to Jans, Postmes, and Van der Zee (2012) and Zdaniuk and Levine (2001). In order to create a high group identification condition, participants were seated closely at adjoining tables and were asked to wear "personnel department team 3" name tags on their chest. After putting on the name tags, the self-introductory session began. They were instructed to introduce themselves as a member of "personnel department team 3". Then as a team, they had to discuss what two group colors they were going to choose. These two colors were used to color their logo. Each member colored their parts with their team colors and colored their logo as a group on one piece of paper. In this way, participants represented themselves as a member of the group and made their own contribution to develop a shared representation of

the whole group. On the other hand, in the low group identification condition, participants were seated at distant and separated tables, and were asked to wear name tags which had assigned initials, without a team name. Then, they introduced themselves as the individually assigned initials (e.g., “I’m team member A/B/C”). Then they were instructed to color the logo with two assigned colors, as an individual, without having a group discussion.

Group-Affirmation

Group-affirmation was manipulated by giving positive feedback (McQueen & Klein, 2006). The positive feedback affirmed the skill level of the group (e.g., “All members have completed the coloring task in a conscientious manner”). Participants were then asked to evaluate potential hires for their company individually. In the task, the target’s qualifications and their qualification scores were presented and participants simply selected one target according to their team’s personnel selection norm. Through this task, participants internalized the in-group norm. Before moving on to the actual group decision making task, which was not performed, participants had time to share their answers to the practice task. Again, the manipulation of group-affirmation was reinforced by the experimenter giving positive feedback on the team’s “earnest” manner.

Dissenting

While participants were sharing their answers, the experimenter left the laboratory, telling the participants that he would bring the material for the following task. Then, the confederate gave a dissenting opinion to the other participants at the preordained phase of the group discussion. He mentioned that although he followed the group norm in the practice task, the team’s personnel selection norm seemed unreasonable and he thought that they should consider other qualifications as well. The content, as well as the language of the statement, was held constant, and criticized the irrational aspect of the discussion process (“While I was doing the task, our team’s standard seemed unreasonable. Wouldn’t it be better to consider other factors together?”). Right after the confederate made his dissenting point, the experimenter came back.

Filling in Questionnaires and Debriefing

The participants were instructed to sit separately at distantly allocated tables at the back of the laboratory,

then the experimenter handed out a survey to the participants. They were then instructed to assess every member in the team except themselves. They started with the assessment survey of participant A (the dissenter). They were instructed to fill out the survey to measure the dependent variable. The evaluations of the dissenter’s intention served as the dependent variable. In order to measure this, two items were developed. One is “This group member is making an effort to guide our team to a better way”, and the other is “This group member is working hard for our team” (9-point Likert measure system). After all the participants completed their questionnaires, the experimenter announced that there would be no actual group decision making task, debriefed, and thanked them for their participation.

Results

The dependent measure of the evaluation of the in-group dissenter was obtained by averaging scores of the two items measuring the attitude towards the dissenter $r_{between\ items} (92) = .81, p < .001$. The data were analyzed using a 2 x 2 ANOVA (group-identification level: high vs. low X group-affirmation vs. control). A two-way ANOVA revealed no significant interaction between group-identification level and group-affirmation, $F(1, 90) = .19, p > .05$. Also, there were no main effects of the identification manipulation nor group-affirmation manipulation ($F < 1$). See Table 1 and Table 2.

Discussion

In this study, we examined the conditions under which dissenters can be evaluated less negatively despite the presence and the influence of high members. This negative evaluation can be explained

Table 1
Descriptive data: mean and standard deviation of each condition

Identification	Affirmation	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>n</i>
Low Identification	Non-Affirmation	6.67 (1.36)	23
	Affirmation	6.34 (1.49)	25
High Identification	Non-Affirmation	6.70 (1.77)	23
	Affirmation	6.54 (1.20)	23

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Table 2
ANOVA on evaluation of ingroup dissenter's intention

	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>
Group identification (A)	1	0.14	.002	.711
Group-affirmation (B)	1	0.64	.007	.425
A x B	1	0.09	.001	.765
Error	90	(2.16)		

Note. Number in the parenthesis is the mean squared error.

by these high identifying members trying to ostracize dissenters in their group. We investigated the possibility of group-affirmation as a way of preventing high identifiers from excluding the dissenters from the group. We postulated that group-affirmation, playing the role of a buffer, would moderate the effect of high identification on negative evaluation of the dissenter. Although the results did not support this hypothesis, the question that this research casts has theoretical and practical implications as explained below.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

In the present study, an attempt was made to establish a theoretical links between two major theories of social psychology: Social Identification Theory and Self-affirmation. These two theories have been studied in two separate literature. However, it was inferred that there are some points where both can interact. As social identification is about social self and self-affirmation is about integrity of the self, they can overlap in certain cases. It was postulated that by focusing on group-affirmation, we found the case in which a negative effect of high identification might be reduced, as a result of this overlapping.

The present research explored a possible way to reduce the unconditional exclusion toward the dissenter's opinion. Frequently, dissenters' opinions, which can be helpful for the in-group, are seen as threats. It is ironic that individuals with high levels of group identification, meaning those who identify the most with their group, tend to attempt the most to "protect" the in-group from these otherwise insightful opinions. As a result, we expect the present research to make a contribution not only to group-affirmation theory, but also to in-group dissenter theory.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the numerous implications of the present study, it also has some limitations that cannot be overlooked. First, the experimental manipulation was not effective. Although the present study manipulated group-affirmation by complimenting the task on the group, it may have been meaningless to the participants. Considering that group-affirmation should influence in an important manner self-concept, the method used could have not reached this effect. In other words, a more robust method in affecting the integrity of social identity in participants is needed.

Second, there is a possibility that the independent variables in the present study could have affected each other, thus resulting in cofounded variables. That is, group affirmation may have interacted with the level of in-group identification. When given group affirmation, participants in the low group identification condition could have put more meaning on being a member of the affirmed group, consequently identifying themselves more strongly with the group.

Third, the present study was conducted with ad hoc lab groups, therefore participants may have undergone some difficulty in strongly identifying themselves with the ad hoc group even after manipulation. Participants were recruited individually and assigned to a team when entering the laboratory. With short periods of interaction and mere manipulations, it may have been insufficient for participants to strongly identify themselves with the group.

Lastly, it should be noted that the participants of the present study were primarily undergraduate students in a laboratory setting, which could limit the external validity of the results. For instances, participants who were mainly undergraduate students might have a less integrated identity or self-concept. Better results could be drawn from a more general population.

Conclusion

For future research, a more sophisticated experimental setting is needed to test the provided explanation of a potential interaction effect between in-group identification and group-affirmation. We recommend for future research to be cautious of the effectiveness of group-affirmation and identification manipulations and to consider potential cofounded variables when interpreting their results. With a more

methodologically refined experiment, we hope to draw more meaningful conclusion on this research question.

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