6. Self-Affirmation and Intergroup Biases: Changing the Narrative and the Potential for Conflict Reduction

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Abstract
Biased judgments of information and an inability to see common ground are psychological barriers to the reduction of intergroup conflict and the promotion of peace. In this chapter, we present evidence from experimental social psychology research showing that self-affirming activities – such as writing about core values – can reduce biased judgments and facilitate openness to the other side in intergroup contexts. By affirming people's self-worth as capable and adaptive individuals, self-affirmations reduce the need to be defensive in threatening intergroup contexts, potentially shaping the narratives that people tell themselves about the conflict. To what extent can the outcomes that self-affirmation has affected in laboratory experiments – the reduction of intergroup biases – attenuate intergroup conflict? Drawing from insights in the educational and health domains in which affirmation interventions have improved meaningful behavioral outcomes, we highlight individual and contextual factors that shape the usefulness of self-affirmation interventions. We close with suggestions for implementing self-affirmation as a component of interventions designed to reduce intergroup conflict and promote peace.

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Self-affirmation theory is a social psychological approach to understand how people cope with information and events that threaten their self-narratives. The core insight is that people are first and foremost concerned with a sense of *global self-integrity*. That is, people are motivated to see themselves as generally or globally adequate, and if this global view is secured or affirmed, then they can tolerate more specific threats to the self. The theory has been tested and developed over decades through experiments (Steele, 1988; see also Sherman & Cohen, 2006) that have subsequently led to intervention studies conducted in field settings showing how, when, and why self-affirming activities can improve individuals' stress outcomes, health behaviors, and academic performance (see Ferrer & Cohen, 2018; Sherman et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021 for reviews). In the domains of intergroup conflict, political reasoning, and prejudice, there are also experiments demonstrating that affirmations can, at times, lead people to be less biased and prejudiced and more open to otherwise threatening intergroup information (see Badea & Sherman, 2019; Sherman et al., 2017 for reviews; see also Lyons et al., 2021).

In this chapter, we review self-affirmation research with the goal of identifying how self-affirmation theory may be fruitfully applied to interventions designed to reduce, or transform, intergroup conflict. We argue that self-affirmation theory provides critical insights on the psychological factors that contribute to intergroup conflict, and self-affirmations themselves may be useful for enhancing the effectiveness of conflict-reduction strategies.

Self-Affirmation and Shared Conflict Narratives
At the heart of the self-affirmation approach is the idea that people are storytellers, continually authoring and revising narratives about themselves, their groups, and their place in the world. According to self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988), these narratives are guided by an underlying motivation to see the self as possessing self-integrity. That is, people's stories are not detached accounts of the events in their lives. Rather, they tend to feature the self, and the group identities associated with the self, as adaptive, moral, and capable. When people experience or perceive a threat to their self-narratives, their story can turn in several directions.

Consider the threats to self-integrity that occur in a person's life when they experience a traumatic intergroup incident – living through an ideologically-motivated terrorist attack, for example. A terrorist attack typically inflicts pain and death on a small number of people within a population, but one of its aims is to cause psychological threat on a far wider scale. By stoking fear and anger, and potentially provoking in response to the attack attempts at retaliation and control of the ideological group responsible, the goals of the attackers are furthered. To experience a terrorist attack against one's group or to be accused of supporting such a terrorist account because of one's group membership are both acute moments of intergroup conflict (Badea et al., 2018; McCauley, 2017). But even when people are not in the heat of such moments and are merely observing or experiencing them vicariously in the world, they act and make

judgments informed by these experiences, and they integrate them into their narratives, worldviews and self-conceptions (Bar-Tel, 2007).

Such vicarious reactions to conflict within a society speak to the presence of a shared psychology that underpins and sustains these conflicts. Particularly in the case of prolonged, intractable conflicts, members of society come to hold similar beliefs and narratives about the origins, meaning, and imperatives associated with the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007; Maoz et al., 2002). These shared narratives form, not to provide an objective or balanced view of historical events, but rather to serve contemporaneous social and psychological functions with respect to the conflict (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004). For example, a political leader wishing to maintain support for a conflict may over-emphasize successes and under-emphasize failures, thereby promoting a shared narrative of determination and success.

Over time, through the curation of their own histories of the conflict, two sides in conflict may come to opposing, contradicting narratives and beliefs around the same events. Each side sees their own side as uniquely righteous, their side as the winning side (or the eventual winning side), and their cause as just and legitimate (Ross & Ward, 1996; Salomon, 2004). Such processes pose barriers to addressing the conflict, barriers that at times may seem impossible to surmount. And yet, reflecting on history reveals instances where antagonistic groups put differences aside to forge agreements, and people showed tolerance to outsiders that would have been unfathomable to previous generations. After a brutal war in the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia, for example, where extreme acts of violence were committed in defense of ethnicity, nationality, and religion, a negotiated peace prevailed that, while fraught at times, enables the different groups to coexist (Kumove, 2022; Penić et al., 2021).

The narratives that foment conflict and prevent this type of peaceful settlement are adopted, in part, because people defend their self-integrity when it is threatened. 'The terrorists attacked us because they are evil,' is psychologically more self-protective than the potentially self-threatening notion, 'The terrorists attacked us because of our past actions against them.' When the ingroup is seen as moral and the outgroup as immoral, even good and moral people can legitimately support aggression against the outgroup (Binning, 2007). Prejudice stems, in part, from such self-image maintenance processes (Badea & Sherman, 2019; Fein & Spencer, 1997). Once established, people come to treat their narratives like possessions, refusing to discard them in the face of new or conflicting evidence (Cohen et al., 2000).

The theoretical rationale for self-affirmation interventions is that salient, self-affirming thoughts should make it easier for people to be less defensive about other self-threatening information (Steele, 1988). Providing people with opportunities for self-affirmation – reminders of important self-resources that reaffirm a narrative that they are people of integrity and worth – can reduce the need to defend the self when it is otherwise threatened (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). When this

occurs, people can accept information that they would have otherwise rejected, and they can incorporate otherwise threatening information into their judgments and actions. Moreover, because people's social identities are central to how they see themselves, they are also defensive about their groups and engage in biased intergroup judgments to maintain a view of their groups as moral and positive (as explored through research on social identity theory; Tajfel & Turner, 1982). Self-affirmation has been shown to reduce these group-serving biases in groups ranging from sports teams to political parties (Cohen et al., 2007; Sherman & Kim, 2005).

More specifically, self-affirmation theory and research (Steele, 1988; Sherman & Cohen, 2006) has repeatedly found that affirmations of individuals' self-integrity can reduce prejudiced judgments and lead people to assume more responsibility for their side's role in a conflict (see Sherman et al., 2017 for review). In the context of intergroup conflicts, affirmation provides individuals with an opportunity to wrestle with meaningful tensions and disagreements between antagonistic groups, with the understanding that their self-identity is not wholly dependent on those specific points of contention. As such, the theory does not claim that affirmation should be relevant to all intergroup challenges. Rather, it should be relevant when the barriers to change are tied to threats to actors' self-integrity. For example, if actors in conflict are simply indifferent or uninterested in changing the status quo (e.g., because they hold unchecked power or because they see the conflict as useful for some other end), affirmations may not facilitate change. On the other hand, when actors wish for change but feel a threat to self-integrity when pushing for this change to occur (e.g., because of pressures to conform), affirmations may help create psychological space for them to do so (Binning et al., 2015).

Field studies have found that affirmations can deflect a negative trajectory and change a person's narrative. For example, studies in school contexts have shown that affirmation can change how students experience threat; affirmed students are more apt to interpret stressful experiences as threats to belonging, untethering the threat from their academic behaviors (Binning et al., 2021; Sherman et al., 2013). The question raised by the present review is whether and how such insights may extend to intergroup conflict. Can self-affirming activities help people to act in ways that reduce, instead of maintain or exacerbate, intergroup conflict?

The Challenge of Self-Affirmation Research on Intergroup Interventions
To understand how self-affirmations may be effectively incorporated into intergroup interventions, it is helpful to first conceptualize what an intergroup intervention is. We argue that intergroup interventions (including those that feature affirmations) must have a defined objective or goal that is theoretically grounded (Sherman et al., 2021; see also Easterbrook & Hadden, 2021). In the case of self-affirmation interventions in the realm of intergroup conflict, the goals of a particular intergroup study should be conceptually linked to the self-threat that the affirmation is designed to address; the barriers to change connected with threats to actors' self-integrity. For example, if fostering agreement in a negotiation is a clear objective of a negotiator,

but the fear of being judged as complicit with the enemy is a psychological barrier, then affirmations could reduce this potential threat, reduce the link between the threat and the self, and lead a negotiator to be more open to compromise (Cohen et al., 2007).

The extensive field research conducted with self-affirmation theory in educational and health settings has led to the identification of a number of methodological issues that we believe should be explicitly considered in regards to intergroup conflict interventions. This challenge becomes salient when contrasting how a self-affirmation *intervention* is different from a self-affirmation *experiment* or *study*. We suggest that any intergroup conflict intervention composes many factors, but at minimum, we believe that it should occur in a field setting in which the behavioral outcomes of a specific population are targeted and analyzed over time (Paluck et al., 2021). Thus, studies conducted solely in laboratory (or online) settings, that lack a behavioral component, or that do not assess longer-term effects, should not, in our conceptualization, be regarded as interventions. These studies advance research and understanding that can identify effects and underlying processes. They may plant the seeds for personal and social change among their participants. And they may set the stage for subsequent intervention studies.

Self-affirmation studies conducted in intergroup contexts typically have not featured longer-term assessments of behavior in the field, which remains a major challenge in conducting intergroup interventions. A significant complication in the case of intergroup interventions is the clarity of the defined objective. It is facile and perhaps unproductive to say that the ultimate objective of an intervention is peace or the absence of conflict, because of course, the question remains, on whose terms will the peace be determined? Moreover, there is the potential for individual-focused interventions to suggest that the "solutions" reside within an individual mind, rather than the broader society.

Herb Kelman, the late Harvard Professor of Social Ethics helps inform our thinking on these issues. After escaping the Nazis in Austria when he was a child, Kelman became one of the leading social psychologists studying conflict and peace, founding the Center for Interactive Conflict Transformation. Kelman (1987) referred to the ultimate goal of peace:

> "… a resolution of the conflict, an outcome that meets the basic needs of both parties and is responsive to their basic fears. Such an outcome—even though it involves, of necessity, a negotiated compromise—would leave both parties better off and more secure than they are today and would be minimally consistent with their sense of justice." (p. 348)

Thus, defining the basic objective of a conflict reduction study requires thought (and perhaps compromise) itself – before an intervention could be considered that could facilitate individuals, groups, and societies along those lines.

Methods of Self-Affirmation

Self-affirmation interventions can be delivered through a number of methods, the most common being through the completion of a values affirmation task where individuals select a value that is personally important to them and then create a written reflection on why their chosen value is important (Epton et al., 2015; McQueen & Klein, 2006). Often, people reflect on specific instances where this value has helped them in their lives (see Table 7.1 and Table 7.2 for typical affirmation and control exercises and sample affirmation and control writing; Binning et al., 2015). In studies of intergroup conflict, self-affirmation tasks have been administered in the laboratory (Cohen et al., 2007), for example, when people have written essays about core values prior to engaging in a negotiation with a purported opponent. Self-affirmation studies have also been conducted on-line, for example, where people have written affirmations prior to watching presidential debate excerpts and evaluated the two opposing candidates (Binning et al., 2010). Control conditions typically have people write about other neutral, less self-focused topics, including why unimportant values may be important to other people or one's daily activities.

All participants
You will now be answering some questions about your ideas, your beliefs, and your life. It is important to remember that there are no right or wrong answers. Please read the following list of personal values: 1) Artistic skills/Aesthetic appreciation 2) Sense of humor 3) Relationships with friends/family 4) Spontaneity/living in the moment 5) Social skills 6) Athletics 7) Musical ability/appreciation 8) Physical attractiveness 9) Creativity 10) Business/managerial skills 11) Romantic values

Affirmation condition	Control Condition
…Then pick the value that is MOST important to you.	…Then pick the value that is LEAST important to you.
Even if you feel that multiple values are very important to you, please pick only one.	Even if you feel that multiple values are not very important to you, please pick only one.
What was the value that you marked? (open-ended prompt)	What was the value that you marked? (open-ended prompt)
Now, try to think of a time when your #1 value or characteristics was important to you. Then please write a few sentences about a time when this value was important. Write as much as you wish, and don't worry about how well it's written. Just focus on expressing your memory of the event, the thoughts and feelings you had at the time, and why the value is important to you. Please write at least 2-3 sentences.	Now, try to think of a time when the value you selected might be important to someone else, like someone you've heard about. In the space below, please try to describe why this value might be important to someone else. Don't worry about grammar or how well written it is. You may write as much as you like, but please write at least 2-3 sentences.

Table 7.1 Affirmation manipulation employed in Binning et al., 2015.

Affirmation condition	Control condition
Relationships with friends/family: After a stressful day at work, I came home and my son just made my day by smiling at me and then we followed with some fun play time	*Business skills: They would think it's important if they were into running a business or investing.*
Sense of humor: At a family reunion I attended recently, some of my relatives were getting upset and allowing their day to be ruined by insensitive comments about weight gain by other family members. I too have gained weight over the years, so when my uncle squeezed my am and said, "I see you have a little extra weight", I just said, "Yeah, I like to keep extra in case someone runs out". He just laughed and said, "funny girl", and that was it. It was over and I enjoyed my evening which is more than I can say for those that allowed words to affect them.	*Musical ability: Music can be a very powerful way to express yourself and your ideas as well as to motivate others to experience a piece of your worldview. Many people across the globe have made a living out of their musical talent and it is not difficult for me to see how people can place high importance on such an ability. For those that are not personally talented musicians, I can imagine it still being a quality of high importance because of the power it has to evoke emotion and call people into action.*
Creativity: It was in my first year as Web Links editor at [corporation]. I was doing a new job; I had to help build a tool, determine rules for style and content of my feature, and write marketing materials. This last was a new task.	*Aesthetic appreciation: While I do consider myself a creative person, aesthetic values go beyond creativity. People who are deeply involved/rooted in the music/art world might appreciate aesthetic qualities more than your general individual.*
Relationships with friends/family: My husband had a massive stroke five years ago and is bedridden so friends and family are a huge support system for us...without both we could not exist at home and my husband would have to be in a nursing home...family and friends make all the difference in our lives	*Romantic values: Many people value romance as an essential part of life. They believe that showing romance, and agreeing on what is romantic, makes for a better relationship. Many people believe that care is shown through specific romantic gestures.*

Table 7.2. Sample essays in affirmation and control condition in Binning et al., 2015

Variations on the basic manipulation have been employed in different research contexts. Affirmation can be prompted by asking questions in conversation (e.g., "How did you treat someone fairly this week?"; Stone et al., 2011) and in educational contexts, via text message exchanges (Manke et al., 2021) where people are given brief opportunities to affirm core values at stressful moments. Online videos have been made that have manipulated self-affirmation via YouTube clips that encourage people to engage in the process of reflecting on key values

(Shuman et al., 2022). What is key throughout these methods is that they provide an opportunity to secure one's self-integrity in ways that are psychologically disconnected from the conflict situation or threat. Because values are a core feature of one's self-integrity, opportunities to reflect on these values, regardless of the specific methodology, are theorized to secure global self-integrity in situations of potential psychological threat.

The Empirical Evidence for Self-Affirmation Effectiveness on Conflict-Related Outcomes
The effect of experimental self-affirmations has been examined with three distinct but related outcome variables in the context of intergroup conflict: 1) the strength with which conflict-supporting beliefs are held; 2) the biased processing of conflict-relevant information; and 3) the resistance to seeing common ground in negotiations (Sherman et al., 2017).

Leaders who seek to foment conflict create narratives within the people they lead that support the conflict. As noted above, people are motivated to adhere to these narratives (Nasie et al., 2014) because contradicting these narratives requires both acknowledging the wrongdoing of one's own group and risking being shunned by those who hold the dominant narrative. And once a narrative rooted in bias and prejudice toward an outgroup is adopted, it can be used to justify violence within a conflict. But research has found that when people feel more secure in some other aspect of their life via self-affirmation, they are able to view the outgroup in a more even-handed manner. Prejudice toward and stereotyping of outgroup members has been reduced among participants in self-affirmation studies,when people are provided with an opportunity to affirm their values (Fein & Spencer, 1997; see Badea & Sherman, 2019 for review). Among those who complete self-affirmations, antipathy and derogation of those who violate their cultural worldviews can also be reduced (Schmeichel & Martens, 2005).

Beyond disrupting beliefs that hold significance for instigating intergroup conflict, self-affirmation has been shown to influence beliefs relevant to ongoing and past conflict. Seeing Arabs as violent aggressors in the wake of 9/11 helped many Americans justify the wars the United States was engaged in; contemplating the perspective of Arab-Americans and the discrimination they felt may have been self-threatening to many, particularly, those who see themselves as egalitarian and fair. Indeed, a study with non-Arab-American U.S. college students, found that self-affirmation decreased the perception that Arab-Americans are confrontational and increased the desire of individuals to meet and discuss prejudice with an Arab-American student (Stone et al., 2011), necessary steps to reducing conflict between the groups. Similarly, self-affirmation has been shown to increase Israeli participants' guilt for and acknowledgment of ongoing Israeli wrongdoing towards Palestinians (Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2011), increase support for reparations (e.g., among Serbians when contemplating their past conflict with Bosnia and Herzegovina; Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2011), and decrease support for discriminatory antiterrorism policies among French college students (Badea et al., 2018). Self-affirmation can also increase acknowledgment of outgroup members' negative experiences, even

when the implication is negative for the ingroup. Affirmed White individuals reported perceiving more racism and expressed greater acknowledgment that White Americans deny racism, and rated the average White person as more racist than unaffirmed individuals (Adams et al., 2006). In each of these cases, affirmation enabled people to countenance conflict-relevant ideas that would otherwise cause them to acknowledge the wrong-doing of their own group. The fact that affirmation has these effects reveals that such acknowledgements are threatening to the self.

Conflict-supporting narratives depend, in part, on how people process information, and in several studies, self-affirmation has been shown to disrupt biased processing of conflict-relevant information. Experimentally induced self-affirmations can decrease self-serving justifications for an unresolved conflict and increase feelings of responsibility for the lack of resolution (Schumann, 2014). Self-affirmation increased open-mindedness and reduced biased information processing of contested political issues (e.g., capital punishment and abortion rights; Cohen et al., 2000; see also Correll et al., 2004), and reduced the partisan divide in assessments of then-U.S. presidential candidate, Barack Obama (Binning et al., 2010). Self-affirmation can also decrease the influence of norms and increase the influence of evidentiary information on participants' political opinions (Binning et al., 2015). It is important to note that whether reducing the influence of norms leads to more or less prejudice towards outgroups depends on whether those norms support increasing or decreasing prejudice (see Badea et al., 2021).

The two sets of outcomes reviewed above, conflict-supporting beliefs (e.g., prejudice and derogation) and biased information processing, are barriers to conflict resolution, making it difficult to successfully negotiate with the outgroup (either individually or as a collective) towards a mutually acceptable solution (Bar-Tal et al., 2010; Ross & Ward, 1995). Research has not yet examined these factors as mediators of successful or failed negotiation. Rather, it has focused on other outcomes that occur within the negotiation process, such as making concessions or taking the opposing side's offer at face value. The process of reactive devaluation – whereby people reject an offered concession merely because it was proposed by the other side (Maoz et al., 2002; Ross, 1995), was reduced among those who were experimentally self-affirmed (Ward et al., 2011). In a set of studies that examined a negotiation between a pro-choice participant and a (purported) pro-life negotiating counterpart, people made more concessions after completing a self-affirmation (Cohen et al., 2007). The authors of these studies note appropriate limitations that we acknowledge here as well – the studies featured hypothetical situations and no actual negotiations took place, and so the impact of affirmation in applied field settings is an open question. But the basic argument – that making concessions is potentially self-threatening when one's actions could lead to being viewed as an unworthy group member – suggests self-affirmation as a potential means to assuage that self-threat in the context of antagonistic negotiations.

People and Contexts where Affirmations are More (or Less) Promising to Reduce Conflict
While self-affirmation has shown promise as an intergroup-conflict reduction strategy in laboratory and online experiments, it is not equally impactful across people or contexts. Affirmation should be most impactful when people's self-narratives are highly intertwined with the group or issue at hand. If the self is not invested in a domain, affirmation is theorized to have null effects with respect to that domain; it may even make people more confident in beliefs they already hold (Briñol et al., 2007). That is, strongly held convictions and identities may be easier to moderate by affirmation than weaker ones. For example, affirmation led Americans who identified strongly as Americans to be less likely to conform to their ingroup and more likely to base their opinions on probative political data, but affirmation had no such effects on weakly-identified Americans (Binning et al., 2015; Study 3). Moreover, making identity salient via experimental manipulation (Cohen et al., 2007, Studies 1-2) or through a study's temporal proximity to a major political election (Binning et al., 2010) has led to more powerful affirmation effects. When important parts of an identity are made salient to people, their self-integrity becomes tethered to those aspects of identity – and there is greater potential for an affirmation to be effective. And, by contrast, when people do not experience any self-threat related to their group's behavior and narrative, when they are so certain as to their position that they are impervious to consideration of alternative arguments, then affirmation is unlikely to facilitate greater openness.

It is also intriguing to consider the ways in which affirmation has shown effects on "both sides" of intergroup conflict. That is, on one hand, affirmation can reduce prejudice and stereotyping (Fein & Spencer, 1997). And on the other hand, affirmation can shape how people respond to the bias of others, that is, being the target of stereotyping and prejudice (Cohen et al., 2006; Steele, 1997). Thus, affirmation may reduce people's own bias, and it may shape people's reactions to being the target of bias. However, most research to date has been one-sided, examining either the reduction of individuals' bias or the mitigation of responses to others' bias, and typically, from the position of the more powerful side in a conflict. Rarely has research sought to influence both sides simultaneously, but doing so may change the resources available that are necessary to sustain an intervention's impact. In particular, when there is an asymmetry in power and resources between the groups (Maoz, 2011; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008), intergroup interventions that employ affirmation should consider how affirmations impact each side (Kamans et al., 2011), as this has implications for maintenance or challenge of the status quo. When both parties in a conflict feel more psychological security, a change in an individual on one side of a conflict might be nurtured or reciprocated by an individual on the opposing side of the conflict.

Strategies for Successful Implementation of Self-Affirmation in Intervention Contexts
Theoretical models developed to help understand longer-term effects of self-affirmation interventions in education and health can yield insights for intergroup interventions. The cycle of adaptive potential model (Cohen & Sherman, 2014) describes how affirmations can cause

changes in the self-system that can change the social system that recursively feeds back to influence the individual in a positive feedback loop. In educational contexts, for example, a student does better on a test after being affirmed, and if the teacher responds positively, it creates another source of affirmation. Potentially, the student is placed in a more challenging track, and thus, the social system is changed in a manner that facilitates the students' goals (Goyer et al., 2017). For successful implementation and long-term effects, there needs to be an environment that supports affirmation-induced change. Affirmation in the absence of other facilitative forces is unlikely to lead to lasting change. Such facilitative forces can come from educational systems designed to reduce conflict, religious organizations that seek mutual respect with other religions, and organizations that are trying to tamp down prejudice amongst their workers. In these cases, there may be programs and leaders that are promoting the reduction of conflict, but self-threat may interfere with people committing to changing their beliefs and actions towards the outgroup in the face of possible condemnation from the ingroup. Affirmations are more likely to lead to longer term effects, then, when there are other factors in a person's network that can further facilitate a positive feedback loop.

Schools provide an environment where, on the one hand, a conflict narrative could be promoted that makes it very difficult to inculcate openness among youth. However, on the other hand, schools can also create supportive contexts that facilitate change (see Taylor & Counihan, this volume). Recent research from Germany provides an example of how self-affirmation theory could be applied. Researchers designed an intervention pairing affirmation with educational content for an adolescent target group. Young adults in Germany were shown an educational video designed to reduce support for right-wing extremist ideologies, including prejudice directed at foreigners. When this video was paired with a self-affirmation, participants reported less extreme judgments and reduced prejudice toward foreigners (Müller & Fetz, 2023). Effects persisted six weeks following the intervention, suggesting that the social environment in the classroom sustained the initial beneficial effects – a positive recursive cycle may have been triggered. It is important to recognize that in violent conflicts these types of educational initiatives may be anomalous; efforts are needed to continue to facilitate these types of interventions where they are most needed (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009).

A second theoretical advance in understanding long-term affirmation effects comes from the trigger-and-channel framework (Ferrer & Cohen, 2018). A meta-analysis of the effects of affirmation in health contexts identified three conditions that facilitate affirmation-induced health behavior change: 1) the presence of psychological threat; 2) the presence of resources to foster change; and 3) timeliness of the self-affirmation with respect to threat and resources. What then, are the resources to foster change from the perspective of intergroup interventions?

One answer to this question about how to foster change within conflict situations is to examine other intergroup interventions where self-threat may inhibit the utilization of resources and the

acceptance of information that could lead to beneficial outcomes. For example, in group-malleability interventions (Cohen-Chen et al., this volume; Halperin et al., 2011; Goldenberg et al., 2018) participants are shown that the outgroup's actions are not fixed and essentialist but malleable. The belief that an outgroup could conceivably change its history of malicious actions towards the ingroup may threaten a person's strongly held beliefs about the superiority of the ingroup within a conflict setting. This belief, then, may be self-threatening and resisted. While the group-malleability approach has been effective across many field and laboratory demonstrations, there are likely people who see the information presented in the intervention as particularly self-threatening. Such individuals may be apt targets for affirmation, which may lead them to be more open to revising their beliefs about the outgroup.

We would thus like to close this chapter by suggesting more broadly that practitioners and researchers seeking to apply self-affirmation "interventions" should consider the other interventions described in this book – and whether affirmation could serve as a trigger that could facilitate greater openness in those contexts. Are there moments of self-threat, when a narrative of conflict could be perpetuated but also when a narrative of openness and progress may be a potential turning point? While there are extremists who would engage in violent action within any conflict, not all of them do. Educators, clinical health professionals and other people with connections in these communities may be able to convince people to resist violence - and one tool they could employ is making people feel more secure about who they are in some other aspects of their lives. And if violent terrorism does occur, might people resist perpetuating a cycle of violence and retribution if they reflect on the bigger picture of who they are, their important relationships, and what gives their lives meaning (see also Kruglanski et al., 2022)? When those moments are identified, self-affirmation may facilitate the success of intervention efforts at reducing intergroup conflict and promoting peaceful outcomes.

Herb Kelman, who died during the course of our writing of this chapter, advocated for a vision of conflict transformation that includes "reflexive conflict dialogue" in complex and protracted conflicts, a form of "interactive conflict transformation" that "engages various conflict actors at first separately in internal self-reflection (Kelman Institute, 2022)." From our perspective, self-affirmation may be a valuable component of such internal self-reflection and could be part of a conflict transformation process, perhaps in concert with other interventions.

Nobody who studies conflict resolution is naive as to the likelihood of success, nor the magnitude of the stakes. As Kelman himself put it: "I never had the illusion that deep-rooted conflicts can be solved easily and permanently. From my experience I learned that you have to be patient, you keep working, and it takes time, and there might be setbacks (Kelman Institute, 2022)."

Guided by this understanding, scholars and practitioners continue to work towards greater knowledge of the psychological barriers that prevent conflict resolution, and how to overcome them. When defensive responses to self-threat contribute to these psychological barriers, self-affirmation can be one tool to help tear them down.

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