Is There an "I" in "Team"? The Role of the Self in Group-Serving Judgments

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Is There an "I" in "Team"? The Role of the Self in Group-Serving Judgments

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Why do people make judgments that favor their groups, attributing outcomes to internal factors to a greater extent when their group succeeds than when their group fails? The present research demonstrates that group-serving judgments serve a self-protective function. In Study 1, participants in team sports competitions made more internal team attributions after experiencing victory than defeat; this group-serving bias was eliminated among those who completed an affirmation of personal values. Study 2 replicated Study 1 and found that affirmed people were less likely to use their self-judgments as an anchor for judgments about the group. Study 2 also found that self-affirmation secured feelings of being a worthy group member, and this was associated with the reduction of group-serving judgments. The present research examines the motivational factors that promote, reduce, link, and separate self-serving and group-serving judgments.

People often make decisions and evaluate information in a way that serves the interests, reputation, and esteem of their groups. Patriots, athletes, and fraternity members favor their countries, teams, and fraternities. Evidence for this notion has come from a wide variety of sources in social and personality psychology (e.g., Brewer, 1979; Hastorf & Cantril, 1954; Smith & Tyler, 1997; Tajfel, 1981). Much research has been devoted to trying to understand why and how people make group-serving judgments. Researchers from the motivational perspective have argued that people make group-serving judgments to help protect and enhance self-esteem (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Researchers from the cognitive perspective have argued that group-serving judgments occur because the self serves as an anchoring basis for judgments of one's group (Cadinu & Rothbart, 1996; Otten, 2002). What ties these different approaches together is the emphasis on the role of the self in group-serving judgments.

To understand the role of the self in group-serving judgment and the interplay between motivational and cognitive processes, we demonstrate in the present research under what conditions people are—and are not—group serving and under what conditions the self is used—and is not used—as an anchor in judgments of one's group. Our research adopts the approach of self-affirmation theory (Sherman & Cohen, 2002; Steele, 1988) to address these issues. The process of self-affirmation, by making individuals more secure in their feelings of self-worth, can affect when people are group serving as well as self-serving and when these judgments of the self and judgments of the group are likely to be linked and likely to be independent.

Group-Serving Biases in Causal Attribution

A popular aphorism used by many coaches and group leaders is that "There is no 'I' in team.'" The idea expressed in the saying is that group members should suspend self-interest and instead defend the interests of the group. Indeed, whether it is assessments of a football game by fans of opposing teams (Hastorf & Cantril, 1954) or allocations of rewards to in-groups versus out-groups (Tajfel, 1981), people exhibit a group-serving bias. Across different settings and situations, being a member of a group results in defense of the group. The group-serving judgment that we focus on in particular is the tendency to make group-serving causal attributions for success and failure.

Although a great deal of research has documented a hedonic bias in attributions, the tendency to make more internal attributions for positive events than negative events, most of the studies have examined the self-serving bias (Miller & Ross, 1975). However, the attributional bias has also been observed in the context of groups. When a group succeeds, individuals think that they contributed more to their group's outcome than when their group fails (Mullen & Riordan, 1988; Schlenker & Miller, 1977). These studies can be thought of as demonstrating a self-serving bias in a group context. People also make group-serving attributional judgments; that is, they make more internal attributions about the group when their group succeeds than when their group fails (Lau & Russell, 1980; Winkler & Taylor, 1979).

The present research examines the attributions individuals make when their group either wins or loses at a team sporting competition. Team sports are a domain in which individuals have been

found to make group-serving attributions as well as self-serving attributions for the outcomes of their games. For example, one study (Lau & Russell, 1980) examined attributions made by professional athletes after victory or defeat. When explaining their victories, athletes and coaches made more internal attributions, both to themselves and to other players on their team, than when explaining defeats. These biased judgments, both inflated internal attributions after victory and deflated internal attributions after defeat, are group serving in the sense that they suggest that the positive things that happen to the group are caused by the members of the group, whereas the negative things that happen to the group are not.

Why Do People Make Judgments That Favor Their Groups?

Social identity theorists (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) present a motivational perspective on why people make group-serving judgments. Two basic premises of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) are that people are motivated to enhance or maintain self-esteem and that membership in collectives constitutes an important part of individuals' self-concept. Consequently, social identity theory predicts that judgments that reflect well on the group will enhance self-esteem.

There is mixed evidence, however, for whether self-esteem motivates group-serving judgments (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). As Deaux's (1996) review of social identity theory describes it, research addressing the role of self-esteem in group-serving judgments has taken one of two approaches. In some research, self-esteem is conceptualized as a dependent variable, and studies have shown that intergroup discrimination leads to increased self-esteem (Chin & McClintock, 1993; Lemyre & Smith, 1985; Oakes & Turner, 1980). In other research, self-esteem is conceptualized as an independent variable, and studies have shown that low self-esteem people make more group-serving judgments as a way to raise their self-esteem (Hogg & Sunderland, 1991).

However, each of these approaches has limitations for demonstrating that the self is integral to group-serving judgments. On the one hand, the self-esteem-as-dependent-variable approach is indirect. Even if changes in self-esteem are a consequence of group-serving biases, it may not necessarily be that self-esteem is a cause of group-serving biases. That is, although previous research has shown that group-serving biases lead to increased self-esteem (Lemyre & Smith, 1985), it has not been demonstrated that the need to protect or enhance self-esteem drives the effect.

On the other hand, the self-esteem as an independent variable approach has not produced consistent evidence (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Although some researchers have found that those with low (manipulated) self-esteem exhibit more group-serving judgments than individuals with higher self-esteem (e.g., Hogg & Sunderland, 1991), other studies have found the reverse pattern. Crocker, Thompson, McGraw, and Ingerman (1987) found that individuals with high trait self-esteem who had experienced a threat to the self made more group-serving judgments than had individuals with low trait self-esteem. More recently, social identity and self-categorization theorists have examined factors that moderate the tendency to be group serving, such as commitment to the group and group self-esteem (Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999). Consistent with our theorizing, these models suggest that the

collective aspects of the self are central parts of the individual's self-concept.

Cadinu and Rothbart (1996) and Otten (2002) have elaborated a more cognitive perspective to explain why people make judgments that favor their groups. The basic idea is that the self serves as an anchor for judgments about one's group. Favorable judgments about one's group are the consequence of two factors. First, the self is generally evaluated in a positive fashion (Baumeister, 1998; Taylor & Sherman, in press). Second, the self and one's important groups are highly overlapping constructs, as evidenced by connectionist models that link the self and one's groups and studies that show a direct link between representations of the self and representations of one's group (Smith, Coats, & Walling, 1999; Smith & Henry, 1996). Consequently, when the self is used as an anchor for group judgments, the result will be similarly positive judgments about one's group. Evidence for this approach comes from studies showing an implicit affective bias toward even novel in-groups (Otten & Wentura, 1999) and studies that find that ratings about one's group in a minimal group setting are based on ratings of the self (Cadinu & Rothbart, 1996).

Our theoretical analysis of group-serving judgments integrates aspects of both the motivational approach that group-serving judgments protect and enhance self-esteem and the cognitive approach that the self is used as an anchor to make group-serving judgments. Central to our analysis is an examination of how the manipulation of self-protective motivation affects the judgments people make about the self and their groups and the links between the two.

Applying Self-Affirmation Theory to Understand Group-Serving Judgments

To understand how these motivational and cognitive processes interact, it is important to demonstrate two things: (a) the conditions under which people will and will not make group-serving judgments and (b) the conditions under which judgments of the self will and will not serve as an anchor for judgments of the group. To address these issues, we manipulated the motivation to maintain one's self-image and examine the effects of that manipulation on group-serving judgments and the relationship between judgments of the self and judgments of one's group.

Self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988) provides a theoretical rationale for what type of manipulation of the motivational self-system is likely to affect group-serving judgments. Self-affirmation theory addresses how people respond to threats to their self-image (J. Aronson, Cohen, & Nail, 1999; Sherman & Cohen, 2002; Steele, 1988). People are motivated to maintain their self-image as competent and worthy individuals. When this self-image is threatened, people tend to become defensive and engage in behavior to reduce the threat and repair their self-image. However, threats to the self can also be reduced indirectly, by having individuals affirm some other domain irrelevant to the threat. When people are affirmed in an alternative domain, they are less likely to respond to self-threatening information in a defensive manner (Reed & Aspinwall, 1998; Sherman, Nelson, & Steele, 2000). Thus, the usual reactions to self-threat are less likely when people are affirmed in an important domain.

Self-affirmations reduce defensiveness by making people feel more secure in their self-worth (Sherman & Cohen, 2002; Steele, 1988). This greater security allows people to be open to the

information that otherwise would be threatening. For example, people who are affirmed are less likely to judge information that contradicts their beliefs in a hostile manner (Cohen, Aronson, & Steele, 2000; Correll, Spencer, & Zanna, 2004). They can do this because when the self is secure, accepting contradictory information no longer reflects negatively on a valued self-image. Information that otherwise would be threatening can be evaluated independently of the self. One way of observing this independence is by looking at the association between beliefs about the self and evaluation of relevant information. In one study, Cohen, Sherman, Bastardi, and Hsu (2004) found that the more patriotic participants were, the more negatively they evaluated an article claiming that U.S. foreign policy led to September 11th. However, participants who were affirmed evaluated the article independently of their personal patriotism. That is, when people were affirmed, there was no association between their personal beliefs and their evaluation of the information; it appears that they no longer used their beliefs as a point of reference for evaluating the information.

Extending this logic to the evaluation of group-relevant information leads to the following predictions. When the self is affirmed, people will feel more secure in their feelings of self-worth. Consequently, people will evaluate their groups independently of their self-evaluations. Judgments about the group that are made independent of self-evaluations should be less biased and more evenhanded. Hence, winners and losers are less likely to differ in their attributions about their groups when they are self-affirmed.

Overview

We conducted two field studies that assessed the attributions athletes made for their team's victory or defeat. Intramural athletes in team sports (volleyball in Study 1 and basketball in Study 2) participated immediately after their team either won or lost the game. Study 1 examines whether self-affirmation reduces group-serving as well as self-serving judgments. Study 2 examines the processes by which this occurs by looking at the conditions when the self is used as an anchor in judgments of one's group.

Study 1

Study 1 was designed to examine the effect of self-affirmation on group-serving and self-serving judgments in response to team victory or defeat. More specifically, we examined how an individually based self-affirmation affects the causal attributions for group performance in a team sports competition. We predicted that a self-affirmation would reduce group-serving, as well as self-serving, attributions for victory and defeat.

Method

Participants and Design

The participants were 48 male European American athletes who were playing intramural volleyball at Stanford University.[1] The participants were randomly assigned to either the affirmation condition or the no-affirmation control condition, thereby creating a 2 (affirmation status: affirmation vs. no affirmation) × 2 (game outcome: winners vs. losers) between-subjects factorial design.

Procedure

Research assistants went to students about to play intramural volleyball and asked if they would participate in a study immediately after their game in exchange for $5. All the recruiting was done prior to the start of the game. The research assistants watched the game and, at its conclusion, sought out the athletes who had earlier agreed to participate and escorted them to a conference room. In the conference room, another experimenter administered the materials. The study featured a two-experimenter, each-half-aware design (E. Aronson, Ellsworth, Carlsmith, & Gonzales, 1990), in which the first set of experimenters was only aware of whether the participant won or lost the game (and not affirmation status) and the second set of experimenters was only aware of affirmation status (and not game outcome). Participants first completed a consent form on which they read that the study would take approximately 10 min and that the research was examining "sports and values." The experimenter explained that the study would consist of a number of questionnaires about values and sports.

Affirmation manipulation. The affirmation manipulation consisted of values scales (adapted from Allport, Vernon, & Lindzey, 1960). Participants first rated five values in terms of how personally important each value was to them. The five values were aesthetics, religion, social, political, and theoretical, and participants rated them on a scale from 1 (*extremely important*) to 9 (*not at all important*). On the next page, the participants ranked those five values from 1 (*most important value*) to 5 (*least important value*). When the participants finished ranking the values, the experimenter collected the questionnaire and randomly assigned the participants to either the affirmation condition, in which they received a scale that corresponded to their most important value, or the no-affirmation condition, in which they received a scale that corresponded to their least important value. The value scales, which have been used in other self-affirmation studies (Sherman et al., 2000; Steele & Liu, 1983; Tesser & Cornell, 1991), provided the key elements of the self-affirmation manipulation. The value scales are theorized to affirm the self by making important values, values central to the individual's self-image, salient (Steele, 1988). The value scales consist of 10 pairs of statements. For participants in the affirmation condition, one statement of each pair was associated with their most important value, and the other statement was filler. For participants in the no-affirmation condition, one statement was associated with their least important value, and the other statement was filler. Participants assigned 1 to 4 points to each statement, with higher points indicating greater agreement with the statement. Hence, the affirmed participants had the opportunity to affirm important values, whereas non-affirmed participants completed an analogous procedure on unimportant values.

Dependent measures. After completing the value scales, participants were given the dependent measures. First, participants indicated the score of the game and whether they won or lost. Next, participants were given several potential causes and asked to rate them on "How much did each of the following factors contribute to your team winning/losing?" The question was phrased so that both winners and losers could assess the degree to which each potential cause contributed to the outcome of the game. Participants rated the different potential causes on a scale from 1 (*did not contribute at all*) to 8 (*contributed a great deal*). Two of the potential

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[1] We made an a priori decision to include only the male European American data in our primary analyses for both studies. We excluded women because of the sex imbalance in participants (16 women vs. 48 men in Study 1, 4 women vs. 44 men in Study 2) and because of research demonstrating sex differences in self-serving attributions across a number of domains (Ryckman & Peckham, 1987; Burgner & Hewstone, 1993; Fox & Ferri, 1992). We excluded Asian American participants because the study centered on the motivation for group-serving judgments. Previous research has shown that whereas European Americans consistently show group-serving biases, Asian samples do not (Heine & Lehman, 1997).

causes focused on the participants' personal contribution, "your personal performance" and "your personal desire." Two of the potential causes focused on the participants' team, "your teammates' performance" and "your team's teamwork." Two of the potential causes focused on more external causes for the outcome of the game, "luck" and "the opposing team's skill level." Finally, participants completed a measure of feelings of self-worth (Brown & Dutton, 1995) on which they rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 8 (*very much*) how at the moment of the questionnaire they were feeling each of the following emotions: glad, humiliated, unhappy, proud, sad, ashamed, pleased with myself, and happy.

Results

Group- and Self-Serving Attributions

We hypothesized that self-affirmation would reduce group-serving as well as self-serving attributions about victory and defeat. Group attributions were assessed by two questions that asked how much participants thought their teammates' performance and their team's teamwork contributed to their team winning or losing. Self-attributions were assessed by two questions that asked how much participants thought their personal performance and their personal desire contributed to their team winning or losing. Each pair of measures was moderately well correlated—group attributions: $r(48) = .26$, $p = .07$; self-attributions: $r(48) = .41$, $p = .004$—and were combined into single measures of group and self-attributions, respectively. We standardized both the group and the self-attributions and conducted a repeated measures analysis of variance with game outcome (victory vs. defeat) and affirmation status (self-affirmation vs. no affirmation) as between-subjects variables and type of attribution (self vs. group) as a within-subject variable. There was a main effect of game outcome, such that winners made more internal attributions ($M = 0.24$) than losers ($M = -0.28$), $F(1, 44) = 5.93$, $p = .02$. However, this was qualified by the predicted Affirmation Status × Game Outcome interaction, $F(1, 44) = 4.50$, $p = .04$. Among the nonaffirmed, the winners made more internal attributions ($M = 0.54$) than the losers

($M = -0.45$), $t(22) = 3.15$, $p = .005$. However, the self-affirmation reduced this biased tendency, as the winners ($M = -0.05$) and the losers ($M = -.11$) did not differ, $t(22) = 0.22$, *ns*. That is, the self-affirmation reduced both the self- and group-serving judgments. Further evidence for parallelism in the responses toward the self and the group is indicated by the lack of a three-way interaction between game outcome, affirmation status, and type of attribution, $F(1, 44) = 0.40$, *ns*. Thus, participants evaluated the self and the group in a parallel manner. We now turn to the separate analyses of group- and self-serving judgments.

Group-Serving Attributions

Overall, members of winning teams attributed their team's outcome more to team causes ($M = 6.60$) than did members of losing teams ($M = 5.97$), $F(1, 44) = 3.88$, $p = .06$. However, this main effect was qualified by an interaction effect between affirmation status and game outcome, $F(1, 44) = 4.33$, $p = .04$. That is, the nonaffirmed participants exhibited a group-serving bias such that those who won the game thought that team causes contributed more to their team's victory ($M = 6.92$) than those that lost the game thought team causes contributed to their team's defeat ($M = 5.63$), $t(22) = 3.04$, $p = .006$. In contrast, this large difference was eliminated among the affirmed participants, as winners ($M = 6.27$) and losers ($M = 6.31$) did not significantly differ in how much they thought team causes contributed to the outcome of the game, $t(22) = -.07$, *ns* (see Figure 1). The self-affirmation reduced group-serving attributions.

Self-Serving Attributions

Overall, winners thought that personal causes contributed more to their team's victory ($M = 5.15$) than losers thought that personal causes contributed to their team's defeat ($M = 4.43$), $F(1, 44) = 3.30$, $p = .07$. That is, there was a self-serving bias in personal attributions about victory and defeat. Although there was no main
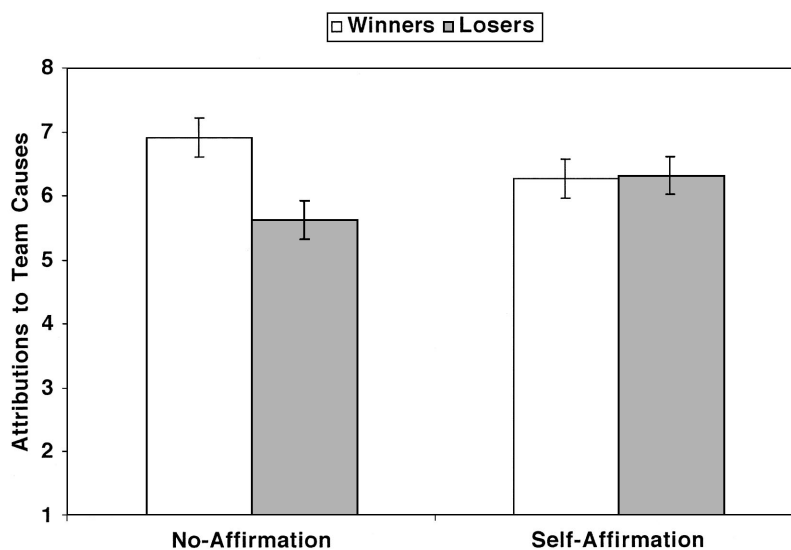

Figure 1. The effect of affirmation status and game outcome on group-serving attributions (Study 1). Error bars indicate standard error.

effect of affirmation and no interaction, $F(1, 44) = 1.52$, *ns*, simple effects tests do indicate that the self-serving bias was strongest for the nonaffirmed participants. That is, among the nonaffirmed participants, those who won the game thought that their personal causes contributed more to their team's victory ($M = 5.57$) than those who lost the game thought their personal causes contributed to their team's defeat ($M = 4.36$), $t(22) = 2.03$, $p = .06$. This tendency was reduced among the affirmed participants, as winners ($M = 4.72$) and losers ($M = 4.50$) did not significantly differ in how much they thought that personal causes contributed to the outcome of the game, $t(22) = 0.44$, *ns*. Although there was no significant Affirmation Status × Game Outcome interaction, simple effects tests indicate that the self-affirmation reduced the self-serving attributions.

External Attributions

To examine whether athletes would differentially attribute the outcome of the game to external causes, we had them assess how much luck and how much the opposing team's skill level led to the outcome of the game. For both measures, there was neither main effect of game outcome—luck: $F(1, 44) = 0.56$, *ns*; opposing team: $F(1, 44) = 0.20$, *ns*—nor affirmation status—luck: $F(1, 44) = 0.18$, *ns*; opposing team: $F(1, 44) = 0.81$, *ns*. For the opposing team's skill level, there was no significant interaction, $F(1, 44) = 0.20$, *ns*. For attributions to luck, there was a marginally significant interaction between affirmation status and game outcome, $F(1, 44) = 3.37$, $p = .07$. Among the nonaffirmed participants, losers ($M = 3.82$) and winners ($M = 3.15$) did not differ in their attributions to luck, $t(22) = 0.84$, *ns*. In contrast, among the affirmed participants, winners ($M = 3.91$) attributed the outcome of the game to luck more than losers ($M = 2.62$), $t(22) = 1.80$, $p = .09$. For both external measures, there was no significant difference in the no-affirmation conditions. Consequently, there was no bias that the affirmation could reduce (although there was a trend for the affirmation to lead winners to attribute the game to luck to a greater extent than losers). It appears that the participants biased their judgments by differentially attributing the outcome of the game to internal factors (both the self and one's team) rather than external factors.

Relationship Between Self-Judgments and Group Judgments

We also examined the correlations between the attributions to the self and the attributions to the group. For the nonaffirmed participants, there was a significant relationship between self-judgments and group judgments, $r(24) = .41$, $p = .04$. Among nonaffirmed participants, it appears as though the self was used as an anchor in judgments of one's group. However, this relationship was reduced for the affirmed participants, $r(24) = .16$, *ns*. A Fisher's *r*-to-*z* transformation showed that these correlations were not significantly different, $Z = 0.89$, *ns*.[2]

Feelings of Self-Worth

Participants also completed a measure of their current feelings of self-worth. Two components of the scale are positive self-feelings and negative self-feelings.[3] There were no main effects or

interactions with positive self-feelings. With negative self-feelings (humiliated, ashamed), we observed a significant main effect of game outcome. That is, the losers felt more negative self-feelings ($M = 3.05$) than the winners ($M = 1.52$), $F(1, 44) = 15.26$, $p < .001$. However, there was also a trend toward an Affirmation Status × Game Outcome interaction, $F(1, 44) = 2.41$, $p = .12$. Simple effects tests indicate a similar pattern of results as the attributional findings. Among the nonaffirmed participants, losers felt more negative self-feelings ($M = 3.68$) than did winners ($M = 1.54$), $t(22) = 3.62$, $p = .002$. However, among the affirmed participants, this tendency was reduced to marginal levels as losers ($M = 2.42$) felt only somewhat more negative self-feelings than winners ($M = 1.50$), $t(22) = 1.78$, $p = .09$. Thus, it appears that the affirmation reduced the extent to which winning and losing affected feelings of humiliation and shame.

Discussion

In Study 1, nonaffirmed participants explained the outcome of a group event in a group-serving as well as a self-serving manner, with winners claiming that internal causes were responsible for their team's victory and losers denying that these same causes led to their team's defeat. However, these group-serving and self-serving tendencies were reduced among the affirmed participants. Affirmed winners and losers differed little in how much weight they attached to both self- and group causes for the outcome of the game. Given the seemingly parallel findings for self- and group-serving biases, the question arises as to the interrelationship between judgments of the self and judgments of one's group.

In Study 1, we found that self-serving judgments and group-serving judgments were significantly correlated among the nonaffirmed participants but were not correlated among the affirmed participants. This initial evidence supports our hypothesis that self-affirmation should reduce the extent to which judgments of the self are used as an anchor for judgments of the group. We explore this further in Study 2, as we examine whether the self serves as an anchor both at the explicit level, in terms of attributions, and at the implicit level, in terms of letter evaluations relevant to the self and the group (Koole, Dijksterhuis, & van Knippenberg, 2001). Research by Otten and colleagues (Otten & Moskowitz, 2000; Otten & Wentura, 1999) has demonstrated that people have an implicit affective bias in favor of their groups. This research is used to support the relatively automatic nature by which judgments of the self are linked to judgments of the group. Yet, as they acknowledge, this is only indirect evidence for the

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[2] An alternative explanation for the self-affirmation reducing the link between self-serving and group-serving judgments is that the affirmation may have restricted the range for the data for both measures, and hence, the drop in correlations was inevitable. To examine this potential artifact, we used Levene's test for equality of variance to examine whether there was different variance in the self-affirmation and the no-affirmation conditions. For both measures, there was no significant difference in variance (group attributions $F = 0.17$, *ns*; self-attributions $F = 0.09$, *ns*).

[3] We also examined the positive (happy, glad) and negative (unhappy, sad) affect items. Winners felt more positive affect ($M = 5.88$) than losers ($M = 4.96$), $F(1, 44) = 5.34$, $p = .03$, and losers felt more negative affect ($M = 3.35$) than winners ($M = 1.83$), $F(1, 44) = 14.42$, $p < .001$, but there were no main effects of affirmation status and no interactions.

self-anchoring process at the implicit level. Consequently, in Study 2, we examine whether there is an association between implicit ratings of the self and implicit ratings of the group. Moreover, we examine whether this association is reduced when the self is affirmed.

A second issue we examined in greater depth in Study 2 concerns the findings from Study 1 that negative self-feelings of humiliation and shame were consistent with the attributional findings. Whereas winners and losers differed sharply in their negative self-feelings, winners and losers who were affirmed did not differ to the same extent. Given the sports context, in which the emphasis is on the team, it may be that these negative self-feelings were in relation to how participants felt about themselves as team members. The affirmation, then, may have secured the individuals' feelings about their self-worth as group members. Thus, these feelings of being a worthy group member may be a potential mediator of the effect of affirmation on reducing the group-serving attributional biases. To examine this issue, in Study 2, we had participants respond to a modified version of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992).

Study 2

Study 2 was designed to examine the relationship between self-serving judgments and group-serving judgments at the explicit and implicit level and to examine collective self-esteem as a potential mediator for the effect of self-affirmation on reducing group-serving attributions.

Method

Participants and Design

The participants were 44 male European American athletes who were playing intramural basketball at Pauley Pavilion on the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles. Participants were randomly assigned either to the affirmation condition or to the no-affirmation control condition, thereby creating a 2 (affirmation status: affirmation vs. no affirmation) × 2 (game outcome: winners vs. losers) between-subjects design.

Procedure

The procedure was virtually the same as that used in Study 1, using the same two-experimenter, each-half-unaware design. Research assistants went to students who were about to play intramural basketball and asked if they would participate in a study immediately after their game in exchange for $5. All the recruiting was done prior to the start of the game. The research assistants watched the game and, at its conclusion, sought out the athletes who had earlier agreed to participate in the study and escorted them to seats in the gymnasium where the study took place. A second experimenter administered the experimental materials. Participants first completed a consent form on which they read that the study would take approximately 10 min and that the research was examining "sports and values." The experimenter explained that the study consisted of a number of questionnaires about values and sports.

Affirmation manipulation. The affirmation manipulation was the same used in Study 1 (adopted from Allport et al., 1960). Participants ranked five values in terms of how personally important each value was to them. Participants in the affirmation condition completed a scale of their most important value, whereas participants in the no-affirmation condition completed a scale of their least important value.

Dependent measures. After completing the value scales, participants were given the dependent measures. First, participants indicated the score of the game and whether they won or lost. Then participants completed a modified version of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale. The different subscales of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale, Public, Private, Membership, and Identity, allowed us to explore which facet of collective self-esteem is most affected by the affirmation and related to the group-serving judgments. All of the items were modified to make sense in the context of the participants' intramural basketball teams. For example, one item (from the Public subscale) was "Overall, my intramural basketball team is considered good by others." Then, participants rated how much they liked the 26 letters of the English alphabet on a scale from 1 (*I do not like the letter at all*) to 7 (*I like the letter a great deal*). The letters were presented in a random order (counterbalanced) and form a measure of implicit preference that has been used in implicit social cognition research (Jones, Pelham, Mirenberg, & Hetts, 2002; Koole et al., 2001). We used this measure to assess participants' self-evaluations and group evaluations at an implicit level by looking at their preference for their initials (e.g., how much Sean Mallon liked the initials "SM") and the initials of their team's name (e.g., how much the team called the "Lankans" liked the letter "L").

Finally, participants were given several potential causes and asked to rate "How much did each of the following factors contribute to your team winning/losing? For example, if your team won, how much was each factor responsible for the win, and if your team lost, how much was each factor responsible for the loss?" The question was phrased so that winners and losers evaluated the same potential causes in a parallel manner. Participants rated the potential causes on a scale from 1 (*did not contribute at all*) to 8 (*contributed a great deal*). One of the potential causes focused on the participants' individual contribution, "your personal performance." Two of the potential causes focused on the participants' team, "your teammates' performance," "your team's teamwork." Two of the potential causes focused on more external causes for the outcome of the game, "luck" and "the opponent's skill level." At the conclusion of the study, participants were thanked, debriefed, paid, and dismissed.

Results

Group- and Self-Serving Attributions

As in Study 1, we hypothesized that self-affirmation would reduce group-serving as well as self-serving attributions about victory and defeat. As in Study 1, we standardized both the group and the self-attributions and conducted a repeated measures analysis of variance with game outcome (victory vs. defeat) and affirmation status (self-affirmation vs. no affirmation) as between-subjects variables and type of attribution (self vs. group) as a within-subject variable. There was a main effect of game outcome, such that winners made more internal attributions ($M = 0.51$) than losers ($M = -0.21$), $F(1, 40) = 12.61$, $p = .001$. There was also a main effect of affirmation status, such that the nonaffirmed made more attributions to the self and the group ($M = 0.38$) than the affirmed ($M = -0.07$), $F(1, 40) = 5.03$, $p = .03$. However, these main effects were qualified by the predicted Affirmation Status × Game Outcome interaction, $F(1, 40) = 13.11$, $p = .001$. Among the nonaffirmed, the winners made more internal attributions ($M = 1.11$) than the losers ($M = -0.35$), $t(18) = 5.25$, $p < .001$. However, the self-affirmation reduced this biased tendency, as the winners ($M = -0.08$) and the losers ($M = -0.07$) did not differ, $t(22) = -.05$, *ns*. As in Study 1, the self-affirmation reduced both the self- and group-serving judgments. Moreover, parallel responses toward the self and the group are indicated by the lack of a three-way interaction between game outcome, affirmation status,

and type of attribution, $F(1, 40) = 0.40$, *ns*. Thus, participants evaluated the self and the group in a parallel manner. We turn to the separate analyses of group- and self-serving judgments.

Group-Serving Attributions

As in Study 1, participants' claims of their team's responsibility for the outcome of the game were assessed by two questions that asked how much the participants thought their teammates' performance and their team's teamwork contributed to their team winning or losing. These two items were highly correlated, $r(44) = .50$, $p = .001$, and were analyzed as a single measure of attributions to the group. Overall, there was a main effect of game outcome, demonstrating that participants made group-serving attributions. That is, members of winning teams attributed their team's outcome more to their team's skill and teamwork ($M = 7.06$) than did members of losing teams ($M = 5.56$), $F(1, 40) = 11.91$, $p = .001$. However, this main effect was qualified by an interaction effect between affirmation status and game outcome, $F(1, 40) = 4.83$, $p = .03$. That is, the nonaffirmed participants exhibited a group-serving bias, as those who won the game thought that team causes contributed more to their team's victory ($M = 7.67$) than those that lost the game thought team causes contributed to their team's defeat ($M = 5.21$), $t(18) = 4.01$, $p < .001$. In contrast, there was no difference among the affirmed participants, as winners ($M = 6.44$) and losers ($M = 5.90$) did not significantly differ in how much they thought team causes contributed to the outcome of the game, $t(22) = 0.91$, *ns*. As in Study 1, the self-affirmation reduced the group-serving attributional bias.

Self-Serving Attributions

Participants' claims of personal responsibility for the outcome of the game were assessed by one question that asked how much they thought their personal performance contributed to their team winning or losing. Overall, winners reported that their personal performance contributed more to their team's victory ($M = 5.75$) marginally more than losers thought that their personal performance contributed to their team's defeat ($M = 4.89$), $F(1, 40) = 1.02$, $p = .10$. That is, there was a trend toward a self-serving bias as well as a group-serving bias in attributions about victory and defeat. There was also a main effect of affirmation status, such that the nonaffirmed participants thought that their performance was more responsible for the outcome of the game ($M = 5.98$) than the affirmed participants ($M = 4.67$), $F(1, 40) = 6.52$, $p = .02$. However, this main effect was qualified by an Affirmation Status × Game Outcome interaction, $F(1, 40) = 8.83$, $p = .005$. Among the nonaffirmed participants, those who won the game thought that their personal performance contributed more to their team's victory ($M = 7.17$) than those who lost the game thought their personal performance contributed to their team's defeat ($M = 4.79$), $t(18) = 4.30$, $p = .001$. In contrast, among the affirmed participants, winners ($M = 4.33$) and losers ($M = 5.00$) did not significantly differ in how much they thought that their personal factors contributed to the outcome of the game, $t(22) = -.84$, *ns*; indeed, losers thought personal performance was somewhat more important, albeit nonsignificantly. Thus, the self-affirmation reduced the self-serving bias in causal attributions in the group setting.

External Attributions

In Study 2, we examined the same external attributions examined in Study 1: luck and the opposing team's skill level. For both measures, there were neither main effects of game outcome—luck: $F(1, 40) = 1.51$, *ns*; opposing team: $F(1, 40) = 0.32$, *ns*—nor of affirmation status—luck: $F(1, 40) = 0.71$, *ns*; opposing team: $F(1, 40) = 0.84$, *ns*. There were also no significant interactions, luck: $F(1, 40) = 1.33$, *ns*; opposing team: $F(1, 40) = 0.01$, *ns*. Thus, the marginal interaction for the luck measure was not replicated, suggesting that it was not a reliable finding. Moreover, as in Study 1, in the no-affirmation conditions there were no significant differences between winners and losers, suggesting that participants did not make biased attributions toward external factors.

Relationship Between Self-Judgments and Group Judgments

The main goal of Study 2 was to examine the relationship between judgments of the self and judgments of the group to assess when people use the self as an anchor in their judgments of the group. Our prediction was that group judgments would be highly correlated with self-judgments *unless* the pressure to protect one's self-image was reduced by self-affirmation. To examine this, we looked at the correlations between the attributions to personal factors and the attributions to team factors, that is, the correlations between self-serving judgments and group-serving judgments.

Figure 2 presents a scatter plot indicating the relationship between self-attributions and group attributions, separately for the no-affirmation and the self-affirmation condition. In the control, no-affirmation condition (represented by the solid black line), self-serving judgments were highly correlated with group-serving judgments, $r(20) = .60$, $p = .004$. This suggests that the self was used as an anchor to make judgments about the group. However, when the motive to protect the self was satisfied by self-affirmation, people evaluated the self and the group independently.
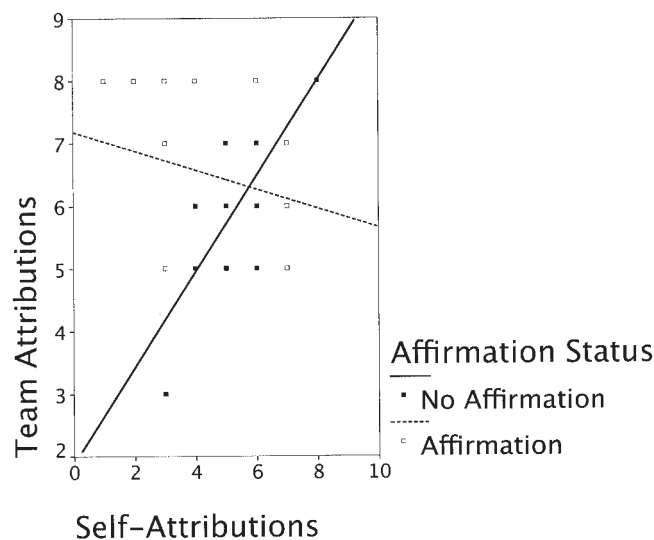

Figure 2.   Correlations between self-attributions and team attributions as a function of affirmation status (Study 2).

That is, in the self-affirmation condition (represented by the dashed black line), the self-serving judgments and the team-serving judgments were uncorrelated, $r(24) = -.10$, *ns*. A Fisher's *r*-to-*z* transformation shows that these two correlations are significantly different, $Z = 2.48$, $p = .01$.[4]

Under normal conditions in a competitive sports environment, the need to protect self-worth leads people to make self-serving and group-serving judgments. Not only did the self-affirmation reduce the need for people to be self- and group serving, but it also reduced the reliance on the self as a reference point or anchor for judgments about the group. When people felt more secure in their self-worth by reflecting on important values, they no longer evaluated the group as they evaluated the self.

Implicit Measures

In Study 2, participants rated how much they liked every letter from *A* to *Z* (presented randomly in two counterbalanced forms). From this, we were able to get measures of implicit self-esteem (preference for a person's initials) and implicit collective esteem (preference for the initials of a team's name). Thus, we can evaluate whether our analysis of the relationship between self-judgments and group judgments extends to the implicit level.

We calculated relative preference for initial letters by using the method of Kitayama and Karasawa (1997) and Koole, Smeets, van Knippenberg, and Dijksterhuis (1999). We first computed the average rating for every letter by individuals who did not have that letter in their initials. This formed a base-rate liking rating for each letter, allowing us to control for differences within the English language for popularity of certain letters. For each participant, we then calculated a difference score between their liking of their initials and the base-rate liking for those letters by people who did not have them as initials. This yielded a relative liking for a person's initials. We used the same process to calculate the relative liking for the initials in the words of a team's name. There were no main effects of game outcome or affirmation status and no interactions between the independent variables for liking of either name initials or team initials.[5]

Figure 3 presents the correlations between implicit self-esteem (own initials) and implicit collective esteem (team initials), separately for the no-affirmation and the self-affirmation condition. For the nonaffirmed, the correlational pattern suggests that the self was used as an anchor for judgments about the group at the implicit level. In the no-affirmation condition (represented by the solid black line), the correlation between individuals' liking for their initials and the liking for the initials of their team's name was highly significant, $r(20) = .60$, $p = .005$. However, consistent with the explicit ratings of self- and group attributions, in the affirmation condition (represented by the dashed black line), implicit self-esteem and implicit collective-esteem were uncorrelated, $r(24) = -.05$, *ns*. A Fisher's *r*-to-*z* transformation shows that these two correlations are significantly different, $Z = 2.28$, $p = .02$. At both the implicit and explicit level, people used the self as an anchor for judgments of their group, unless they were affirmed.

Collective Self-Esteem

We next examined whether self-affirmation makes people feel more secure about their group in response to either success or
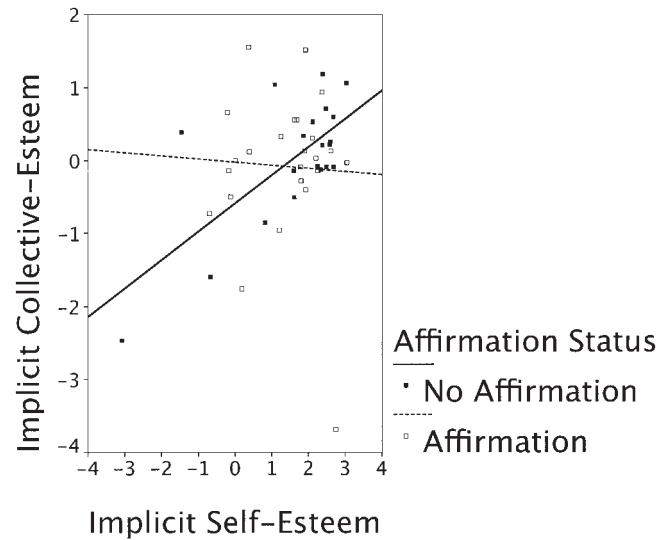

Figure 3. Correlations between implicit self-esteem and implicit collective-esteem as a function of affirmation status (Study 2).

failure and whether this factor would be associated with group-serving judgments. The 16-item Collective Self-Esteem Scale had a high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$). When we collapse across the four subscales, Membership, Private, Public, and Identity, we find that the pattern of results mirrors the attributional findings. That is, there was a main effect, such that winners had higher collective self-esteem ($M = 5.60$) than losers ($M = 4.82$), $F(1, 40) = 10.29$, $p = .003$. However, this was qualified by a significant Affirmation Status × Game Outcome interaction, $F(1, 40) = 4.76$, $p = .03$ (see Table 1). Among the nonaffirmed, there was a significant difference, as winners ($M = 5.97$) had higher collective self-esteem than losers ($M = 4.67$), $t(18) = 3.90$, $p = .001$. However, among the affirmed, winners ($M = 5.22$) and losers ($M = 4.98$) did not significantly differ in their collective self-esteem, $t(22) = 0.74$, *ns*.

Our hypothesis was that, in the absence of affirmation, the experience of victory or defeat would lead to a temporary boost or deficit in feelings of self-worth in relation to one's group. Of the four subscales of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale, the one that corresponds to collective feelings of self-worth the most is Membership collective self-esteem. The self-affirmation may secure this feeling of being a worthy group member and, consequently, attenuate the need to make group-serving attributions. The Membership collective self-esteem items all measure athletes' feelings of self-worth in relation to their team. Sample items are "I am a

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[4] Again, this does not appear to be due to a restriction of range in the self-affirmation condition, as for both measures, there was no significant difference in variance (group attributions $F = 1.56$, *ns*; self-attributions $F = 0.72$, *ns*).

[5] We examined the correlation between the attributions to self and attribution to the team and the evaluation of the initials of the team (implicit team evaluation) and the initials of the self (implicit self-evaluation). For team evaluations, there was a significant correlation, $r(44) = .33$, $p = .03$, between implicit and explicit measures, but for self-evaluations, there was not, $r(44) = .18$, *ns*.

Table 1

Effect of Affirmation Status and Game Outcome on the Individual Subscales of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale and on the Overall Score

	No affirmation		Affirmation	
Collective Self-Esteem Scale	Winners	Losers	Winners	Losers
Subscale				
Membership[a]	6.54	5.48	5.64	5.87
Private	6.87	5.70	6.22	5.87
Public	6.00	4.36	5.78	4.97
Identity	4.45	3.14	3.25	3.20
Overall[a]	5.97	4.67	5.22	4.98

[a] Affirmation Status × Game Outcome interaction is significant, $p < .05$.

worthy member of my intramural basketball team" and "I often feel I am a useless member of my intramural basketball team" (reverse coded).

Examination of the individual subscales of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (see Table 1) indicates that the Membership subscale is driving the significant overall collective self-esteem interaction reported above. That is, for the Membership self-esteem subscale, there was an Affirmation Status × Game Outcome interaction, $F(1, 40) = 4.04$, $p = .05$. Among the nonaffirmed, there was a significant difference, as winners ($M = 6.54$) felt themselves to be more worthy group members than losers ($M = 5.48$), $t(18) = 2.92$, $p = .01$. However, among the affirmed, winners ($M = 5.64$) and losers ($M = 5.87$) did not significantly differ, $t(22) = -.60$, *ns*. For the other three subscales, none of the interactions obtained significance.

Mediation

Next, we examined whether membership collective self-esteem mediated the group-serving causal attributions. Our argument is that the affirmation secured the individual's feelings of self-worth in the group context; that is, their feelings of being a worthy team member. If the affirmed participants' membership collective self-esteem was less affected by the victory and defeat, then, we reasoned that they would be less group serving in their attributions. We conducted a path analysis to test this reasoning (Baron & Kenny, 1986), as can be seen in Figure 4. We used the planned interaction between affirmation status and game outcome, as well as the main effects, to predict the attributions to team causes. This direct effect was significant, $\beta = -.30$, $t(40) = -2.20$, $p = .03$. Next we used the planned interaction contrast, as well as the main effects, to predict participants' scores on the Membership collective self-esteem subscale. This path was significant as well, $\beta = -.30$, $t(40) = -2.01$, $p = .05$. Finally, we allowed the Affirmation Status × Game Outcome interaction and membership collective self-esteem to predict the attributions to team factors (with the main effects entered as well). The path from membership collective self-esteem to team attributions was marginally significant, $\beta = .25$, $t(40) = 1.78$, $p = .08$, but the direct effect of the Affirmation × Outcome interaction contrast was no longer significant, $\beta = -.22$, $t(40) = -1.61$, *ns*. A Sobel's test of significance for the reduction in the direct path, however, did not reach significance, $Z = -1.43$, $p = .15$. Thus, we have evidence that mem-

bership self-esteem partially mediated the group-serving attributions. In addition, none of the other subscales, or the overall collective self-esteem score, significantly mediated the group-serving attributions.

Discussion

Study 2 replicated Study 1, again using athletes who had just emerged from team competition. Once again, we observed both group-serving as well as self-serving attributions, as winners claimed that internal causes were more responsible for their team's victory than losers did for defeat. However, this biased attributional pattern was eliminated among participants who had completed an individually based self-affirmation.

To better understand how people make group-serving judgments, Study 2 examined the conditions under which judgments of the self and judgments of one's groups are likely to be linked and when they are likely to be independent. In a competitive sports context, in the absence of self-affirmation, individual's self-judgments were highly correlated with their group judgments. However, when individuals were affirmed, judgments of the self and judgments of the group were uncorrelated both at the explicit level in terms of their evaluations of causes of the outcome of the game as well as at the implicit level in terms of their evaluations of their own and their team's initials. Although these correlational analyses alone do not provide any information as to whether it is the self-judgment or the group judgment that is used as an anchor, analysis of the subscales of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale supports our hypothesis that it is self-feelings that drive the group-serving judgments. That is, of the four subscales, only the Membership collective self-esteem subscale, which measures one's feelings of self-worth in relation to the group, obtained a significant Affirmation Status × Game Outcome interaction. None of the other subscales that measure one's feelings about the group (Public, Private, or Identity) obtained a significant interaction. Moreover, mediational analyses indicate that membership collective self-esteem partially mediated the group-serving bias. Taken together, these analyses show that the self is what is used as an anchor rather than the group. When participants were made to feel more secure in their worthiness as a group member, they felt less
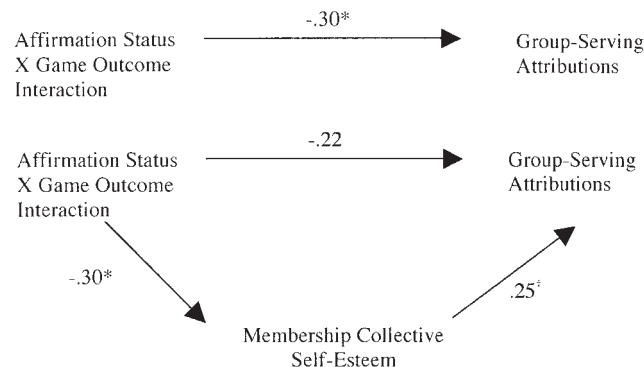

Figure 4. Relationship between affirmation status, game outcome, and group-serving attributions as mediated by membership collective self-esteem (Study 2). Coefficients are standardized betas. † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$.

of a need to use their self-judgments as an anchoring basis for their group judgments.

General Discussion

In two studies, athletes who experienced team victory or defeat made group-serving as well as self-serving attributions for the outcome of the game. Biased judgments, both inflated internal attributions after victory and deflated internal attributions after defeat, were sharply reduced among participants who completed an individually based self-affirmation. After experiencing victory, volleyball players (in Study 1) and basketball players (in Study 2) thought that team causes—as well as personal causes—were more responsible for the outcome of the game than they thought they were after experiencing defeat. Yet these biased judgmental patterns were reduced among those participants who completed the self-affirmation.

In Study 2, we also found that when the self was affirmed, individuals were less likely to use the self as an anchor in making judgments about their groups. That is, an examination of self-serving attributions and group-serving attributions found that they were highly correlated in the no-affirmation condition but were uncorrelated in the affirmation condition. This finding supports our integration of motivational and cognitive perspectives on the origins of group-serving judgments. Use of the self as an anchor in judgments of the group depended on the motivational pressures on the self. Among nonaffirmed participants, the goal to protect and enhance self-esteem led to group-serving judgments, and the correlations suggest that this happened through a process of using the self as an anchor. However, when self-protective pressures were reduced or eliminated with self-affirmation, people were less likely to use the self as an anchor in their judgments, and this resulted in judgments less favorable to one's group.

Study 2 found evidence for the self as an anchor in implicit judgments of the self and groups (preferences for the letters in a person's initials and in the team's initials) as well as explicit judgments (attributions). This finding speaks to questions raised about the cause of an implicit in-group bias (Otten & Wentura, 1999). That is, not only did we observe evidence that the self is used as an anchor in implicit judgments about one's group, but we showed as well that this process is limited by the motivational pressures affecting the self. This finding also speaks to an issue raised by Sherman and Cohen (2002) in their review of self-affirmation research. That is, it shows that self-affirmation processes can affect judgments at the implicit level.

Study 2 also found large differences in membership collective self-esteem between winners and losers. Winners of the game felt that they were more worthy team members in reference to their basketball team than losers; however, these differences were eliminated among affirmed participants. Moreover, the membership collective self-esteem partially mediated the effect of self-affirmation and game outcome on group-serving attributions. This suggests that the affirmation reduced the biased group judgments by securing participants' self-feelings in relation to their group. When participants' feelings of being a worthy group member were secured in this way, participants were more likely to accept the otherwise threatening information that team factors may have played a large role in defeat or a small role in victory.

The Role of the Self in Group-Serving Judgments

Why do people make judgments that favor their groups? Although social identity theorists (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979) have suggested that group-serving judgments enhance and protect the self, to date the evidence for this motivational approach has been inconclusive (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Deaux, 1996). The present studies demonstrate that when the motivational pressure to maintain one's self-image is reduced, people will be less group serving in their judgments. In two studies, we found that a group-serving bias in causal attributions was eliminated among participants who completed an individually based self-affirmation. These findings that an experimental manipulation that affected the self modified the tendency to make group-serving judgments provide direct evidence that the origin of these group-serving judgments comes from a motivation to protect the self.

Additional evidence for the self-protective role of group-serving judgments comes from the results of Study 2. Of the different aspects of the collective self-esteem scale, the one that examines feelings of self-worth in the collective context is the Membership subscale. These feelings of being a worthy member of one's group partially mediated the group-serving judgments. When self-feelings in relation to the group were secured by the self-affirmation, people no longer made group-serving causal attributions.

However, a more cognitive interpretation for the effect of self-affirmation on the reduction of group-serving judgments is suggested by self-categorization theory (Ellemers et al., 1999; Hogg, 2003; Hogg & McGarty, 1990; Turner, 1985). That is, the personal self may have been made more salient and the team self may have been made less salient by the self-affirmation manipulation of having people reflect on personally important values. A person reflecting on an important value such as religion need not evaluate the team in a biased manner because the individual's self-worth as a religious person is not contingent upon the game outcome. Consequently, the reduction in group-serving judgments may have occurred because the group was made less salient for the self-affirmed participants.

Although self-categorization does provide an alternative, more cognitive explanation for the present set of findings, future researchers could profit by examining conditions under which self-categorization theory and self-affirmation theory make different predictions. The motivational explanation of self-affirmation theory would be supported by stronger mediational evidence linking feelings of self-worth or personal security to the reduction of group-serving judgments. Indeed, the Study 2 finding that membership self-esteem is associated with the reduction in group-serving judgments does support the self-affirmation explanation and is in contradiction with the self-categorization principle that the personal self and the social self are functionally antagonistic. Second, the notion proposed in the present article that the personal self can serve as an anchor for group-level judgments is not shared by self-categorization theorists (see Turner, 1999). Future research designed specifically to test these differences would help illuminate areas of overlap and conceptual distinctions among the theories. Indeed, the intersection of self-affirmation, social identity, and self-categorization theories is an ongoing topic of interest for self-affirmation theorists (Adams, O'Brien, & Thomas, 2003; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002).

How do people make judgments that favor their groups? Our results suggest that this occurs by a process of using the self as an anchor in judgments of the group (Cadinu & Rothbart, 1996; Otten, 2002). Yet, our findings also demonstrate that motivational pressures on the self affect the cognitive process of self-anchoring. Self-affirmation eliminated the link between judgments of the self and judgments of one's group. When people no longer used the self as an anchor, they no longer made group-serving judgments. Thus, the present research demonstrates the integration of motivational and cognitive processes in understanding when people are biased in favor of their groups and when they are not.

Mediators of Self-Affirmation Effects

There has been much debate in the literature about the mediators of self-affirmation effects. For example, Koole et al. (1999) found that implicit affect mediated the effect of self-affirmation on reduction of rumination, a position that is consistent with Tesser, Martin, and Cornell (1996), who have argued that the self-system serves to maximize positive affect (that may be nonconscious) rather than self-feelings. However, it is likely that the specific mediator of a self-affirmation depends on the context in which it is invoked. In the Koole et al. (1999) study, the focus was on the self and on how an individual responded to a failure experience. Thus, one interpretation of Koole et al.'s (1999) findings is that affirmation secured feelings of self-worth, and this was picked up in the implicit affect measure. Viewed this way, it may be that the implicit affect measure may have been related to self-evaluation (for a discussion of this possibility, see Koole et al., 1999).

In the present study, participants were in a more collective context, and the outcome they experienced was more collective in nature. Their teams had either won or lost an intramural competition. The aspect of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale that was most consistent with self-feelings in the collective context was membership collective self-esteem, the extent to which people felt that they were worthy team members. That the membership collective self-esteem partially mediated the reduction of group-serving biases suggests to us that the affirmation helped the participants feel more secure in their worthiness as group members. When affirmed, they were less affected by the situational constraint of victory and defeat in how worthy they felt, and this inhibited the need to make group-serving attributions.

In terms of the mediation of self-affirmation processes, then, our results suggest that the mediator is highly dependent on the context in which the affirmation is exerting its effect. In the more individual threat experience of the Koole et al. (1999) study, how participants felt (i.e., their affect) served as a mediator. In the more collective context of the present study, how participants felt about themselves in relation to their group served as a mediator.

Unresolved Issues, Implications, and Future Directions

One of our goals in conducting this research among athletes and their intramural teams was to take advantage of preexisting groups in a natural setting in which people care deeply about the outcome. Although this research strategy led us to conduct a field study among individuals as their teams were experiencing victory and defeat, one issue to note is that participants were not randomly assigned to victory or defeat. There may have been some preex-

isting differences (e.g., skill level, team cohesion) that led winners and losers to differ. However, participants were randomly assigned to the affirmation condition, and it is hard to fathom how any preexisting difference could have interacted with the affirmation manipulation to produce the observed effects. Still, future research under more controlled laboratory settings would profit from an experimental design in which participants were randomly assigned to success and failure.

The samples in both studies consisted of European American men, and thus, we must be cautious in our generalizations. Research has shown that women are less self-serving in their attributions for personal success and failure (Ryckman & Peckham, 1987; Burgner & Hewstone, 1993; Fox & Ferri, 1992). Whether they would be less self-serving, as well as less group serving, in more collective contexts remains an open question. Similarly, in terms of culture, researchers have found that individuals in more collectivist cultures are less group serving in their judgments (Heine & Lehman, 1997). Our samples only included European American men because our focus was to examine the process of group-serving judgments. However, future research would profit by gender and cultural analyses on how people make judgments about their groups. This research could identify the sociocultural conditions that foster or inhibit group-serving judgments.

The present set of studies highlight the importance of the self in group-serving judgments. Although the results have obvious practical implications for coaches or athletes who want teammates to recognize how personal and team liabilities may have led to defeat, they also have implications for biased judgments more generally. Whether it is chief executive officers explaining a decrease in profits or individuals responding to important but potentially threatening health messages, the present studies suggest that the tendency for people to be self-serving and group serving in their acceptance of threatening information can be sharply reduced by self-affirmation.

Conclusions

The present research illustrates why and how people make group-serving judgments by focusing on the role of the self. In so doing, it illustrates the interconnection between the self and collective processes. Collective events (such as the victories and defeats of one's group) affect feelings of self-worth, and individual events (such as self-affirmation) affect judgments about one's group. To close, although coaches may claim that there is no "I" in "team," we agree with Kahn's (2003) assessment that "Whoever first proclaimed that there is no 'I' in team was a better speller than a thinker" (p. 1).

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