

Making the Sexual Harassment of Others Self-Relevant: The Roles of Identity Salience and Value Affirmation

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In three experiments, female participants were primed to think of themselves as female university students or unique individuals. We predicted that group-primed participants would find reading about the sexual harassment of a female student threatening to their self-concepts. However, if these participants could affirm an important value, the threat to their personal self-esteem might be resolved. Group-primed participants who wrote about an important individual value reported higher personal self-esteem in comparison with group-primed participants who did not. However, when group-primed participants wrote about a value important to their group, they did not report higher personal self-esteem in comparison to group-primed participants who lacked this opportunity. The results suggest that group-primed participants who affirmed an important individual value reported higher personal self-esteem because it allowed them to re-categorize themselves as unique individuals who were different from the female victim.

KEY WORDS: self-affirmation; social identity theory; self-categorization; fairness judgments.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding when observers judge the treatment of another person to be unfair is critical for understanding observers' punishment decisions

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(Tyler *et al.*, 1997), lay-off survivors' reactions to the termination of other employees (Brockner *et al.*, 1992; Wiesenfeld *et al.*, 1999), and observers' support for collective action (Leung *et al.*, 1993). However, several social justice models propose that observers often ignore potential injustices because the recognition of injustice requires the restoration of equity (either psychologically or in reality, Adams, 1965; Berscheid and Walster, 1967), undermines their beliefs in a just world (Lerner, 1981) or threatens their feelings of personal control (Martin, 1986). For example, Lerner (1981, 2003) proposes that we find injustice psychologically threatening because it undermines our sense of control and predictability. We assume that "bad things happen to bad people" and "bad people do bad things" (Crandall and Beasley, 2001; Feather, 1999). When these beliefs are challenged, we experience distress, and if possible, change our assessment of the perpetrators and victims to make the situation more consistent.

Revising causal explanations is one way to cope with the distress caused by witnessing the unfair treatment of others. Alternatively, if witnessing injustice creates feelings of distress similar to the distress created by cognitive dissonance processes, the opportunity to affirm one's values in a different arena also should reduce any resulting distress (Wiesenfeld *et al.*, 1999). However, affirming one's values should only be helpful if the initial distress is the product of a threat to one's self-concept (Aronson *et al.*, 1999; Wiesenfeld *et al.*, 1999). The purpose of this paper is to use a theoretical framework grounded in social identification and self-categorization theories (Tajfel and Turner, 1986; Turner *et al.*, 1987) to explore (1) when observers experience an observed injustice as relevant to their self-concept and (2) whether the affirmation of important values always leads people to feel less personally connected to the fate of other group members.

Self-affirmation theory is built upon the premise that we are motivated to maintain an overall self-image of ourselves as decent, moral, and competent (see Aronson *et al.*, 1999 for a review). Because we derive our self-worth or self-integrity from a variety of sources, we can respond to a threat to our self-image in one domain by affirming our integrity in a different domain. Participants given a chance to affirm an important individual value were less likely to rely on stereotypes (Fein and Spencer, 1997), more willing to acknowledge threats to their personal health and mortality (Sherman *et al.*, 2000; van den Bos, 2001) and less likely to change their attitudes (Steele and Liu, 1983) than participants not given the same opportunity. Student participants in a laboratory study who affirmed an important individual value also reacted less negatively to the unfair treatment of another student participant in comparison with participants not given the same opportunity (Wiesenfeld *et al.*, 1999, 2001).

It is provocative, and perhaps a bit worrisome, to propose that if people can affirm their self-image as a moral, good, and competent person after

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witnessing the unfair treatment of another person, they will be less, and not more, distressed by the situation. One could argue that if we remind people of their important values, they should be more willing to acknowledge and confront injustice. However, according to Wiesenfeld *et al.* (1999), people view the unfair treatment of another person as a potential threat to themselves. Affirming one's value in a different domain can reduce any distress caused by this threatening information.

Before we can argue that witnessing unfairness is a *self*-threat, we require a model of the self that extends the self-concept beyond the individual person to include important group memberships (or social identities, Ellemers *et al.*, 1999; Simon, 1999; Turner *et al.*, 1987; Wright *et al.*, 2002). As outlined in social identity and self-categorization theories (Tajfel and Turner, 1986; Turner *et al.*, 1987), our self-concepts reflect shared group memberships as well as unique individual characteristics. When there are strong contextual cues or a group is psychologically significant for a person, a particular social identity or group membership will emerge as the dominant self-representation (Smith and Henry, 1996; Wright *et al.*, 2002). When a shared group membership is contextually salient and important, the self-concept includes all ingroup members and a threat to any ingroup member will be interpreted as a threat to the self. When a shared group membership is primed, people view themselves as interchangeable members of the group who share a set of values and norms that are distinct from other groups (Ellemers *et al.*, 1999; Turner *et al.*, 1987). In other words, people will consider other group members to be within their "scope of justice" (Deutsch, 1985; Huo, 2003; Opatow, 1990; Wenzel, 2004). However, when a unique personal identity is primed, people will focus on idiosyncratic personal qualities that distinguish them from other people, including other ingroup members. This analysis suggests that the need to cope with a threat to the self should occur only if people feel that they share an important group membership with the target of the injustice. Otherwise, no matter how unfair the treatment of others might be, observers should not interpret the situation as relevant to the self (see Yzerbyt *et al.*, 2003).

We do not mean to suggest that observers will fail to view the unjust treatment of outgroup members as distressful or wrong (see Leach *et al.*, 2001). Instead, we propose that self-affirmation can affect people's attitudes and behavior only if people interpret the observed injustice as a threat to their self-concept. We present three studies that test our hypothesis that the interpretation of the unfair treatment of another person as a self-threat requires a shared group membership to be salient. In all three studies, we prime participants to think of themselves as female university students or as unique individuals (the identity salience manipulation). We expect participants primed to think of themselves as female university students to view the sexual harassment of a fellow female university student as a self-threat. If

true, group-primed participants who do not have the opportunity to write about an important individual value will report lower personal self-esteem than will participants who do have this opportunity. The presence or absence of a self-affirmation opportunity should not affect the personal self-esteem of participants primed to think of themselves as unique individuals.

We think that affirming an important individual value may enable participants to cope with the unjust treatment of a fellow group member because they can shift their attention away from a shared group membership to interpersonal differences (see Eidelman and Biernat, 2003). However, if we ask participants to affirm a group and not an individual value, they must focus on what they share in common with other group members. In other words, the affirmation manipulation does not allow participants to shift to a less inclusive level of self-categorization (see Turner *et al.*, 1987). If we ask participants to affirm an important group value, they cannot distance themselves from the self-threat that is implied when one shares a salient group membership with a target of unfair treatment. On the one hand, the request to affirm a group value may not protect personal self-esteem. Therefore, group-primed participants should report lower personal self-esteem than individual-primed participants. On the other hand, the request to focus on group values makes other individual qualities and degrees of personal self-worth less important (and perhaps less sensitive to threatening information). Further, when a shared group membership is salient, participants' commitment to the group, their perceptions of the group's collective strength and degree of group cohesion all tend to increase (see Spears *et al.*, 1997; Stuermer and Simon, 2004). This argument suggests that an opportunity to affirm or not affirm a group value may not influence *personal* self-esteem (although affirming group values might shape group attachment or identification). We explore this possibility in the third experiment.

In contrast to earlier research, we explicitly prime participants to think of themselves as unique individuals or representative group members. Only participants reminded of their shared group membership with the target should find reading about the sexual harassment of a female university student threatening. In this case, the opportunity to affirm an important individual value should influence personal self-esteem. If a shared group membership is not primed, the mistreatment of another group member should not be relevant, and therefore, not a potential threat to one's self-concept. To confirm that our results reflect differences in the degree of self-relevance and not changes in justice judgments, we also asked participants to rate how fair the situation was and how biased the perpetrator was. We did not expect the manipulations of identity salience and value affirmation to influence participants' justice judgments. However, it is possible that the degree to which participants viewed a situation as self-relevant might shape what they would recommend to the student. People may be more willing to

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recommend action if they feel self-involved. Therefore, we included several questions designed to explore the possible behavioral implications of our analysis.

Although, we think a measure of situational personal self-esteem is the best test of self-relevance, we also include a measure of negative and positive affect (Watson *et al.*, 1988). Self-affirmation researchers often include measures of negative mood to assess whether an affirmation opportunity reduces the negative feelings presumably aroused by the self-threat (Sherman and Kim, 2005; Weisenfeld *et al.*, 1999). However, it is equally plausible that the opportunity to affirm an important value elicits positive feelings (by reminding the person that he or she is a competent and moral person, Koole *et al.*, 1999). Unlike previous self-affirmation research (Aronson *et al.*, 1999), participants in these studies are observers and not victims of a distressing event. Therefore, we suspect that the levels of negative affect participants report may be low and not influenced by our experimental manipulations. However, drawing upon Koole *et al.* (1999) research, we expect that the opportunity to affirm an important personal value may be associated with more positive feelings, regardless of the identity salience manipulation.

Finally, we designed this study to address a methodological issue. In a previous laboratory experiment, undergraduates who witnessed the poor treatment of another student and employees who survived company lay-offs reported less intense negative feelings when they had the opportunity to affirm an important individual value than when they did not (Wiesenfeld *et al.*, 1999). However, participants who did not affirm an important individual value immediately completed the dependent measures. It is possible that it was the additional time, and not the task, that reduced participants' negative feelings in the self-affirmation condition. Therefore, we ask participants in the no affirmation experimental condition to write about a value that is least important to them (guaranteeing that all participants write a paragraph before answering any questions, Fein and Spencer, 1997; Spencer *et al.*, 2001).

STUDY 1

Method

Participants

Fifty-nine female undergraduates completed the questionnaire. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 60, $M(\text{age}) = 23.60$, $SD = 8.67$, $M(\text{number of semesters on campus}) = 3.44$, $SD = 1.90$. Some students were able to earn extra credit for an Introduction to Psychology course. All students partici-

pated in a \$100.00 payment lottery. After we collected all data, we selected (at random) one participant's name for a \$100.00 payment.

Overview of Design

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions of a 2 (group membership or individual identity primed) \times 2 (opportunity to self-affirm or not self-affirm) factorial design. Participants assigned to the group membership primed experimental condition were primed to think of themselves as female Sonoma State University students. Participants assigned to the individual identity-primed experimental condition were primed to think of themselves as unique individuals. All participants read a brief scenario in which a male professor sexually harassed a female student (see Appendix). Participants assigned to the self-affirmation experimental condition had an opportunity after reading the scenario to select and write about a value that was most important to them. Participants assigned to the no self-affirmation experimental condition had an opportunity to select and write about a value that was least important to them. After participants read the scenario and wrote the appropriate value paragraph, they completed a short adjective checklist, questions about what to recommend to the victim, a situational self-esteem scale, and an identification scale.

Manipulation of Identity Salience

Participants assigned to the group-primed experimental condition read that we were interested in how gender differences might shape students' attitudes toward potentially problematic faculty-student relationships. On the first page, participants circled whether they were male or female. They next read that for this study, they had been assigned the following "group member number." At the top of each page, these participants circled their gender and wrote their assigned "group member number." Before reading the harassment scenario, group-primed participants evaluated how well six sets of four adjectives described female students (including themselves) at their university. For each set of four adjectives (e.g., "fearless," "can talk easily," "predictable," and "kind-hearted"), participants labeled one adjective as the most descriptive of female Sonoma State University students' reactions to new situations and problems, a second adjective as the next most descriptive, a third adjective as the third most descriptive, and the last adjective as the fourth most descriptive.

Participants assigned to the individual-primed experimental condition read the same instructions and completed the same adjective checklist but in

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this case, we wrote that we were interested in how individual differences might shape students' attitudes toward potentially problematic faculty-student relationships. On the first page, participants wrote their birthday and month. They next read that for this study, they had been assigned the following "personal subject number." At the top of each page, individual-primed participants wrote their assigned "personal subject number." Before reading the harassment scenario, individual-primed participants evaluated how well the same six sets of four adjectives described them personally. We used the same priming procedure successfully in three prior experiments (Smith *et al.*, 1994; Smith and Spears, 1996).

Manipulation of Self-Affirmation

We used the manipulation designed by Fein and Spencer (1997) to create an opportunity to affirm or not affirm an individual value. Participants wrote a paragraph about one value selected from the following list: (1) aesthetics, appreciation of fine arts, (2) politics, an interest in political discussions and debates, (3) religion, an interest in topics such as ethics and morality, (4) social, an interest in improving society and its citizens, and (5) theoretical, an interest in scientific theory and research. Participants in the self-affirmation experimental condition circled the value that was most important to them and then wrote an explanatory paragraph. Participants in the no affirmation condition circled the value that was least important to them and then wrote an explanatory paragraph about why the value might be important to someone else (Fein and Spencer, 1997; Spencer *et al.*, 2001).

Dependent Measures

Preliminary Analyses. First, to make sure participants read the scenario closely, we asked participants to briefly summarize the scenario on the page following the scenario. Second, to make sure participants correctly read the self-affirmation instructions, we read their paragraphs about why they chose the particular value that they did. Third, we tracked whether participants recorded their subject number on each page of the questionnaire and, if appropriate, circled their group membership.

Adjective Checklist. After completing the value affirmation exercise, we asked participants to read a number of words that "describe different feelings and emotions" (the PANAS, Watson *et al.*, 1988). For each word, we asked them to indicate to what extent they felt "this way right now, i.e., at the present moment." Participants rated ten adjectives representing the PANAS

negative affect scale and ten adjectives representing the PANAS positive affect scale from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely).

Following Wiesenfeld *et al.* (1999), we combined the ten negative adjectives (scared, afraid, upset, distressed, jittery, nervous, ashamed, guilty, irritable, and hostile) into a single scale ($\alpha = 0.92$). We also created a second scale designed to capture positive feelings. This scale included participants' reports about the extent to which they felt proud, enthusiastic, strong, and inspired ($\alpha = 0.75$).

Situational Personal Self-esteem. The measure of personal self-esteem was a situational version of the seven-item Rosenberg (1979) self-esteem scale ($\alpha = 0.91$). Questions included: (1) I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others, (2) I feel that I have a number of good qualities, (3) All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure (reverse-scored), (4) I take a positive attitude toward myself, (5) On the whole, I am satisfied with myself, (6) I certainly feel useless at times (reverse-scored) and (7) At times, I think I am no good at all (reverse-scored). Participants were asked to respond to each of the questions as "they are true for you RIGHT NOW." Ratings could range from 1 (disagree) to 7 (agree).

Perceived Injustice. To explore the extent to which participants viewed the scenario as unfair, we combined the answers (rated on a seven point scale) to three questions: (1) How fairly did the professor treat the student described in the story? (reverse-scored) (2) Was the professor's behavior wrong? (3) How severely should the professor be punished? ($\alpha = 0.52$). We also asked participants to rate the extent to which they felt the professor was biased against women from 1 (not at all) to 4 (definitely).

Recommendations to the Female Victim. We asked students to indicate from 1 (not at all) to 7 (absolutely) whether the student in the scenario should (1) report the professor's behavior to the department chair, (2) report the professor's behavior to the Dean of Students, (3) write a formal letter describing the situation, and (4) talk to a personal lawyer about a lawsuit. Because participants' ratings for the fourth question were not closely related to the other three questions, we created one scale that represented reports to the administration ($\alpha = 0.61$). We treated the question about contacting a personal lawyer as a separate question.

Group Identification and Victim Similarity. We included two measures that we thought would determine whether the priming manipulation was successful. First, we asked participants to indicate how similar they felt to the female student in the scenario on a scale from 1 (not at all similar) to 7 (very similar). Second, we combined participants' ratings of seven statements from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly) as a measure of identification with female students at this university (see Crocker and Luthanen, 1990; Ellemers *et al.*, 1999). Participants rated whether (1) they identified with other female SSU students, (2) being a female SSU student

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had little to do with themselves (reversed-scored), (3) being a female SSU student was not important to the kind of person they were (reverse-scored), (4) they were proud to think of themselves as a female SSU student, (5) they were glad to be a female SSU student, (6) they felt good about being a female SSU student, and (7) they felt strong ties to other female SSU students ($\alpha = 0.73$).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

To confirm that participants read the scenario, we asked participants to summarize briefly what they had read and to report the final grade received by the student. Ninety-three percent of the students correctly summarized the story (and the other four students reported their very negative opinions of the situation). One participant assigned to the no affirmation experimental condition chose to write about the value most important to her. Her data were excluded. Ninety-three percent of the participants correctly reported that the final grade given in the scenario was a “C-.” Ninety-one percent of the participants completed the relevant header at the top of each page. In Table I, we list the means and standard deviations for all the dependent measures in each of the four experimental conditions.

Table I. Means and Standard deviations for Dependent Measures Used in Study 1

	Individual Identity primed				Shared group membership primed			
	Most important value		Least important value		Most important value		Least important value	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Negative feelings	1.82	0.75	1.35	0.43	1.64	0.52	1.49	0.97
Positive feelings	3.25	0.77	2.70	0.93	3.13	0.86	2.74	0.78
Situational self-esteem	6.18	0.82	6.44	0.86	5.78	1.13	4.72	1.28
Unfair treatment	6.44	0.33	6.52	0.78	6.50	0.45	6.2	0.68
Professor biased	3.79	1.08	3.18	1.08	3.64	1.13	3.38	1.05
Report incident	6.78	0.48	6.91	0.22	6.74	0.46	6.84	0.32
Contact lawyer	5.05	1.47	5.36	1.21	4.50	1.16	3.80	1.37
Group identification	4.19	1.26	4.33	1.25	4.36	1.17	4.11	1.51
Similar to victim	3.99	1.60	2.45	2.21	2.00	1.36	1.89	1.19

Note. Participants rated frequency of feeling adjectives from 1 to 5, personal self-esteem, identification with female SSU students and similarity to the victim from 1 to 7, recommendations to the victim and professor bias from 1 to 4. Higher scores indicate stronger agreement.

Situational Personal Self-esteem

The key question is whether the affirmation manipulation will influence ratings of personal self-esteem for participants primed to think about their shared group membership with the female victim. A 2×2 ANOVA with situational self-esteem as the dependent variable revealed that group-primed participants reported statistically significantly lower situational self-esteem ($M = 5.25$) than did individual-primed participants ($M = 6.31$), $F(1,54) = 13.94$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.21$. More importantly, as shown in Fig. 1, this pattern is qualified by a statistically significant interaction between identity salience and affirmation opportunity, $F(1,54) = 5.33$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.09$. Simple effects analyses showed that for group primed participants, the opportunity to affirm an individual value was associated with higher personal self-esteem ($M = 5.78$) than no opportunity ($M = 4.72$), $F(1,55) = 7.87$, $p < 0.05$. However, for individual primed participants, the opportunity to affirm an individual value was not associated with higher personal self-esteem ($M = 6.18$) compared with the “no opportunity” or control condition ($M = 6.44$), $F(1,55) = 0.02$, $p = 0.89$. Group-primed participants who did not have a chance to affirm an individual value reported lower personal self-esteem than did individual-primed participants who did not affirm a value, $F(1, 55) = 20.09$, $p < 0.05$. The personal self-esteem for group-primed participants who affirmed an individual value did not differ significantly from the personal self-esteem for individual-primed participants who affirmed a value, $F(1, 55) = 0.85$, $p = 0.36$.¹ As predicted, group-primed participants who were unable to affirm an important personal value reported the least situational self-esteem.

Adjective Checklist

We next explored whether the experimental manipulations shaped participants' immediate emotional reactions. A 2×2 ANOVA with ratings of the negative adjectives as the dependent variable revealed no statistically significant effects ($M = 1.60$, $SD = 0.72$). However, a 2×2 ANOVA showed that participants who affirmed an important individual value reported more positive feelings ($M = 3.19$) than did participants who did not affirm an important individual value ($M = 2.72$), $F(1,55) = 4.52$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.08$. Regardless of the priming manipulation, reminding participants of an important personal value increased their positive affect.

¹If we treat our hypothesis as a contrast, it is statistically significant, $F(1, 57) = 48.39$, $p < 0.05$.

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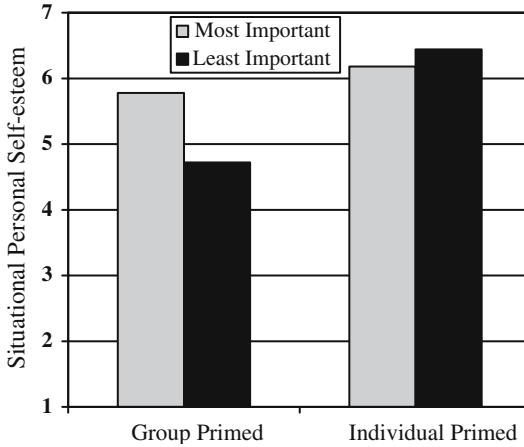


Fig. 1. Mean ratings of situational personal self-esteem—Study 1

Perceived Injustice

To confirm that all participants viewed the situation as extremely unfair, we conducted a 2×2 ANOVA with perceived injustice as the dependent variable. Across all experimental conditions, participants rated the professor's behavior as extremely unfair ($M = 6.41$, $SD = 0.56$). However, a 2×2 ANOVA with assessments of gender bias as the dependent variable revealed that participants who were primed to think of themselves as group members viewed the professor as more biased ($M = 3.72$) than did participants who were primed to think of themselves as a unique person ($M = 3.16$), $F(1, 55) = 3.95$, $p = 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.06$.

Group Identification and Victim Similarity

To explore whether we made their identity as female university students salient to group-primed participants, we asked participants to rate the extent to which they identified with female students at their university and the extent to which they felt similar to the target. The experimental manipulations did not influence participants' degree of identification with female university students ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.28$). A 2×2 ANOVA with similarity to the female student as the dependent variable revealed that participants who affirmed an individual value saw the female student as less similar

($M = 1.85$) than participants who did not affirm an individual value ($M = 2.96$), $F(1,55) = 3.56$, $p = 0.07$, $\eta^2 = 0.06$.

Recommendations to Student

Finally, we explored whether the experimental manipulations shaped participants' recommendations to the victim. A 2×2 ANOVA with recommendations to the student as the dependent variable revealed that participants who affirmed an individual value were less likely to recommend that the student talk to a personal lawyer ($M = 4.15$) than participants who did not affirm an individual value ($M = 5.21$), $F(1,55) = 8.98$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.14$. The experimental manipulations did not influence participants' strong recommendations that the behavior should be reported to the administration ($M = 6.82$, $SD = 0.38$).

Discussion

As predicted, only group-primed participants who lacked the opportunity to affirm an important individual value reported lower situational personal self-esteem after reading about the harassment of a female university student. This pattern is particularly striking because all the participants agreed that the situation was extremely unfair. The affirmation of an individual value was associated with more positive feelings (but no difference in negative feelings) and a weaker recommendation that the student talk to a lawyer and perceptions of less similarity to the harassed student. We think that these results offer some support for our proposal that in this context affirming an important individual value enabled participants to distance themselves from the female target.

However, before drawing any strong conclusions, it seemed important to replicate the situational personal self-esteem results. We also used the second study as an opportunity to include social justice as a sixth possible value choice. Although justice was not one of the five values listed, ten women (five in the group-primed individual value affirmation experimental condition) spontaneously mentioned "injustice" or "unfairness" in their value paragraph. One could argue that these participants affirmed a value related to the source of the self-threat. Therefore, they might feel even more upset and threatened and, as a consequence, work harder to distance themselves from the female victim (leading to reports of higher personal self-esteem).²

²We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for their helpful suggestion.

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As an initial test of this possibility, we compared the ratings for group-primed participants who mentioned injustice with group-primed participants who did not. We also compared group-primed participants who selected “social” or “political” as values (arguably more closely related to justice values) with group-primed participants who did not. Unfortunately, these comparisons revealed no clear differences for any of the dependent measures. However, this pattern may reflect the small numbers of participants who mentioned justice relevant values. We thought that if we included a value that explicitly mentioned “justice,” more participants might make this choice. This change might give us a chance to explore whether participants’ value choices might lead to greater defensiveness. However, the primary purpose of this second study was to replicate the pattern of personal self-esteem results that we found in the first study.

STUDY 2

Method

Participants

Sixty-six female undergraduates completed the questionnaire. Participants’ ages ranged from 17 to 25, $M(\text{age}) = 19.28$, $SD = 1.56$, $M(\text{number of semesters on campus}) = 2.82$, $SD = 1.64$. Some students were able to earn extra credit for an Introduction to Psychology course. All the participants participated in a \$100.00 participant payment lottery.

Procedure and Materials

Participants read the same scenario and list of values as presented in the first study. However, we included a sixth value defined as “justice, an interest in fair treatment and outcomes for everyone.” As in the first study, we randomly assigned participants to complete a questionnaire in which their identity as a female university student or unique person was primed. We also randomly assigned participants to select and write about a value that was either most or least important to them. Participants completed the same list of negative adjectives ($\alpha = 0.70$) and positive adjectives ($\alpha = 0.78$). They also completed the measure of fairness ($\alpha = 0.59$), measure of situational personal self-esteem ($\alpha = 0.89$), measure of identification with female university students ($\alpha = 0.72$), measure of recommendations to the student ($\alpha = 0.87$), and the other questions included in the first study.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

All students correctly summarized the story and 90% correctly reported that the final grade given in the scenario was a “C-.” One participant assigned to the most important value affirmation experimental condition chose to write about several different values that were most important to her. Her data were excluded. Eighty-eight percent of the participants completed the relevant header at the top of each page. We present the means and standard deviations for the four experimental conditions in Table II.

Situational Personal Self-esteem

The key question is whether the affirmation manipulation will influence ratings of personal self-esteem for participants primed to think about their shared group membership with the female victim. A 2×2 ANOVA with situational self-esteem as the dependent variable revealed a statistically significant interaction between identity salience and affirmation opportunity, $F(1,64) = 4.23$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.06$ (see Fig. 2). Simple effects analyses showed that for group-primed participants, the opportunity to affirm an individual value was associated with significantly higher personal self-esteem

Table II. Means and Standard Deviations for Dependent Measures Used in Study 2

	Individual identity primed				Shared group membership primed			
	Most important value		Least important value		Most important value		Least important value	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Negative feelings	1.50	0.42	1.43	0.32	1.82	0.66	1.53	0.35
Positive feelings	2.75	0.92	2.98	1.06	3.57	0.74	2.55	0.82
Situational self-esteem	5.83	0.75	5.91	0.88	6.29	0.56	5.43	1.31
Unfair treatment	6.71	0.40	6.60	0.71	6.50	0.59	6.67	0.54
Professor biased	3.79	0.80	3.43	1.16	3.53	1.02	3.80	0.52
Report incident	6.49	0.80	6.76	0.54	6.77	0.51	6.62	0.74
Contact lawyer	4.93	1.83	4.64	0.84	5.68	1.29	3.80	0.52
Group identification	4.51	1.05	4.73	1.15	4.90	0.84	4.69	0.73
Similar to victim	2.40	1.77	3.00	1.54	2.84	2.01	3.25	1.77

Note. Participants rated frequency of feeling adjectives from 1 to 5, personal self-esteem, identification with female SSU students, and similarity to the victim from 1 to 7, recommendations to the victim and professor bias from 1 to 4. Higher scores indicate stronger agreement.

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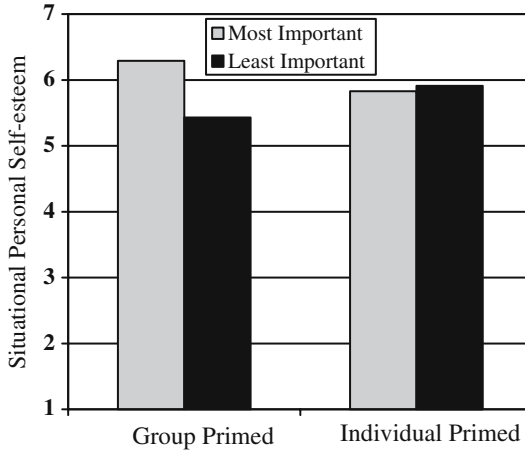


Fig. 2. Mean ratings of situational personal self-esteem—Study 2

($M = 6.29$) than no opportunity ($M = 5.43$), $F(1,64) = 8.57$, $p < 0.05$). However, for individually primed participants, the opportunity to affirm an individual value was not associated with higher personal self-esteem ($M = 5.83$) in comparison with the “no opportunity” condition ($M = 5.91$), $F(1,64) = 0.05$, $p = .83$. Group-primed participants who did not have a chance to affirm an individual value reported marginally lower personal self-esteem than did individual-primed participants who did not affirm a value, $F(1, 64) = 2.79$, $p = 0.10$. The personal self-esteem for group-primed participants who did affirm an individual value did not differ significantly from the personal self-esteem for individual-primed participants who affirmed a value, $F(1, 64) = 2.43$, $p = .12$.³ As predicted, group-primed participants who were unable to affirm an important personal value reported the least situational self-esteem.

Adjective Checklist

The second question is whether the experimental manipulations shaped participants' immediate emotional reactions. A 2×2 ANOVA with ratings of the negative adjectives as the dependent variable revealed that group-primed participants reported slightly more negative feelings ($M = 1.67$) than did individual-primed participants ($M = 1.46$), $F(1,64) = 3.28$, $p = 0.08$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$.

³If we treat the hypothesis as a contrast, it is statistically significant, $F(1, 64) = 5.89$, $p < 0.05$.

A 2×2 ANOVA with ratings of the positive adjectives as the dependent variable revealed that participants who affirmed an important individual value reported more positive feelings ($M = 3.16$) than did participants who lacked a similar opportunity ($M = 2.97$), $F(1,67) = 3.28$, $p = 0.08$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$. This main effect was qualified by a statistically significant interaction, $F(1,67) = 8.35$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.12$ (see Fig. 3). Simple effects analyses showed that for group-primed participants, the opportunity to affirm an individual value was associated with more positive feelings ($M = 3.57$) in comparison with the “no opportunity” condition ($M = 2.55$), $F(1,65) = 12.90$, $p < 0.05$). However, for individual-primed participants, the opportunity to affirm an individual value was not associated with more positive feelings ($M = 2.75$) in comparison with the “no opportunity” condition ($M = 2.98$), $F(1, 65) = 0.46$, $p = 50$. Group-primed participants who affirmed an individual value reported more positive feelings than did individual-primed participants who affirmed a value, $F(1, 65) = 7.81$, $p < 0.05$. Among participants not given an opportunity to affirm an individual value, group-primed participants reported no more positive feelings than did individual-primed participants, $F(1, 65) = 2.31$, $p = 13$.

Value Choice

In this study, we offered “justice” as a value choice to explore whether (1) group-primed participants might be more likely to choose this value as most important and (2) if group-primed participants chose this value, whether they would report higher levels of personal self-esteem. Eleven

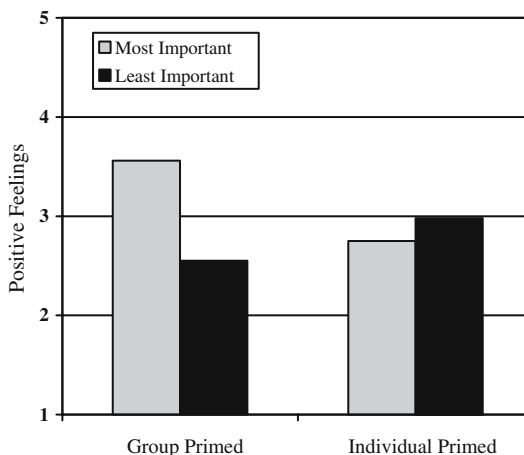


Fig. 3. Mean ratings of positive feelings—Study 2

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participants (16.2%) chose justice as the topic for their paragraph. The experimental conditions did not appear to influence the frequency with which participants chose justice as a value, $\chi^2(1) = 1.93$, $p = 0.17$. Group-primed participants who selected “justice,” “social,” or “political” reported slightly higher personal self-esteem ($M = 6.54$) than did group-primed participants who selected the other three values ($M = 6.11$), $t(17) = 1.68$, $p = 0.11$. There does not seem to be clear evidence that group-primed participants preferred justice-related values.

Perceived Injustice

To confirm that all participants viewed the scenario similarly, we conducted a 2×2 ANOVA with perceived fairness as the dependent variable. Across all experimental conditions, participants rated the professor’s behavior as extremely unfair ($M = 6.64$, $SD = 0.57$). The experimental manipulations also did not influence the extent to which participants viewed the professor as biased against women ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.88$).

Group Identification and Victim Similarity

To explore whether we made their identity as female university students salient to group-primed participants, we conducted a 2×2 ANOVA with identification with female students as the dependent measure. Across all experimental conditions, participants reported moderate identification with female university students ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 0.92$). Participants who affirmed an important value reported feeling less similar ($M = 2.62$) than did participants who did not ($M = 3.13$) but this difference was not statistically significant, $F(1, 55) = 1.23$, $p = 0.27$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$. No other main or interaction effects attained statistical significance.

Recommendations to Student

Finally, to explore the behavioral implications of these manipulations, we conducted a 2×2 ANOVA with punishment recommendations as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed that participants who affirmed an individual value were marginally less likely to recommend that the student talk to a personal lawyer ($M = 4.79$) than participants who did not affirm an individual value ($M = 5.21$), $F(1,55) = 3.38$, $p = 0.07$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$. The experimental manipulations did not influence participants’ strong recommendations that the student should report the behavior to the administration ($M = 6.66$, $SD = 0.66$).

Discussion

As in the first study, group-primed participants who lacked the opportunity to write about an important individual value reported the lowest situational personal self-esteem. In this study, we also found that group-primed participants who did not affirm an important personal value reported less positive affect than did group-primed participants who affirmed an important value, replicating the situational personal self-esteem ratings.

However, we did not find clear evidence that group-primed participants were more likely to select justice as a value or that those group-primed participants who selected more justice-oriented values felt more defensive. Unexpectedly, group-primed participants reported more negative affect than did individual-primed participants; this difference did not emerge in the first study and was not qualified by the self-affirmation manipulation. Interestingly, group-primed participants in this study did not view the professor as more biased than did individual-primed participants—a difference that did emerge in the first study. These differences might indicate different ways that group-primed participants can react to threatening information, but without more consistent patterns, we hesitate to draw any firm conclusions. Still, as in the first study, participants all rated the scenario as extremely unfair, and participants who affirmed an important individual value were less likely to recommend that the student contact a lawyer and viewed themselves as slightly less similar to the student.

The first two studies suggest that the opportunity to affirm an important individual value may enable people to cope with a self-threat that can be caused by observing the unfair treatment of another group member. Yet, there are numerous situations in which group members challenge and confront the unfair treatment of another group member, often at great personal risk to themselves. Further, interviews with activists and other participants in collective action suggest that they view the victims of injustice as sharing an important group membership and the injustice as violating deeply held beliefs (Minnow, 1998; Potter and Reicher, 1987).

How can we reconcile our data with these observations? We argue that the mistreatment of the female student is self-relevant because group-primed participants have adopted an extended self-concept that includes all female students. Affirming an important individual value offers participants a way to dissociate themselves from an ingroup victim by shifting participants' attention away from a shared group membership to their personal selves (Turner *et al.*, 1987). Although this shift might enable some self-protective strategies, it also means that any benefits gained from being one of many are lost. In other words, viewing oneself as a group member can remind people of one important source of social support (see Stuermer and Simon, 2004).

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Therefore, in the third study, we replace the opportunity to affirm an important individual value with the opportunity to affirm an important group value. This change means that participants do not have an opportunity to shift their focus to their unique individual self (Edelman and Biernat, 2003; Turner *et al.*, 1987). However, the focus on group values may increase participants' commitment to the group, their perceptions of the group's collective strength and degree of group cohesion (see Stuermer and Simon, 2004).

If we present the affirmation manipulation as related to the group and not the person, it should not disrupt group-primed participants' frame of reference or "scope of justice", as is the case for the individual value affirmation manipulation. On one hand, this choice does not enable group-primed participants to distance themselves from the self-threat through individual value affirmation. On the other hand, it may not make the group-primed participants who are unable to affirm an important value feel as vulnerable because they would see themselves as one of many female university students who could challenge this single male professor. Given that individual-primed participants should not see the scenario as relevant to their self-concept, we did not expect this shift to group values to influence personal self-esteem. To our knowledge, this is the first study to ask participants to affirm or not affirm values important to the group rather than the self. Perhaps this will be the context in which group-primed participants find it most difficult to ignore the mistreatment of another group member.

STUDY 3

Method

Participants

Seventy-one female undergraduates completed the questionnaire. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 62, $M(\text{age}) = 26.06$, $SD = 11.27$, $M(\text{number of semesters on campus}) = 3.74$, $SD = 2.44$. Some students were able to earn extra credit for an Introduction to Psychology course. All the participants participated in a \$100.00 participant payment lottery.

Procedure and Materials

Participants read the same scenario and list of five values as presented in the first study. However, in this study, we asked participants to circle and write about the value that they felt was either most or least important to "female SSU students, if you are a woman. If you are a man, please circle the

value that you feel is most/least important to male SSU students.” As in the first study, we randomly assigned participants to complete a questionnaire in which their identity as a female university student or as a unique person was primed. We also randomly assigned participants to select and write about a value that was most or least important to female university students as a group. Participants completed the same list of negative adjectives ($\alpha = 0.82$), positive adjectives ($\alpha = 0.85$), measure of fairness ($\alpha = 0.87$), measure of situational personal self-esteem ($\alpha = 0.88$), measure of identification with female students ($\alpha = 0.65$), measure of recommendations to the student ($\alpha = 0.90$), and the other questions included in the first two studies.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Eighty-three percent of the students correctly summarized the story. The other 14 participants reported their very negative opinion about the situation. Ninety-two percent correctly reported that the final grade given in the scenario was a “C-.” One participant assigned to the most important value affirmation experimental condition chose to write about several different values most important to her, so her data were excluded from the analyses. Ninety percent of the participants completed the relevant header at the top of each page. We present the means and standard deviations for the four experimental conditions in Table III.

Situational Personal Self-esteem

The first question was whether the shift to a group value affirmation manipulation would reveal the same interaction pattern that we observed in the first two studies. A 2×2 ANOVA with situational self-esteem as the dependent variable revealed no statistically significant effects ($M = 5.98$, $SD = 0.98$).

Adjective Checklist

A 2×2 ANOVA with ratings of the negative adjectives as the dependent variable revealed no statistically significant effects ($M = 1.63$, $SD = 0.60$). A 2×2 ANOVA with ratings of the positive adjectives as the dependent variable revealed a tendency for participants who were primed to think of themselves as a group member to report more positive feelings ($M = 3.16$)

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Table III. Means and Standard Deviations for Dependent Measures Used in Study 3

	Individual identity primed				Shared group membership primed			
	Most important value		Least important value		Most important value		Least important value	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Negative feelings	1.72	0.67	1.67	0.62	1.59	0.67	1.55	0.50
Positive feelings	2.72	1.01	6.51	0.84	3.43	0.99	2.88	0.81
Situational self-esteem	5.89	0.78	6.01	1.13	5.96	1.40	6.04	0.61
Unfair treatment	6.51	0.84	6.62	0.96	6.91	0.23	6.84	0.43
Professor biased	3.50	0.99	3.75	1.07	3.93	0.26	3.76	0.75
Report incident	6.47	1.23	6.80	0.62	6.87	0.35	6.80	0.73
Contact lawyer	4.68	1.45	5.55	1.50	5.53	1.68	5.35	1.41
Group identification	5.06	0.98	4.33	1.19	5.06	1.03	4.97	0.60
Similar to victim	2.50	1.62	2.75	1.86	2.60	1.68	5.35	1.41

Note. Participants rated frequency of feeling adjectives from 1 to 5, personal self-esteem, identification with female SSU students and similarity to the victim from 1 to 7, recommendations to the victim and professor bias from 1 to 4. Higher scores indicate stronger agreement.

than participants who were primed to think of themselves as unique persons ($M = 2.71$), $F(1, 67) = 3.67$, $p = 0.06$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$. The affirmation manipulation did not influence participants' ratings of the adjectives.

Perceived Injustice

To confirm that all participants viewed the situation as extremely unfair, we conducted a 2×2 ANOVA with perceived injustice as the dependent variable. Group-primed participants viewed the professor's behavior as slightly more unjust ($M = 6.89$) in comparison with individual-primed participants ($M = 6.56$), $F(1, 67) = 3.43$, $p = 0.07$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$. The experimental manipulations did not influence participants' assessments of the professor's degree of gender bias ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.85$).

Recommendations to Student

The experimental manipulations did not influence participants' strong recommendations that the student should report the behavior to the administration ($M = 6.73$, $SD = 0.77$) or talk with a personal lawyer ($M = 5.27$, $SD = 1.52$).

Group Identification and Victim Similarity

A 2×2 ANOVA with identification with female university students as the dependent variable revealed that participants who affirmed an important group value identified marginally more strongly with female university students ($M = 5.06$) than did participants who did not ($M = 4.65$), $F(1, 67) = 3.04$, $p = 0.09$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$. The experimental manipulations did not influence participants' assessments of their similarity to the female student ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.71$).

Discussion

In contrast to the results from the first two studies, group-primed participants who affirmed an important group value did not report higher personal self-esteem in comparison to group-primed participants who did not get this opportunity. The affirmation manipulation did not "disrupt" the collective frame of reference, and even participants who wrote about unimportant values may have been reminded of the implicit social support being a part of a group implies. They may have felt less vulnerable and isolated in comparison to group-primed participants asked to write about an unimportant individual group value. Of course, without a direct assessment of collective self-esteem, common fate or social support, our explanation must remain speculative.

Interestingly, the opportunity to affirm an important group value increased participants' degree of identification with female undergraduate students, regardless of the priming condition. Further, regardless of the affirmation manipulation, group-primed participants viewed the situation as more unfair and reported more positive feelings than did individual-primed participants. Although these differences were not strong, they are provocative. In particular, the evidence suggests that participants could view the situation as unfair but also report feeling stronger and more inspired. The data from this study suggest that if people view themselves as group representatives and are reminded of shared group values, they may feel more empowered to challenge the situation.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results support our argument that before people can use self-affirmation strategies to cope with the unfair treatment of another person, they must view the target as part of an important reference group. We think that group-primed participants who affirmed an important individual value

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reported higher levels of situational personal self-esteem than did group-primed participants because it allowed them to distance or re-categorize themselves as single and unique individuals who were different from the female target. However, it is intriguing that when group-primed participants selected a value that was important or not important to the group, group-primed participants who were unable to affirm an important value did not report lower levels of *personal* self-esteem. It does not seem to be the value content that is most important, but the frame of reference the affirmation manipulation primes.

We argue that self-affirmation, at least in this context, offers participants a way to distance themselves from an ingroup target. We can contrast our focus on self-relevance with the argument that self-affirmation reduces self-defensiveness and individual rationalizations (Sherman *et al.*, 2000; Sherman and Kim, 2005). For example, Sherman and Kim (2005) propose that the opportunity to affirm important individual values enabled team members to view their team's performance more objectively (e.g., they were less likely to overestimate their teams' contributions to a win and to underestimate their teams' responsibility for a loss).

If our results reflect a reduction in self-defensiveness, we would expect to find differences in reports of negative affect, not positive affect. Yet, in these studies, the value affirmation manipulation influenced the frequency of positive affect rather than negative affect. Of course, participants reported very low levels of negative affect (making any differences difficult to detect). The low levels of negative affect may reflect our use of scenarios or perhaps the unconscious nature of self-threat (see Koole *et al.*, 1999). Still, we find that affirmation increases positive affect (supporting the argument that people use other parts of the self as a resource) in the context of the predicted effects on personal self-esteem. Therefore, we think that it is important not to assume that affirmation effects always reflect defensive rationalizations. Furthermore, even if there are many contexts in which the "objective" assessments of information or performance produced by self-affirmation are useful, we think our research illustrates at least one context in which self-affirmation does not produce useful results. If people can affirm their individual self-worth in a different domain, they feel less connected to the mistreatment of other group members.

Unlike most previous self-affirmation research, we distinguished personal identity salience and values from group salience and values. Although this distinction produced some provocative findings, our design did not allow us to distinguish between two possible reasons for why priming a shared group-membership increases self-relevance. Based on self-categorization theory (Turner *et al.*, 1987), we argue that when we reminded participants of their group membership, they viewed the female target as interchangeable with themselves. As a fellow group member who shares the same goals,

values, and vulnerabilities, they found her mistreatment distressing. Alternatively, observing the mistreatment of another ingroup member might remind observers that they could encounter the same problem (e.g., position identification, Lerner *et al.*, 1976; Van Zomeren and Lodewijkx, 2005). In other words, participants' personal self-esteem ratings represent more instrumental concerns. In order to distinguish between these two explanations, it will be important to ask participants in different experimental conditions the extent to which they think they might be harassed by a professor.

Other measures reveal further limitations. For example, we have no direct evidence to confirm the success of the group priming manipulation. Group-primed participants in the first two studies were no more likely to report identifying with female university students than individual-primed participants. In the third study, it was the affirmation of group values that increased female university identification, not the identity salience manipulation. In retrospect, we should not be surprised by these results. Researchers design measures of identification (Ellemers *et al.*, 1999) to capture the degree to which a group is valued and central to the self-concept. Although researchers sometimes use these measures to assess the degree to which people are likely to use a particular social category, some self-categorization and social identity researchers distinguish between situational salience and social identification (Haslam, 2001). In other words, making a group membership salient in a particular situation might not influence the degree to which participants identify with their group (or feel similar to other group members). Our measure of recommendations to the target also represents an indirect way to explore participants' behavioral intentions. Perhaps if we had asked participants to help or denigrate the victim or directly punish the perpetrator, we might have found the relationship between the degree of self-relevance and behavioral involvement that we predicted (see Skitka *et al.*, 2004).

Finally, it is important to recognize that our participants are women—a group that is likely more familiar and more vulnerable to sexual harassment problems than other groups. Without showing similar effects among men or with other social categories, we should generalize these conclusions with caution. We also do not know whether similar dynamics might operate if the salient group membership includes the perpetrator rather than the victim of mistreatment.

Still, what is most striking about this research is the flexibility of self-categorization (see also Ellemers *et al.*, 1999; Turner *et al.*, 1997; Yzerbyt *et al.*, 2003). We think our results suggest how fragile feelings of felt injustice on behalf of another person can be. Given the numerous ways in which people might cope with the self-threat implied by such injustices, perhaps it is no

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surprise that, as Martin (1986) wrote (paraphrasing Gurr, 1970), the question is not “why men rebel?” but why they do not.

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APPENDIX

Imagine that during the last semester, you witnessed a male faculty member repeatedly harass Janet, one of your female classmates. Professor B would often remark “you’re just a girl, what do you know.” In front of the entire class, Professor B would say to her “How about if we go to Motel 6 down the road and negotiate your grade for this assignment?” and on a few occasions, he would say to her “Would you get the keys out of my pocket please?” Or he would drop chalk on the floor and ask her to bend over and pick it up. At the end of the semester, when Professor B was going over final grades with each student you overheard the professor ask your classmate what her GPA was. She reported a 4.0 to which the professor responded, “What did you do to get those grades? Exchange sexual favors?” During the semester break, Janet told you that she received a C– in Professor B’s class.

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