



Report

Cognitive consequences of affirming the self: The relationship between self-affirmation and object construal

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ABSTRACT

Previous research suggests that affirming one's important values is a powerful way of protecting one's general self integrity, allowing non-defensive processing of self-relevant information. In a series of four studies linking self-affirmation with construal level, we find that in addition to any self buffering effect, thinking about one's values and why they are important more generally shifts cognitive processing towards superordinate and structured thinking. Self-affirmation leads participants to perceive a greater degree of structure within their selves (Study 1), to increasingly identify actions in terms of their end-states (Study 2), to more strongly distinguish between primary and secondary object features (Study 3) and to perform better on tasks requiring abstract, structured thinking than those requiring detail-oriented, concrete thinking. Together, these findings suggest that thinking about important values helps individuals to structure information and focus on the big picture.

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Research focusing on self-affirmation attests to the power of affirming one's important values. Self-affirmation has been linked with less biased information processing (Cohen, Aronson, & Steele, 2000; Reed & Aspinwall, 1998; Sherman, Nelson, & Steele, 2000; Spencer, Fein, & Lomore, 2001), less prejudice and stereotyping (Fein & Spencer, 1997), and less self handicapping (Siegel, Scillitoe, & Parks-Yancy, 2005). It reduces the stressfulness associated with evaluative situations (Creswell et al., 2005), the accessibility of threatening cognitions (Koole, Smeets, van Knippenberg, & Dijksterhuis, 1999) and the motivational force of dissonance provoking situations (Steele & Liu, 1983). Indeed, self-affirmation appears to be a powerful way of protecting one's general self integrity, allowing non-defensive processing of self-relevant information.

In the current research, we suggest that, in addition to protecting one's general self integrity, thinking about one's central values and why they are important has a broad effect on information processing. Specifically, we propose that the process of focusing on central and defining features of the self leads to a general tendency to focus on central and defining information, affecting processing in a variety of contexts and across a multitude of domains. In what follows, we elaborate on our rationale for this prediction and discuss it in the terms utilized by construal level theory, a recent theoretical perspective that specifies a range of outcomes associated with more or less gist-based processing.

Self-affirmation as procedural priming

Social psychologists have studied priming – the transfer of an activated concept to an unrelated context – since the late 1970s, when Donald and his ambiguously hostile tendencies captured researchers' attention (Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977). Early work focused on semantic priming, the activation of a semantic concept such as, in Donald's case, the trait hostile. Researchers soon established that priming could exert a widespread effect, influencing social judgment (for a meta analysis, see DeCoster & Claypool, 2004), attitudes (e.g., Kawakami, Dovidio, & Dijksterhuis, 2003; Ledgerwood & Chaiken, 2007) and even behavior (e.g., Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996). Furthermore, priming effects were not limited to the activation of semantic concepts: activated goals could guide behavior a la conscious goal pursuit (Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trötschel, 2001; Shah, 2005), and styles of processing could be activated via procedural primes that led one through a set of procedures, establishing a temporary “mindset” or information processing orientation (cf., Schooler, 2002; Smith & Branscombe, 1987; for a recent review of different forms of priming, see Förster, Liberman, & Friedman, 2007).

From this perspective, it is intriguing to consider the process of self-affirmation not only in terms of its motivational consequences for the self, but also in terms of the procedures themselves that are typically involved in such affirmation. That is, thinking about and affirming one's important values and priorities affirms one's sense of self, but it is also in itself a cognitive procedure in which individuals think about the self in terms of its most central features. As

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such, we believe that engaging in this procedure will invoke a general, widespread tendency to think about items in terms of their central, essential elements, affecting the way people process both self-relevant and self-irrelevant information. Moreover, we argue that this tendency to focus on the gist or primary features of an item is part of a pattern of processing by which information is represented in an abstract, schematic fashion that focuses on essentialities vs. a more concrete, specific fashion that fails to distinguish what is important from what is secondary.

This processing distinction is related to construal level theory (CLT; Trope & Liberman, 2003), which distinguishes between two forms of mental representation: high-level and low-level construals. High-level construals are abstractions that capture core, central aspects. Rather than containing rich and thorough details, these representations extract the gist from the available information by emphasizing a few primary, defining features of events. Low-level construals, in contrast, are relatively concrete, unstructured representations that include an item or event's subordinate and incidental features. These representations are thus rich in detail, but they do not strongly distinguish between what is secondary and what is defining.

Utilizing this distinction between elements that are more central and defining vs. those that are more secondary or supporting in nature, recent research has related a variety of diverse variables to the concept of construal-level (for a recent review see Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007). For example, reasoning that end-states are what give goals their definition, whereas means reflect the supporting issue of how a goal will be attained, Liberman and Trope (1998) argued that desirability concerns are more superordinate in nature than feasibility concerns, and thus increasingly captured as representation moves to a higher level of construal. A similar distinction has been made regarding central vs. peripheral object information (Trope & Liberman, 2000), trait vs. behavior information (Nussbaum, Trope, & Liberman, 2003), and global vs. local trend information (Henderson, Fujita, Trope, & Liberman, 2006). Though diverse, the common factor uniting these various distinctions is that each distinguishes between a more defining element (a "high-level construal feature") and a lower level feature that is subordinate to that high-level aspect. Indeed, in line with this conceptualization, factors that broadly influence construal-level (e.g., temporal distance) similarly impact each of these variables. Moreover, recent studies have suggested that a widespread tendency to process information in a high-level construal fashion (e.g., a high-level "mindset") can be procedurally primed by engaging in any one procedure associated with this type of processing (e.g., Fujita, Trope, Liberman, & Levin-Sagi, 2006).

Approaching the process of self-affirmation from this perspective, while individuals undoubtedly use affirmation to bolster and defend the self, it is at the same time a procedure through which they focus on their most central self-characteristics. Consequently, given that a major hallmark of high vs. low-level construals is whether representations emphasize what is central and defining vs. what is secondary in nature, and that construal mindsets can be activated by engaging in procedures associated with high or low-level construal processing, we believe that this process of focusing on central self-characteristics will act as a procedural prime, activating a widespread construal orientation and influencing processing on an array of tasks associated with focusing on central, defining elements.

Critically, because this hypothesis revolves around shared procedures, not shared content, we expect to find that self-affirmation influences processing of the self, and also processing of information that is irrelevant to the self. Why, then, examine self-affirmation in particular, over any other procedure that would focus one's attention on central object features? While we would expect other centrality manipulations to lead to a similar pattern of results, there are two key reasons why we believe it is intriguing to consider this idea specifically within the context of self-affirmation. First,

although much research vaunts the effects of affirming the self, less is known about the mechanisms responsible for these effects. Linking self-affirmation with a general shift in information processing may offer insight into the processes that underlay self-affirmation's impact, a point we return to and elaborate upon in the general discussion section. Second, according to self-affirmation theory (for a recent review, see Sherman & Cohen, 2006), people are motivated to affirm the self and will spontaneously attempt to do so. If affirmation has a widespread influence on information processing, as we propose, this may then point to a widely relevant way in which people, perhaps unintentionally, change the way that they process information.

We test this proposed effect of self-affirmation in a series of four studies. In Study 1, we focus on the domain of the self, establishing that affirmation influences the way people think about themselves, with affirmed participants representing the self in a higher-level, more schematic fashion. Studies 2–4 move on to investigate broader transfer effects, examining the effect of affirmation on an array of tasks. To examine the breadth of the phenomenon and to provide converging evidence for our central proposal, we utilize tasks that share little surface similarity, but are united in their relevance to more or less gist-based processing. These include identification of actions as more superordinate ends vs. subordinate means (Study 2), evaluation of objects with primary and secondary features differing in valence (Study 3), and performance on two visual tasks, one that requires elucidating the essence of a picture, and one that requires detail-oriented thinking (Study 4). In addition, because it provides a plausible alternative explanation, we took care to examine mood in each of the four studies.¹ We did not find evidence that positive mood was responsible for any of the effects we describe, however, and we therefore delay our discussion of this issue until the general discussion.

Study 1: self concept clarity

Recent research suggests that high-level construals are associated with a coherent, structured self representation that emphasizes the self's gist, whereas low-level construals are associated with a more contextualized self representation that is less structured and consistent (Wakslak, Nussbaum, Liberman, & Trope, 2008). We thus begin in Study 1 by examining the influence of self-affirmation on representation within the domain of the self, arguing that affirmation will lead participants to adopt a more schematic, structured view of the self. Following a self-affirmation manipulation, participants completed a measure of self concept clarity, defined by Campbell and colleagues (1996) as a structural component of the self involving the extent to which the contents of the self concept are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and temporally stable. We expect participants who have affirmed the self to report a higher degree of self concept clarity than those who have not.

Method

Participants

Twenty-five NYU students (18 women, 7 men), participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement.

¹ Specifically, after completing the dependent measure in each study, participants completed measures of general mood and the degree of effort put into the tasks. Effects of self-affirmation did not appear to be due to these variables. There were no significant differences between affirmation conditions in mood or effort, with the exception of a trend for low affirmation participants to report more positive mood than high affirmation participants in Study 3, and high affirmation participants in Study 4 reporting they placed more effort into the essay task than low affirmation participants. Furthermore, adjusting for mood and effort as covariates in each of the four studies did not substantially change the effects of the affirmation manipulation.

Materials and procedure

Participants were asked to complete a pilot survey packet containing a number of unrelated studies. The first of these surveys was labeled “Value Study” and contained a common manipulation of self-affirmation (cf., Sherman et al., 2000). Participants in the high affirmation condition were instructed to think about their most important value and write an essay describing why this value was important to them, as well as a time when it was important in determining what they did in a situation. Participants in the low affirmation condition, in contrast, were instructed to think about their least important value and to write an essay describing why that value might be important to another student, and a time when it might have been important in determining what another student did in a situation. Thus, participants in the high affirmation condition were asked to focus on a central value, whereas those in the low affirmation condition were asked to focus on a value of secondary importance to them.²

Next, as part of a supposedly unrelated study, participants completed Campbell et al.’s (1996) 12 item self concept clarity scale (e.g. “I seldom experience conflict between the different aspects of my personality”; “My beliefs about myself seem to change very frequently (reverse coded)”). This measure of self-structure was developed to capture the self’s coherence and consistency, aspects of self representation that relate to a high-level construal of the self (Wakslak et al., 2008). Participants indicated their agreement on scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Results and discussion

As expected, participants reported a greater degree of self concept clarity after writing an essay about their most important value ($M = 4.63$; $SD = .83$) than after writing an essay about their least important value ($M = 3.73$; $SD = 1.11$), $t(22) = 2.26$, $p < .05$, $d = .96$, supporting our argument that self-affirmation leads individuals to adopt a high-level construal on the self.³ Given this finding, does affirmation activate a general tendency to process information in a high-level construal manner, influencing variables unconnected to issues of self integrity? Studies 2–4 address this question.

Study 2: ends vs. means action identification

According to action identification theory (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989) individuals can identify behaviors in terms of the superordinate ends that they accomplish or the subordinate means through which they are carried out. For example, the act of “locking a door,” is both an act of “securing the house” (the goal of locking a door) and of “turning a key in the lock” (the means through which one locks a door). Because end-related action identifications reflect more defining, higher-level construals of activities (Liberman & Trope, 1998), we expect to see a greater preference for ends vs. means action identification after participants write an essay about their most important (vs. least important) value.

² As pointed out by Cohen et al. (2000), individuals may use any self reflective writing task as an opportunity to affirm the self. In light of this, we had an independent rater code participants’ essays to ensure that participants adequately followed instructions. The majority of participants did successfully follow the provided instructions; data from the fifteen participants across the four studies whose essays were coded as not having followed directions were excluded from the analyses. Interestingly, we noticed a particular tendency to write self-affirming essays, despite having been instructed to write about an unimportant value, in data collected the week before finals. This is consistent with self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988; for a recent review see Sherman & Cohen, 2006), which argues that it is especially during times of self threat that people will seek to affirm the self.

³ Data from one participant qualified as an outlier ($>1.5 \times IQR$) and was excluded from the reported analysis. The pattern of results does not change if this outlying score is included in the analysis.

Method

Participants

Forty-seven NYU students (33 women, 14 men) participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement.

Materials and procedure

As in Study 1, participants completed a pilot survey packet of unrelated studies. First, they were provided with a list of eleven values and qualities, and were asked to rank these attributes in terms of their importance to them. Next, participants completed a self-affirmation writing task. Those in the high affirmation condition were asked to indicate the value they ranked #1 in the previous exercise and to describe why this value is an important value. In contrast, those in the low affirmation condition were asked to indicate the value they ranked #9 in the previous exercise and to describe why this value is an important value. After completing this value related essay, participants completed Vallacher and Wegner’s (1989) Behavior Identification Form (BIF) as part of a supposedly unrelated study. Developed originally to identify individual differences in action identification, this measure is sensitive to manipulations of construal level (e.g., Liberman & Trope, 1998). Participants saw a series of 25 target actions and choose between two alternate descriptions of each: one identifying the action in terms of the means used to accomplish the behavior and the other identifying the action in terms of the end that it accomplishes. Preference for the low-level, means-related identification for an item was coded “0,” while preference for the high-level, ends-related identification for an item was coded “1.” These were averaged to create a single index of action identification, with higher scores indicating increased preference for ends vs. means action identification.

Results and discussion

As expected, participants had stronger preferences for high-level action identifications after writing an essay about their most important value ($M = .63$; $SD = .17$) than their least important value ($M = .52$; $SD = .13$), $t(43) = 2.44$, $p < .05$, $d = 0.74$.⁴ Results thereby provide initial support for our proposal that manipulations of self-affirmation influence one’s construal level in subsequent tasks unrelated to self threat. It is possible, however, that ends-related action identifications are more closely tied to values than are means-related action identifications and that this explains the observed effect of affirmation. In Study 3, therefore, we use a paradigm unrelated to values: evaluation of an object with primary and secondary features of differing valence.

Study 3: radio set evaluation

The influence of construal level extends beyond representation to choice and evaluation. Trope and Liberman (2000), for example, argued that because the distant future is represented at a high-level construal, evaluation of an object to be obtained in the distant future is influenced more by primary, goal-relevant features of the object than by secondary, goal-irrelevant features of the object. In contrast, because an object to be obtained in the near future is represented at a lower-level of construal, secondary, goal-irrelevant features of the object may carry as much weight in evaluation as do primary object features. By the same logic, if self-affirmation and construal are truly linked, we would expect participants mak-

⁴ Data from two participants were outliers ($>1.5 \times IQR$) and were therefore excluded from the reported analysis. The pattern of results does not change if these outlying scores are included in the analysis.

ing object evaluations to give more weight to primary than secondary object features after writing an essay about their most important value, but not after writing an essay about their least important value. A more traditional, self-buffering approach to self-affirmation, in contrast, would have no reason to predict a relationship between self-affirmation and product judgments made in a non-self-threatening context.

Method

Participants

Thirty-nine NYU students (25 women; 14 men) participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement.

Materials and procedure

After completing the self-affirmation manipulation described in Study 1, participants responded to an allegedly unrelated questionnaire entitled “Consumer Research Scenario.” This survey, adapted from Trope and Liberman (2000), asked participants to imagine buying a radio set in order to listen to morning programs and music when they wake up. Information was provided about two aspects of the purchase: the sound quality of the radio, which is a primary, goal-relevant aspect of the item, and the clock that happened to be built into the set, which is a secondary, goal-irrelevant aspect of the purchase. Two different versions of the scenario were presented between participants. In the primary positive/secondary negative condition, participants read that the sound quality of the radio set (i.e., the primary feature) was good, but the built in clock (i.e., the secondary feature) turned out to be pretty useless. In contrast, in the primary negative/secondary positive condition, participants read that the sound quality of the radio set was poor, but the built in clock turned out to be pretty useful. After reading the scenario, participants indicated their satisfaction with the product on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all satisfied*) to 9 (*very satisfied*).

Results and discussion

A 2 (high vs. low self-affirmation) \times 2 (positive radio/negative clock vs. negative radio/positive clock) ANOVA performed on the satisfaction ratings yielded the expected two-way interaction, $F(1, 35) = 5.21, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .13$. As can be seen in Fig. 1, participants in the high affirmation condition expressed greater satisfaction with the radio set that had good sound quality and a poor clock ($M = 6.40$) than with the radio set that had poor sound quality and a good clock ($M = 3.78$), $t(17) = 4.62, p < .001, d = 1.78$. In contrast, after writing an essay about their least important value, participants did not make this distinction, $t(18) = .69, p > .50$, expressing a similar degree of satisfaction with the radio set that had a positive primary feature and a negative secondary feature ($M = 5.70$) as with the radio set that had a negative primary feature and a positive secondary feature ($M = 5.20$).

These results bolster our claim that self-affirmation activates a construal orientation that transfers to subsequent tasks. Is it possible, however, that something about self-affirmation’s previously established reduction of defense motivation could explain why affirmed participants more strongly differentiated between value derived from primary and secondary object features? In order to conclusively rule out a self buffering explanation, our final study examines performance on two separate tasks: one linked with high-level construals and one linked with low-level construals. If self-affirmation exerts an influence only via a self-buffering, defensiveness reducing mechanism, we would expect to find a similar relationship between affirmation and performance on both tasks. In contrast, a construal account predicts that the effect of affirmation on performance will depend upon the nature of the task. High affirmation participants should perform better at the task related

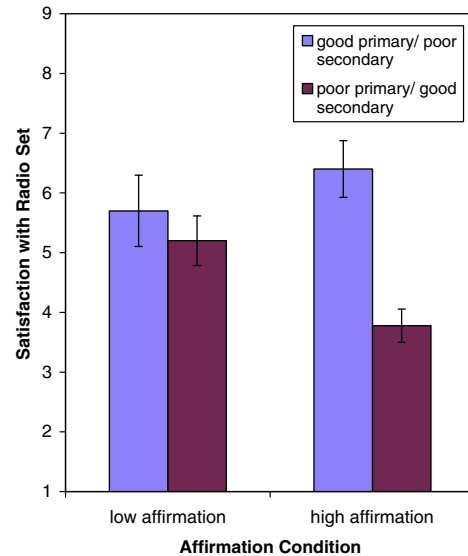


Fig. 1. Radio set satisfaction as a function of affirmation and feature valence (Study 3). Error bars reflect standard errors.

to high-level construal, whereas low affirmation participants should perform better at the task related to low-level construal.

Study 4: picture performance

In Study 4, participants were presented with two tasks, the Gestalt Completion Test (GCT; Ekstrom, French, Harman, & Dermen, 1976) and the picture completion subtest of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC; Wechsler, 1991). The GCT presents participants with a series of fragmented pictures that they must try to identify, tapping the ability to distill the essence of a visual stimulus and to create visual structure. In contrast, the picture completion test presents participants with a series of pictures, each of which contains a missing item that must be identified; performance captures the ability to observe details and to recognize specific features of the environment. In this way, the two tasks are almost opposites – whereas the GCT involves the ability to see the whole picture and fill in the missing parts, the picture completion test requires respondents to identify the missing parts, i.e., to not fill them in. Correspondingly, while high-level construals are associated with increased performance on the GCT (Förster, Friedman, & Liberman, 2004), they are associated with decreased performance on the picture completion test (Wakslak, Trope, Liberman, & Alony, 2006). We therefore expected participants to perform better on the GCT after writing about their most important value, but better on the picture completion test after writing about their least important value.

Method

Participants

Forty-five NYU students (28 women; 17 men) participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement.

Materials and procedure

As in Study 1, participants completed the essay writing self-affirmation manipulation as the first study in a series of supposedly unrelated pilot surveys. Immediately thereafter, participants completed the GCT and the picture completion task. Before beginning each task, participants read a brief introduction to the task and were provided with a sample item. Participants were given

2 min to complete eight GCT items and 2 min to complete 24 Picture Completion items. Order of the two tasks was counterbalanced and did not impact the results.

Results and discussion

Performance on each task was calculated by summing the number of correctly completed items. To allow comparison across the two different tasks, these raw scores were converted into z-scores. The standardized responses were then subjected to a 2×2 mixed design ANOVA, with the task (GCT and picture completion) as a within subjects factor and affirmation condition as a between subjects factor. Fig. 2 illustrates the significant interaction between task and affirmation condition, $F(1, 43) = 9.00, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .17$. As expected, whether participants performed better on the GCT or the picture completion task was influenced by whether they had just written an essay about their most or least important value. Specifically, matched t tests indicated that participants in the high affirmation condition performed better on the GCT (the task associated with high-level construal) than the picture completion task (the task associated with low-level construal), $t(25) = 1.97, p = .06, d = 0.79$. In contrast, participants in the low affirmation condition performed better on the picture completion task than the GCT, $t(18) = 2.25, p < .05, d = 1.06$.

General discussion

Findings from four studies suggest that self-affirmation activates a high-level construal orientation, influencing representation of both the self and objects external to the self. Participants who wrote an essay about their most important (vs. least important) value perceived themselves in a more coherent, structured manner (Study 1), increasingly identified activities in terms of their superordinate end-states vs. subordinate means-states (Study 2), more strongly based product evaluations on primary over secondary features (Study 3), and performed better on a task requiring them to structure fragmented visual input, than one requiring detail-oriented thinking (Study 4). Thinking about important values appears to engender a big picture approach, leading to schematic, representations that emphasize superordinate, defining elements.

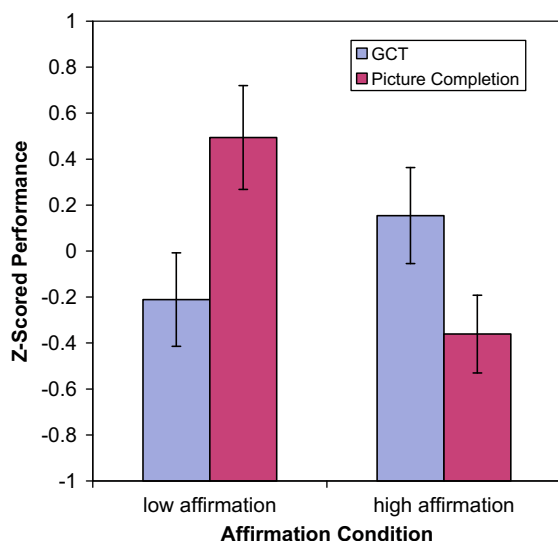


Fig. 2. The effect of affirmation on GCT and picture completion task performance (Study 4). Error bars reflect standard errors.

These findings extend previous work on the consequences of self-affirmation, suggesting that the effects of self-affirmation are not limited to self integrity variables. That is, by causing a shift in the degree to which one sees the world in a gist-like manner that distinguishes what is central from what is secondary, affirmation has an impact on basic processing issues, regardless of whether the stimuli are self-relevant. Furthermore, the current findings may be germane to the ongoing debate regarding the precise mechanism responsible for previously documented effects of self-affirmation (cf., Sherman & Cohen, 2006). While it is likely that self-affirmation produces effects through multiple cognitive, affective, and motivational mechanisms, one possibility that arises from the current research is that affirmation might reduce defensiveness by allowing people to see the big picture, to distinguish between urgent gratifications (e.g., being right or winning a debate) and more important and defining long-term goals (e.g., learning or achieving pragmatic compromise). This idea is consistent with many of the outcomes associated with self-affirmation (e.g., increased openness to threatening health information (Sherman et al., 2000), trivialization of dissonance provoking situations (Simon, Greenberg, & Brehm, 1995), reduced self handicapping (Siegel et al., 2005), etc.), and is consistent, at a theoretical level, with documented effects of high-level construal manipulations (e.g., increased interest in negative feedback and reduced interest in downward social comparison (Freitas, Salovey, & Liberman, 2001) and increased self control (Fujita et al., 2006), etc.). We hope that future research will explore this possibility and investigate the potential mediating role of construal-level in previously documented self-affirmation effects.

In addition to implications for self-affirmation theory, the current research may also be useful in enhancing our understanding of construal level. Whereas research on construal level initially focused on psychological distance, the current work reinforces the notion that distance is just one precursor of the level of construal at which an event is represented. Specifically, this research suggests that a high-level construal orientation can be activated via tasks that lead individuals to focus on defining, essential elements.⁵ While self-affirmation is a particularly interesting manifestation of this, the current results imply that similar manipulations related to focusing on central, defining aspects should lead to similar effects. For example, focusing on such disparate things as one's central roles, goal priorities, the primary features of a task, and main part of an activity, might each serve to activate a similar construal orientation. Future research should examine whether the particular mechanism by which one activates a high or low-level construal orientation has consequences for subsequent processing, or whether these mechanisms are essentially interchangeable. In the meantime, by entering into the construal construct from a different vantage point than has previous research but pointing to a similar constellation of effects, the current studies underscore the validity of the construal-level perspective, which views abstraction, structure, and superordinate thinking as connected psychological variables.

Mood as an alternative explanation

Although we believe the effects we describe are a result of differences in construal level, a possible alternate explanation

⁵ Note that central and peripheral elements do not necessarily differ in type of content. Indeed, the current studies held content constant, in that both high and low affirmation participants wrote about the same type of content (values). Rather than a content issue, then, we see focusing on central issues as an inherent part of the process of abstracting the gist from information, and we think it is this processing style that is evoked through affirmation and that then influences processing of subsequently presented information.

revolves around mood. The effects of affirmation on mood are controversial, with some findings suggesting that self-affirmation leads to positive affect and other investigations failing to provide evidence for this link (for a review, see Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Assuming that affirmation does impact mood, however, it is possible that this would be responsible for our effects, as positive affect has been linked with the ability to see interconnections and common categories (Isen & Daubman, 1984), as well as increased attention to global elements (Gasper & Clore, 2002).⁶ To examine the plausibility of this hypothesis, we measured mood in each of our studies; we did not find that it varied across affirmation conditions (with the exception of a trend in Study 3, where low affirmation participants reported surprisingly more positive affect than their high affirmation peers), nor did we find that it explained the pattern of findings we describe. Thus, we did not obtain support for a mood-based explanation of the current effects. Of course a measurement approach is not the strongest way of ruling out an alternative account, and future research should therefore attempt to experimentally separate affirmation and mood in order to more conclusively identify any separate effects they may have.

Conclusions

Across the domains of representation, evaluation, and performance, four studies support a link between self-affirmation and construal level. These findings represent a novel approach to self-affirmation, pointing to a heretofore unexplored cognitive aspect of the process of affirming the self. Further, the results illustrate that the consequences of affirmation can extend beyond variables related to self-threat. We hope that this research is useful in stimulating continued investigation of the process by which self-affirmation produces a broad range of consequences, as well as enhancing our understanding of the factors that influence level of construal.

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⁶ Interestingly, Labroo and Patrick (2008) recently argued that the reason positive affect has these effects is that it induces distance, a well established precursor of construal level.