Original Article

You Just Don't *Get* Us!

Positive, but Non-Verifying, Evaluations Foster Prejudice and Discrimination

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Abstract: Researchers have assumed that self-enhancement strivings motivate compensatory prejudice against minorities. We ask if self-verification strivings might explain compensatory prejudice more parsimoniously. Three studies tested whether receiving overly positive evaluations from outgroup members (immigrants) amplifies prejudice and discrimination against them. In Experiment 1 participants who received excessively positive evaluations from immigrants expressed less liking for them and donated less to them than those who received negative verifying feedback. Experiment 2 replicated these findings only when participants had sufficient time to reflect on the feedback. Experiment 3 indicated that diminished perceptions of being understood mediated the impact of overly positive evaluations on prejudicial reactions. These results suggest that self-verification theory offers a more parsimonious account of compensatory prejudice than self-enhancement theory.

Keywords: self-verification, group identity verification, self-enhancement, prejudice, intergroup relations

Negative evaluations can trigger compensatory activity. People who are evaluated negatively in one context, for example, compensate by subsequently derogating minorities in an unrelated context (Fein & Spencer, 1997). Such compensatory prejudice is thought to reflect efforts to maintain positive self-regard. Nevertheless, in this article we propose a more general mechanism: people's desire for identity verifying (i.e., subjectively accurate) evaluations may trigger instances of compensatory prejudice. One implication of this possibility is that overly *positive* evaluations should foster compensatory prejudice and discrimination. To put this hypothesis in context, we briefly review relevant research.

Self-Enhancement and Self-Verification as Precursors of Prejudice

People display a widespread preference for positive evaluations (Leary, 2007). Even infants display a preference for smiling faces (Shapiro, Eppler, Haith, & Reis, 1987) and vocal acceptance (Fernald, 1993). By the time they reach adulthood, positivity strivings are thought to produce several cognitive biases: attributing positive outcomes to themselves and negative outcomes to external circumstances (Blaine & Crocker, 1993); claiming that they are superior

to the average person (Taylor & Brown, 1988); and displaying a nonconscious tendency to preferentially associate positive phenomena with oneself (Pelham, Mirenberg, & Jones, 2002). Finally, even people with negative self-views report feeling better when they receive positive rather than negative evaluations (Kwang & Swann, 2010).

Support for an independent desire for subjectively accurate ("self-verifying") evaluations has also emerged. Self-verification theory (e.g., Swann, 1983, 2012) assumes that people form self-views by observing how others react to them (e.g., Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). As people become increasingly certain of their self-views, they come to rely on these self-views to make predictions about their worlds, guide behavior, and maintain a sense of control, continuity, place, and coherence. They accordingly work to confirm their self-views. To this end, they choose to interact with verifying over non-verifying evaluators (Swann, Wenzlaff, & Tafarodi, 1992), preferentially solicit self-confirmatory feedback (Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989) and display cognitive biases that exaggerate support for their self-views (Swann & Read, 1981). Recent research has extended self-verification processes from personal identities to collective and group identities. Specifically, evidence suggests that people work to verify collective self-views (qualities that are shared by the self and group; Chen, Chen, & Shaw, 2004) and group identities (qualities that characterize the group but

not necessarily the self; Gómez, Seyle, Huici, & Swann, 2009).

Despite such concerted efforts to verify their identities, people cannot completely control the reactions they elicit from others. As a result, they will occasionally encounter challenges to their self-knowledge. Such challenges will foster feelings of being misunderstood, diminished perceptions that the world is predictable and controllable and may even encourage people to question the veracity of their identities. These feelings may, in turn, trigger compensatory activities through which they work to regain the perception that their worlds are predictable and controllable (Stets & Burke, 2005). In some instances, such compensatory efforts may be designed to repudiate a threat to a specific self-view, as when people respond to a threat to their dominance by behaving in a highly dominant manner (Swann & Hill, 1982). In other instances, compensatory activities may be designed to rebut a threat to a global self-view, as when people respond to a threat to their global self-worth by attempting to shore up global perceptions of themselves. For example, participants who received feedback that disconfirmed their global self-worth within two domains (insightfulness and social skill) subsequently intensified their search for self-verifying feedback within two unrelated domains (athletic and artistic; Swann et al., 1992). This tendency to compensate for threats within one domain by enacting compensatory activities within unrelated domains suggests that efforts to manage threats are interchangeable to a degree, with threats to one domain of the self-system motivating efforts to shore up independent domains of the self-system. More generally, it appears that people are motivated to maintain the coherence of the larger self-system such that disturbances to any aspect of the system will encourage them to amplify their efforts to validate other beliefs within the system.

Self-verification theory's most provocative prediction is that people should prefer self-confirming evaluations even if the self-view in question is negative. For example, the theory predicts that those who see themselves as disorganized or unintelligent will prefer evidence that others perceive them as such. In contrast, self-enhancement theory predicts that people with negative as well as positive self-views will prefer positive feedback. The research literature indicates that the desire for self-verification prevails over self-enhancement (e.g., people with negative self-views prefer and seek negative evaluations) when certain theoretically prescribed conditions are met. For example, the self-view must be firmly held (i.e., certain and important; Pelham & Swann, 1994) and the outcome measure should emphasize cognitive as compared to affective reactions (Kwang & Swann, 2010; Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987). In addition, people must have the cognitive resources needed to compare the feedback with a relevant self-view (Hixon & Swann, 1993).

When the foregoing conditions are met, research indicates that people strive to verify their negative group as well as personal identities. Thus, for example, participants preferred to interact with outgroup members who verified negative as well as positive qualities of their group (Gómez et al., 2009). Furthermore, participants who received feedback that challenged their identities may subsequently work to reaffirm the central values of their group (Rabinovich & Morton, 2015).

This brings us to the primary objective of this paper: using a self-verification approach to broaden an earlier model of compensatory prejudice developed by Fein and Spencer (1997). Drawing on a variation of self-enhancement theory, the authors argued that when people receive negative evaluations, they enact compensatory activities that are designed to preserve their positive self-views. One such compensatory activity was derogating members of an outgroup. For example, participants who received negative feedback on an intelligence test were particularly inclined to subsequently denigrate outgroup members. As in the earlier work on compensatory self-verification (e.g., Swann et al., 1992), the domain in which participants received the feedback (a test given by an experimenter) was independent of the domain in which compensatory activity was measured (evaluations of outgroup members). As did Swann et al. (1992), the authors concluded that the cross-domain nature of this compensatory activity suggests that it was operating at the level of the entire self-system.

We embrace Fein and Spencer's assumption regarding the involvement of the entire self-system in compensatory prejudice but propose that the motivational mechanism driving these processes is self-verification rather than self-enhancement. That is, it was not that the feedback was negative per se, it was that it challenged participants' (predominantly positive) self-views. This reasoning leads to the novel prediction that we test in this paper – Challenging negative self-views with unexpectedly positive evaluations should trigger compensatory prejudice. Furthermore, because unexpected evaluations challenge the integrity of the self-system, they will motivate compensatory reactions that are designed to reaffirm other beliefs, including preexisting biases against outgroup members who were not the source of the unexpected evaluations.

Although we are aware of no direct tests of our major hypothesis, some evidence provides partial support for it. For example, Crocker, Thompson, McGraw, and Ingerman (1987) reported that participants with high self-esteem responded to threats to their self-concept by derogating outgroup members but those with low self-esteem did not. Similarly, Crocker and Luhtanen (1990) found that when people received negative feedback about their group's performance, those with high collective self-esteem

increased ingroup bias but those with low collective self-esteem did not. These findings clash with self-enhancement theory but can be readily explained by self-verification theory (see also Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). That is, because the negative feedback disconfirmed the self-views of participants with high but not low self-esteem, only people with high self-esteem viewed the negative feedback as non-verifying and felt therefore compelled to display compensatory prejudice. A self-verification framework can also explain Fein and Spencer's (1997) findings. That is, given that the majority of people (70%) have high self-esteem (Diener & Diener, 1995), it is likely that most of their participants had high self-esteem. As such, negative feedback likely frustrated most participants' desire for self-verification, thus triggering compensatory prejudice.

If self-verification strivings do indeed motivate compensatory prejudice, variables that are known to influence self-verification strivings should mediate this effect. One such variable is feeling known and understood. Researchers have discovered that receiving non-verifying, positive feedback causes recipients to doubt that they are accurately perceived by others (e.g., Brown, Stukas, & Evans, 2013; Campbell, Lackenbauer, & Muise, 2006; North & Swann, 2009; Swann et al., 1987). More to the point, feeling known and understood mediated the tendency for low self-esteem individuals to express less commitment to an organization that (unexpectedly) treated them with respect (Wiesenfeld, Swann, Brockner, & Bartel, 2007). This suggests that feeling understood should likewise mediate the impact of overly positive feedback on compensatory prejudice.

We addressed these issues in three studies. We first tested whether participants who received excessively positive evaluations of their group identity from immigrants subsequently expressed less liking for immigrants and donated less to them than those who received verifying feedback (Experiment 1). To determine whether self-verification strivings underlay our findings, we included three key features in our designs. First, building on earlier evidence that cognitive elaboration of social feedback is required for people to display self-verification strivings (e.g., Swann, Hixon, Stein-Seroussi, & Gilbert, 1990), we deprived some of the participants of cognitive resources by having them respond while under time pressure (Experiment 2). Compensatory prejudice and discrimination should emerge when participants receive overly positive feedback and are free of time pressure, but not when they are rushed. Second, if overly positive feedback is experienced as a threat to the entire self-system, it should motivate efforts to reaffirm one's beliefs by amplifying prejudice and discrimination against *any* outgroup members and not just the outgroup members who provided the overly positive

feedback (Experiment 3). Third, to the extent that compensatory self-verification strivings grow out of a tendency for overly positive feedback to endanger feelings of being understood, feelings of being misunderstood should mediate compensatory reactions (Experiment 3).

A Note on Sample Size and Exclusions

The most relevant previous research (Gómez et al., 2009) showed that receiving verifying versus enhancing feedback produced a medium-large effect on the perceived competence of evaluators. We accordingly estimated that a sample size of 100 participants would provide sufficient power to our effects for Experiments 1 and 3 ($f = .04$). We used a larger sample size for Experiment 2 because we expected interaction as well as main effects. All measures, manipulations, and exclusions are disclosed.

Experiment 1: Will Overly Positive Feedback Foster Compensatory Prejudice and Discrimination?

This experiment was designed to determine the impact of having members of an outgroup (low SES immigrants to Spain from Morocco, South America, and Eastern Europe) either enhance or verify participants' ingroup identities on evaluations of outgroup members and monetary donations to them. We randomly assigned participants to verification, enhancement, or control (no feedback) conditions.

Method

Participants
One hundred sixteen Spanish undergraduate students (104 women, $M_{age} = 29.44$, $SD_{age} = 8.03$) participated on the web for course credit.[1]

Procedure
The experiment was divided into two waves. In wave 1, participants first learned that they would participate in research about how Spaniards and immigrants perceive each other. They also learned that we were conducting a parallel study in which immigrants indicated how they perceived Spaniards. To insure that our participants self-identified as Spaniards, we asked participants who did not consider themselves Spaniards (e.g., Catalan or Basque participants

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[1] Twenty-two more participants responded to the questionnaire in wave 1, but were not present at wave 2. Results reported for the first wave did not vary when such participants were included in the analyses.

who support independence from Spain) to participate in a different study. As in Gómez et al. (2009), participants then generated five negative characteristics (e.g., "Lazy," "Rude") that they were certain characterized Spaniards. To ensure that participants listed only negative traits, we asked them to rate the valence of each trait on a scale ranging from -3 (= *completely negative*) to $+3$ (= *completely positive*), $\alpha = .77$. Participants rated the traits below the theoretical midpoint (0) of the scale, $M = -1.53$, $SD = 1.10$, $t(115) = -15.02$, $p < .001$. In addition, participants rated the certainty with which they held each trait on 7-point scales ranging from -3 (= *strongly uncertain*) to $+3$ (= *strongly certain*), $\alpha = .83$. Certainty ratings exceeded the theoretical midpoint of the scale, $M = 1.27$, $SD = 1.04$, $t(115) = 13.20$, $p < .001$. Finally, participants indicated the extent to which the traits describing the ingroup also described themselves personally on a 7-point scale ranging from -3 (= *it does not describe me at all*) to $+3$ (= *it describes me perfectly*), $\alpha = .74$. Ratings were below the midpoint of the scale, $M = -0.99$, $SD = 1.38$, $t(115) = -7.76$, $p < .001$, suggesting that the instructions successfully activated ingroup identities (Gómez et al., 2009). At the end of the first wave, participants learned that a group of student immigrants from their university (with whom they did not expect to interact) would assess the degree of overlap between the ingroup identities listed by the participant and the immigrants' assessments of the ingroup.

Wave 2 occurred 1 month after wave 1. We began by reminding participants that a group of immigrant students had evaluated their responses of wave 1. Participants then learned that they would receive a short summary of the evaluation of immigrants before completing the second wave. At the end of the study they would read the entire report. Participants in the *control condition* received no feedback (ostensibly due to a clerical error) but instead proceeded directly to the final questionnaire.

Each participant in the *verification condition* learned that the immigrants who evaluated his/her responses agreed with him/her on four of five characteristics that the participant himself/herself had listed in wave 1. Each participant in the *enhancement condition* learned that immigrants who evaluated his/her responses rated the ingroup more positively on four of the five characteristics that the participant himself/herself had listed in wave 1.

The final questionnaire included three outcome measures (outgroup evaluation, pro-outgroup donations and perceived competence of the evaluators).

Liking of Outgroup

The evaluation of the outgroup consisted of three feeling thermometers ranging from "Positive-Negative," "Like-Dislike," and "Favorable-Unfavorable" ($\alpha = .88$; adapted from Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993). For each dimension, participants rated immigrants on a scale ranging from 0 (= *the negative pole*) to 100 (= *the positive pole*).

Donation to Outgroup

Donations were measured by having participants indicate what percentage of their experimental credits (0.5 points) they were willing to donate to student immigrants from their university.

Perceived Competence of Outgroup

We measured perceived competence of the evaluators on a 3-item scale adapted from Gómez et al. (2009). Participants rated the evaluators as "Competent," "Credible," and "Sincere" on a scale ranging from 0 (= *strongly disagree*) to 6 (= *strongly agree*), $\alpha = .78$. Upon completion of these questions, participants in this experiment (and Experiments 2–3) were debriefed, thanked, and dismissed.

Results

Table 1 contains means and standard deviations of all outcome measures as well as the differences among conditions. Throughout the paper we used analysis of variance (ANOVA) to assess between group differences and Bonferroni post hoc analyses when comparing means. Liking of outgroup correlated significantly with perceived competence of outgroup, $r(114) = .25$, $p < .01$. Donation did not correlate significantly with the other variables, $rs < .17$, $ps > .07$.

Liking of Outgroup[2]

ANOVA yielded a significant effect of the experimental condition, $F(2, 113) = 4.90$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2_p = .08$. Participants in the enhancement condition evaluated immigrants more negatively than those in the verification, $p = .015$, and control conditions, $p = .029$. The verification and control conditions did not differ, $p = 1.00$.

Donation to Outgroup

A significant effect of the experimental condition emerged, $F(2, 113) = 4.38$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2_p = .07$, with participants in the enhancement condition donating less credits to immigrants than those in the verification, $p = .009$, and control

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[2] The results are virtually the same when controlling for valence, certainty, and self-descriptiveness of the traits in all three experiments. The effect of these covariates was not significant, except for an effect of valence on outgroup liking, $B = -4.11$, $p = .005$, and perceived competence in Study 2, $B = -0.32$, $p < .001$, and the effects of certainty, $B = -2.25$, $p = .022$, and self-descriptiveness, $B = 2.60$, $p = .007$, on ingroup evaluation in Study 3.

Table 1. Experiment 1: Outcome measures as a function of feedback

Measures	Enhancement		Verification		Control	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Liking of outgroup	58.72[b]	12.95	66.90[a]	13.34	66.41[a]	10.91
Donation to outgroup	29.71[b]	21.03	40.56[a]	16.89	40.64[a]	16.39
Perceived competence of outgroup	3.94[b]	1.02	4.53[a]	0.83	4.58[a]	0.69

Note. Cells with superscripts within files differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$).

conditions, $p = .005$. The verification and control conditions did not differ, $p = 1.00$.

Perceived Competence of Outgroup

A significant effect of the condition was obtained, $F(2, 113) = 6.32$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2_p = .10$, such that participants in the enhancement condition imputed less competence to evaluators than participants in the verification, $p = .030$, and control conditions, $p = .033$, conditions. The verification and control conditions did not differ, $p = 1.00$.

Discussion

The results indicate that receiving overly positive feedback regarding one's ingroup identity triggered compensatory prejudice and reduced donations toward a lower status outgroup (immigrants). Presumably, rating the outgroup as relatively incompetent and dislikable restored participants faith in the veracity of their ingroup-identities. In contrast, feedback that verified ingroup identities neither increased prejudice nor decreased donations – even though the feedback verified *negative* ingroup identities.

Experiment 1 indicates for the first time that when participants received feedback that exceeded their firmly held group identities, they compensated by displaying more prejudice and discrimination than participants who received feedback that verified their identities. In Experiment 2 we sought to determine if self-verification strivings played a role in these effects.

Experiment 2: Will Time Pressure Curtail Compensatory Prejudice and Discrimination?

If compensatory prejudice and discrimination are driven by self-verification strivings, manipulations that are known to

short-circuit self-verification should prevent such compensatory activity. Based on previous evidence that self-verification processes require cognitive elaboration (e.g., Hixon & Swann, 1993; Swann et al., 1990), after providing participants with overly positive or self-verifying feedback we placed some participants under time pressure to minimize elaboration. Consistent with Study 1, we expected that participants would display compensatory prejudice and discrimination after receiving overly positive feedback in the unlimited time condition. However, this effect should be diminished under time pressure.

Method

Participants

Three hundred seventy-two Spaniards (223 women, $M_{age} = 33.36$, $SD_{age} = 12.41$) participated individually on the web. Participants were recruited through a snowball technique, such that undergraduate students invited their acquaintances to participate.

Procedure

The experimenter introduced participants to a study about how Spaniards and immigrants perceive each other. Participants learned that there was a parallel study with groups of immigrants, in which we asked them how they saw Spaniards. We asked participants to list five negative characteristics that they were certain characterized the ingroup (Spaniards).[3] After listing the negative traits, participants learned that the system would compare their responses with the characteristics that a group of immigrants – who were participating in a parallel study – attributed to Spaniards. Two minutes later participants in the *verifying* condition learned that the negative characteristics that immigrants attributed to Spaniards matched the characteristics listed by the participant. Participants in the *enhancing* condition learned that the characteristics that immigrants assigned to Spaniards were more positive than the characteristics listed by the participant. Participants in the *control condition* received no feedback (ostensibly due to a clerical error).

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[3] We used the midpoint of the scale as the reference point (0) in determining whether the traits listed in Experiments 2–3 were negative, descriptive of the group, and certain that they applied to Spaniards. Participants considered the traits they listed in both experiments to be negative and not self-descriptive and they were certain that those traits applied to Spaniards.

After receiving the feedback, participants were randomly assigned to either the time pressure or no time pressure condition. In the *time pressure condition,* participants learned that they should respond as quickly as possible to the remainder of the questionnaire. In the *unlimited time condition,* participants were told to take as much time as they wished. A 3 (Verification vs. Enhancement vs. Control) × 2 (Time pressure vs. Unlimited time) ANOVA on the time that participants took to complete the dependent variables indicated a main effect of the time condition, $F(1, 366) = 39.40$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .10$, such that participants in the unlimited time condition ($M = 317.45$ s, $SD = 173.83$) took longer than participants in the time pressure condition ($M = 227.93$, $SD = 85.66$). No other effects were significant, ps > .11. Three additional manipulation checks evaluated.

(1) How fast participants believed that they had responded to the questionnaire (from 1 = *extremely slowly* to 5 = *extremely quickly*),
(2) How long participants perceived that they had took to complete the questionnaire (from 1 = very little time to 5 = a very long time), and
(3) How much participants believed that they had reflected on their responses (from 1 = *nothing at all* to 5 = *very much*).

Only main effects of the time condition emerged, such that participants in the unlimited time condition reported that they had responded more slowly, $F(1, 366) = 46.75$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .11$, $M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.67$ versus $M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.65$, taken longer to complete the questionnaire, $F(1, 366) = 32.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .08$, $M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.67$ versus $M = 2.42$, $SD = 0.74$, and reflected more on their responses, $F(1, 366) = 20.74$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .05$, $M = 3.43$, $SD = 0.72$ versus $M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.98$, than participants in the time pressure condition. No other effects were significant, ps > .10.

Liking of Outgroup
The measure was identical to that used in Experiment 1, $\alpha = .94$.

Donation to Outgroup
For the measure of pro-outgroup donations, participants learned that the Ministry of Science gave the researchers €5 for each participant that could be donated to NGOs. Participants were asked to distribute those €5 between (a) an organization to help low income Spaniards versus (b) an organization to help immigrants. They can choose to donate all to one group or to divide it between the groups, as long as the total summed €5.

Perceived Competence of Outgroup
We used the same measure that was included in Experiment 1, $\alpha = .85$.

Results

Table 2 contains means and standard deviations of all outcome measures and differences between groups. Liking of outgroup correlated significantly with donation, $r(370) = .46$, and perceived competence of outgroup, $r(370) = .48$. Donation and perceived competence of outgroup also correlated positively, $r(370) = .24$, all ps < .01.

Liking of Outgroup

A significant effect of the interaction between the feedback and time manipulations emerged, $F(2, 366) = 10.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .06$. The feedback effect was significant in the unlimited time condition, $F(2, 366) = 4.12$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2_p = .02$, indicating that participants in the enhancement condition evaluated immigrants more negatively than participants in the verification, $p = .007$, and control conditions, $p = .026$. The effect of feedback was also significant in the time pressure condition, $F(2, 366) = 8.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .05$, but in this case it was the participants in the verification condition who evaluated immigrants more negatively than those in the enhancement, $p < .001$, and control conditions, $p = .001$. No other effects were significant, ps > .12.

Donation to Outgroup
A significant interaction between the feedback and time pressure manipulations emerged, $F(2, 366) = 5.06$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2_p = .03$. The effect of feedback was significant in the unlimited time condition, $F(2, 366) = 3.21$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2_p = .02$, such that participants in the enhancement condition donated less money to immigrants than participants in the verification, $p = .017$, and control conditions, $p = .052$. The effect of feedback did not reach significance in the time pressure condition, $F(2, 366) = 1.95$, $p = .14$, $\eta^2_p = .01$. No other effects were significant, ps > .72.

Perceived Competence of Outgroup
A significant effect of the interaction between the feedback and time manipulations emerged, $F(2, 366) = 7.18$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .04$. The feedback effect was significant in the unlimited time condition, $F(2, 366) = 6.17$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2_p = .03$, indicating that participants in the enhancement condition perceived immigrant evaluators as less competent than participants in the verification, $p = .001$, and control conditions, $p = .041$. However, the effect of feedback was not significant in the time pressure condition, $F(2, 366) = 1.60$, $p = .20$, $\eta^2_p = .01$. No other effects were significant, ps > .28.

Discussion

The results of Experiment 2 replicated and extended the results of Experiment 1. As in the first experiment, in the

Table 2. Experiment 2: Outcome measures as a function of feedback and time pressure conditions

Measures	Enhancement		Verification		Control	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Liking of outgroup						
Unlimited time	62.08[b]	18.75	71.55[a]	16.01	69.76[a]	17.84
Time pressure	70.48[a]	18.67	58.02[b]	22.90	69.35[a]	16.54
Total	66.76	19.09	64.46	20.97	69.56	17.15
Donation to outgroup						
Unlimited time	1.75[b]	0.92	2.18[a]	1.15	2.10[a]	0.90
Time pressure	2.14[a]	0.91	1.82[b]	0.99	1.96[a,b]	0.78
Total	1.97	0.93	1.99	1.08	2.03	0.84
Perceived competence of outgroup						
Unlimited time	3.24[b]	0.98	4.03[a]	0.95	3.69[a]	1.06
Time pressure	3.70	1.35	3.33	1.51	3.53	1.22
Total	3.49	1.22	3.66	1.32	3.61	1.14

Note. Cells with superscripts within files differ significantly from each other ($p \leq .05$).

unlimited time condition, recipients of enhancing feedback derogated immigrants, donated less money to them, and deemed evaluators less competent than recipients of verifying feedback or no feedback. Importantly, all these compensatory reactions elicited by enhancing feedback disappeared when participants were rushed. Although receiving verifying feedback under time pressure unexpectedly worsened liking for immigrants relative to the no feedback condition, this effect did not extend to the other outcome variables (donation and attributions of competence). Therefore, it appears that, consistent with previous research (e.g., Gómez et al., 2009, 2011), most of the outcome measures indicated that the no feedback and verification conditions did not differ, suggesting that people routinely expect to be seen as they see themselves.

Experiment 3: The Specificity of, and Mediators of, Compensatory Prejudice and Discrimination

Experiments 1 and 2 both showed that receiving enhancing feedback deteriorates intergroup relations when such feedback does not match one's group identity. One remaining question, however, involves the specificity of these reactions. For example, do they extend to outgroups who did not supply the evaluation or even to other members of one's ingroup? In addition, are these compensatory reactions mediated by feelings of being misunderstood as self-verification theory would suggest?

To address this question we measured evaluations of three different low status groups (immigrants, Muslims, and Gypsies). We anticipated that feedback would affect liking of immigrants through reductions in feelings of being understood. Based on past evidence showing that prejudice toward one group tends to be correlated with prejudice toward other groups (e.g., Akrami, Ekehammar, & Bergh, 2011), the activation of prejudiced beliefs toward immigrants might trigger related negative evaluations of other low status groups. Thus, we expect a serial indirect effect in which felt understanding and liking of immigrants impacted liking of Muslims and Gypsies.

Method

Participants

One hundred forty-two Spaniards (83 women, M_{age} = 38.40, SD_{age} = 10.92) participated voluntarily on the web. Participants were recruited with a snowball technique, such that students asked their acquaintances to collaborate.

Procedure

The experimenter introduced participants to a study about how Spaniards and immigrants perceive each other. Participants learned that there was a parallel study with groups of immigrants, in which we asked them how they saw Spaniards. We asked participants to list three negative characteristics that they were certain characterized the ingroup (Spaniards). After listing the negative traits, participants knew that the system would compare their responses with the characteristics that a group of immigrant students – who were participating in a parallel study – attribute to Spaniards. Two minutes later participants in the *verifying* condition learned that the negative characteristics that immigrant students attributed to Spaniards matched the characteristics listed by the participant. Participants in the *enhancing* condition learned that the characteristics that

Table 3. Experiment 3: Outcome measures as a function of feedback

Measures	Enhancement		Verification	
	M	SD	M	SD
Feeling understood	2.83[b]	1.04	3.36[a]	0.91
Liking of ingroup	67.76	16.68	70.71	14.22
Liking of immigrants	61.21[b]	16.78	68.28[a]	13.86
Liking of Gypsies	43.57[b]	19.81	53.07[a]	17.46
Liking of Muslims	48.79[b]	17.21	56.76[a]	18.25
Donation to immigrants	1.78[b]	0.91	2.12[a]	0.67
Perceived competence of immigrant evaluators	3.25[b]	1.01	3.81[a]	1.01

Note. Cells with different superscripts within files differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$).

immigrants assigned to Spaniards were more positive than the characteristics listed by the participant. Participants then completed the outcome measures.

Feeling of Being Understood

We assessed feeling of being understood with a 3-items scale (e.g., "Immigrants understand Spaniards") ranging from 0 (= "*strongly disagree*") to 6 (= "*strongly agree*") and adapted from Gómez et al. (2009), α = .81.

Liking of Outgroups and Ingroup

The measure of liking was the same one used in Experiments 1–2. Participants evaluated the following groups: (a) the ingroup (Spaniards), (b) immigrants, (c) Gypsies, and (d) Muslims in general, αs > .92.

Donation to Immigrants and Perceived Competence of Immigrant Evaluators

We used the same measures as in Experiments 1–2, α = .82.

Results and Discussion

Table 3 contains means and standard deviations of all outcome measures as well as the differences among conditions.

Table 4 contains the correlations. Most of them were positive but modest.

Feeling Understood

Participants in the enhancement condition felt less understood by outgroup members than participants in the verification condition, $F(1, 140) = 10.16$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2_p = .07$.

Liking of Ingroup[4]

No effect of the experimental condition was obtained, $F(1, 140) = 1.29$, $p = .26$, $\eta^2_p = .01$.

Liking of Immigrants, Gypsies and Muslims

Participants in the enhancement condition evaluated immigrants, $F(1, 140) = 7.53$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2_p = .05$, Gypsies, $F(1, 140) = 9.24$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2_p = .06$, and Muslims, $F(1, 140) = 7.13$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2_p = .05$, more negatively than those in the verification condition.

Donation to Immigrants

Participants in the enhancement condition donated less money to immigrants than those in the verification condition, $F(1, 140) = 6.61$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2_p = .05$.

Perceived Competence of Outgroup

Participants in the enhancement condition imputed less competence to evaluators than participants in the verification condition, $F(1, 140) = 10.57$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .07$.

Mediational Analyses

We used the PROCESS macro of Hayes (2013).

Liking of Immigrants

To determine whether perception of feeling understood by outgroup members mediated the effect of our experimental manipulation on outgroup evaluation, we tested a simple mediation model in which the experimental manipulation was the predictor, feeling understood was the mediator, and liking was the outcome variable. Results suggest that feeling understood mediated the effect of our experimental manipulation on outgroup evaluation (see Figure 1).

Donation to Immigrants

We predicted that the effect of our manipulation on donation would be serially mediated by feeling understood and outgroup evaluation. We accordingly treated experimental manipulation as the predictor, feeling understood as the first mediator, outgroup evaluation as the second mediator

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[4] A factor analysis with Varimax rotation on measures of liking (ingroup, outgroup, Gypsies, and Muslims) yielded four different factors. All items loaded on the appropriate factor.

Table 4. Experiment 3: Correlations

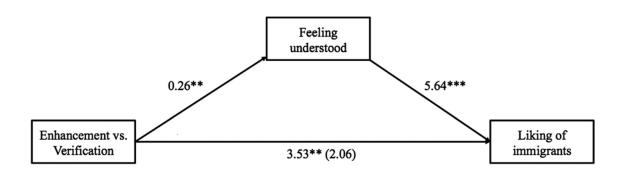|	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Feeling understood							
2. Liking of ingroup	.28**						
3. Liking of immigrants	.40**	.20*					
4. Liking of Gypsies	.22**	.31**	.40**				
5. Liking of Muslims	.21**	.22**	.56**	.41**			
6. Donation to immigrants	.18*	−.12	.37**	.09	.33**		
7. Perceived competence of immigrant evaluators	.33**	.21*	.57**	.32**	.46**	.24**	

Note. **p < .01; *p < .05.

Figure 1. Experiment 3: Indirect effect of the experimental manipulation on liking of outgroup (immigrants) via feeling understood. **p < .01.
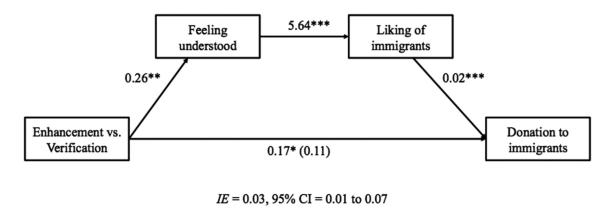

Figure 2. Experiment 3: Indirect effect of the experimental manipulation on donation via feeling understood and outgroup evaluation. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

and donation to immigrants as the outcome variable. Results indicated that the indirect effect through feeling understood *and* outgroup evaluation was significant (see Figure 2). The indirect effects through feeling understood alone or through outgroup evaluation alone were not significant.

Liking of Gypsies and Muslims

We also tested whether the effect of our manipulation on the evaluation of Gypsies and Muslims would be serially mediated by feeling understood and outgroup evaluation. To that end we used model 6 of Hayes (2013), such that feeling understood was the first mediator and liking of immigrants

was the second mediator. The serial indirect effects through feeling understood and outgroup evaluation were significant both for Gypsies, $b = 0.64$, 95% CI = 0.23–1.46, and Muslims, $b = 0.94$, 95% CI = 0.33–2.27. The indirect effects through feeling understood alone or through outgroup evaluation alone were not (the confidence intervals contained zero).

Discussion

The results of Experiment 3 replicated and extended the results of Experiments 1–2. Relative to those who received verifying feedback, participants who received overly positive feedback from immigrants regarded them as less competent and likable and donated less to them. These compensatory prejudicial/discriminatory responses generalized to outgroups who were not the source of the evaluation (e.g., Gypsies and Muslims), thereby tacitly reaffirming participant's beliefs about themselves. At the same time, compensatory reactions were not reflective of a tendency to derogate everyone, as overly positive feedback did nothing to lower impressions of the ingroup. Finally, our results suggest that feelings of being misunderstood may mediate the effect of feedback on compensatory prejudice and discrimination.

General Discussion

Our findings suggest that receiving overly positive evaluations of one's group is cognitively jarring – so jarring, in fact, that recipients display compensatory prejudice and discrimination. Based on self-verification theory, we reasoned that unexpectedly positive feedback about the ingroup encouraged people to question the veracity of their identities. To reaffirm their identities, they derogated and discriminated against outgroup members.

Although our findings do not provide support for each component of our model of compensatory prejudice, they do offer several forms of support for our assumption that self-verification strivings motivate compensatory prejudice and discrimination. For example, only participants who had sufficient cognitive resources available engaged in compensatory activity after receiving overly positive feedback. This is instructive because cognitive resources are a known prerequisite for self-verification (e.g., Swann et al., 1990). In addition, mediational analyses suggested that compensatory activity emerged because overly positive evaluations threatened people's perception that they are known and understood by others. So threatened, they derogated outgroup members, presumably to reaffirm the validity of their knowledge system. Moreover, our data

suggest that such compensatory reactions were not merely retributive, as they generalized to outgroup members who were not the source of the overly favorable evaluations. At the same time, compensatory reactions did not spill over to everyone, as overly positive evaluations did not diminish recipients' impressions of ingroup members.

Our findings call for a broader understanding of the mechanisms underlying compensatory prejudice. Previous accounts (e.g., Crocker et al., 1987; Fein & Spencer, 1997) have used self-enhancement theory to explain compensatory prejudice. Within this framework, people respond to negative evaluations by attempting to shore up their personal self-esteem. Although self-enhancement theory can explain Fein and Spencer's findings, it cannot explain why Crocker et al.'s participants with low self-esteem failed to display compensatory prejudice. Furthermore, self-enhancement theory cannot explain why our participants displayed compensatory prejudice and discrimination after receiving overly *positive* evaluations, nor can it explain why this effect was mediated by perceptions of being known and understood. In contrast, a self-verification account can explain all of these effects, suggesting that it may offer a more parsimonious account of compensatory prejudice and discrimination.

Remaining Questions and Implications

We assume here that feedback that contradicts people's beliefs about their ingroup challenges their assumption that they truly know the ingroup. They respond by striving to reaffirm their perception that their beliefs are accurate and that the world is therefore predictable and controllable by engaging in compensatory derogation of an outgroup. Although our findings provide evidence for the predicted relationship between identity discrepant feedback and compensatory prejudice, a challenge for future researchers will be to document the mechanisms that underlie and mediate our effects. For example, were our effects mediated by uncertainty regarding the veracity of their identities? Did compensatory prejudice restore feelings of coherence and control?

It would also be interesting to explore other factors that might moderate compensatory reactions, including personal prejudice and quantity and quality of intergroup contact. Moreover, compensatory prejudice and discrimination might be amplified by ingroup identification such that high identifiers would be more reactive to discrepant feedback about their group identity than low identifiers (Gómez et al., 2009).

Future researchers should also consider the possibility that although identity verification strivings have the advantage of satisfying needs for coherence, control, and predictability, they can be costly. For example, when people with negative self-views respond to the prospect of positive

evaluations by evoking negative evaluations from interaction partners (Swann & Read, 1981, Experiment 2), they may well foreclose the possibility of a harmonious relationship with such relationship partners. Even more striking, when people with negative self-views respond to spouses who adore them by withdrawing from the relationship (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994) or seeking divorce (Neff & Karney, 2005), they lower their prospects of enjoying a satisfying marriage. Such instances demonstrate that self-verification involves trade-offs wherein self-verifiers attain a sense of coherence, predictability, and control at the cost of other variables such as relationship quality (for reviews, see Swann, 1983, 2012). This suggests that people may refrain from expressing negative compensatory reactions if other goals or considerations [e.g., desire to be liked (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010) or perceived as moral (Hopkins et al., 2007)] are more salient or potent than verification strivings. From this vantage point, compensatory prejudice is a nuanced rather than non-reflexive response to non-verifying feedback.

To date, the most prominent motive in the study of group processes has been the desire for identities that are positive and distinctive (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) or self-enhancing (Fein & Spencer, 1997; Hogg & Abrams, 1990; Sinclair & Kunda, 1999). A key contribution of the research reported here is to suggest that the desire for self-verification also plays an important role in intergroup relationships. Further support for this possibility comes from evidence that people strive for verification of their negative as well as positive group identities (Gómez et al., 2009) and that perceived verification mediates the positive effect of intergroup contact on intergroup orientations (Gómez, Eller, & Vázquez, 2013). In addition, people prefer to be seen as prototypical as they see themselves (Gómez, Jetten, & Swann, 2014). Our findings add to this growing literature by showing that self-verification strivings may contribute to compensatory prejudice and discrimination. More generally, self-verification theory offers a more parsimonious account of compensatory prejudice than self-enhancement theory, as it can explain efforts to maintain negative as well as positive identities.

Acknowledgments

Author Contributions

All authors conceived, designed, and developed the experiments. Alexandra Vázquez collected online data and performed the statistical procedures. All authors wrote, reviewed, and approved the final manuscript.

Open Data and Materials

Materials and data for the experiments are available at https://osf.io/ruwtp/?view_only=029082d6d85b4e5a926f193bbfb11f87

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