

**Threat to national identity continuity: When affirmation procedures increase the
acceptance of Muslim immigrants**

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Abstract

European majority group members increasingly perceive threats to national continuity, which in turn leads to defensive reactions, including prejudice against Muslim immigrants. However, according to self-affirmation theory, individuals can respond in a less defensive manner if they have affirmed positive aspects of their self-concept (self-affirmation) or their social identity (group-affirmation). In the present research, we test the potential of affirmation procedures as tools for reducing prejudice towards Muslim immigrants when national continuity is threatened. We examine the impact of personal vs. normative attachment to Christian roots of national identity on the efficacy of affirmation procedures, and the congruence between the threatened and the affirmed domains of the self. Results show that group-affirmation reduced opposition to Muslims' rights amongst participants personally attached to the idea that national continuity is based on Christian roots. The discussion stresses the importance of non-congruence between the threatened domain of the self and the affirmed domain for the design of affirmation procedures.

Key words: national continuity, Muslim immigrants, self-affirmation, group-affirmation

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It is a pressing societal issue in most European societies to foster harmony amongst different groups, particularly amongst majority and minority/immigrant group members. Religion is often used among members of the host societies to define who belongs to the national group, and to thereby either recognize or deny the claimed identity of others (Blackwood, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2015; Kiely, Bechhofer, Stewart, & McCrone, 2001). One of the underlying fears experienced by some members of majority groups in European countries is the perception that their national identity might undergo major changes or might even no longer exist through time because of the presence of Muslim immigrants (Mahfud, Badea, Verkuyten, & Reynolds, 2018). Therefore, finding ways to reduce prejudice in the face of a perceived existential threat might be useful to make cohabitation easier between majority groups and Muslim immigrants in these countries.

Previous empirical studies have shown that a threat to the prospective cultural continuity of the national in-group increased negative attitudes against immigrants (e.g., Falomir & Frederic, 2013). Threats to the national in-group can be based on a perception of pronounced group differences in morals, values, standards, beliefs, and attitudes and/or including in-group economic and political power, and in-group security and welfare in general (Badea, Iyer, & Aebischer, 2018 ; Stephan, Ybarra, Martinez, Schwarzwald, & Turkaspa, 1998). Symbolic and cultural differences seem to play an important role in the emergence of prejudice (Obaidi, Kunst, Kteily, Thomsen, & Sidanius, 2018). Moreover, religion can represent an important constituent of national identity, and is one of the criteria identified by Triandis (1994) contributing to perceived cultural distance between groups. Cultural distance includes several other criteria such as differences in mother tongue, family and marital life, and values. Generally, larger perceived cultural distance has been found to be associated with stronger feelings of threat and more negative outgroup attitudes (Guan et al., 2011; Lam, Chiu, Lau, Chan, & Yim 2006). In France, Muslim immigrants are perceived as

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being culturally distant compared to the majority group, and this social group is highly discriminated against (Anier, Badea, Berthon, & Guimond, 2018).

Threat to the continuity of national identity includes an existential dimension: the majority group members have the feeling they are not able to pass on their cultural heritage to the next generations (Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2013). Vignoles (2011) has identified the need for a feeling of continuity through time as one of the important motives that drive attitudes and behaviors. As national identities are typically rooted in rich historical and cultural heritage, the fulfilment of the need for continuity is an important reason why people feel attached to their national group memberships (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Previous research has shown that existential threats to a national group increased the motivation to protect the ingroup and to reject the outgroup (Jetten & Hutchison, 2011). For example, Smeekes and Verkuyten (2013) manipulated perceived existential threat to national identity by asking Dutch participants to think about how they would feel if their country no longer existed, and had no more past or future. Results showed that the perception of existential threat at a national level led to an opposition towards Muslim immigrants expressing their rights.

Social psychologists have shown the efficacy of many interventions in reducing prejudice (Michie, van Stralen, & West, 2011) but few of these interventions target defensive responses to the perception of threat to national identity coming from immigration. Recent research on self-affirmation has shown that people could reduce this perception of threat to national identity and their level of prejudice under some circumstances. An experiment conducted with French citizens shortly after the terrorist attacks in Paris showed that self-affirmation procedures effectively reduced support for discriminatory policies (e.g., banning immigrants from high-risk countries from entering the country). In addition, the perception of threat associated with immigration mediated the effect of self-affirmation on prejudice reduction (Badea, Binning, Sherman, & Verliac, 2018). Although recent research has thus

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provided some evidence that self-affirmation seemed to increase positive attitudes towards immigrants, there is still a dearth of empirical evidence on the impact of such techniques in the realm of intergroup relations.

Self-affirmation, group-affirmation and prejudice reduction

According to self-affirmation theory (Sherman & Cohen, 2006), prejudice and discrimination towards minority groups represent defensive reactions that individuals may exhibit to cope with a threat to a specific aspect of their identity. People are motivated to maintain self-integrity, an image of themselves being capable and adaptive - and receiving negative information that threatens the individual or collective self (e.g., national identity) can lead people to display more prejudicial attitudes (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). However, affirming participants' important values, reminding them of important personal or collective success, attenuates the link between threats to the self-image and expressions of prejudice (Fein & Spencer, 1997).

A distinction can usually be made between *self-affirmation*, which relates to the individual's self-perception, and *group-affirmation*, which relates to the sense of belonging to a group. Self-affirmation may be accomplished by recalling actions or values that are meaningful to the individual, whereas group-affirmation is obtained through recalling positive events or values that matter to the group. In general, self-affirmation is found to be successful in reducing negative intergroup attitudes. In particular, studies carried out in the U.S. have shown a greater recognition of racism (Adams, Tormala & O'Brien, 2006) and more emphasis on student funding programs for African-Americans (Harvey & Oswald, 2000) among participants who accomplished a self-affirmation task, compared to those from the control condition. In France, majority group members who thought about personally important political values (i.e., self-affirmation) exhibited a higher willingness to accept refugees

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compared to other conditions (group-affirmation and control), (Badea, Tavani, Rubin, & Meyer, 2017).

Results on group-affirmation are more ambiguous: this technique can attenuate, have no impact on, or even accentuate negative attitudes. For example, Sherman and collaborators have shown that highly in-group identified supporters of basketball were less biased in explaining the failure or victory of their team after completing a group-affirmation task (Sherman, et al., 2007). In a different study conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cehajic-Clancy and colleagues (Cehajic-Clancy, Effron, Halperin, Liberman, & Ross, 2011) examined the acknowledgment of Serbs' responsibility for the genocide committed by in-group members towards Bosnian Muslims in three experimental conditions: self-affirmation, group-affirmation, and control. Self-affirmation resulted in more pronounced feelings of guilt about the Srebrenica genocide compared to the control condition, while group-affirmation had no effect. The latter can even increase in-group bias, which was demonstrated in a study conducted in the U.S.. Erlich and Gramzow (2015) showed that members of political parties who thought of values important to them as members of their political in-group judged the opposite party more negatively than those from the control condition. These negative effects of group-affirmation on intergroup attitudes were accentuated among more highly identifying group members.

In order to develop a better understanding of the role of group-affirmation in reducing prejudice towards Muslim immigrants, we suggest to take into account (a) the impact of the personal vs. normative attachment to Christian roots of national identity on the efficacy of affirmation procedures, and (b) the congruence between the threatened and the affirmed domains of the self.

Christian national continuity: personal beliefs versus social norms

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The continuity of national identity can be represented in different ways. Smeekes & Verkyuten (2014) compared Dutch citizens' attitudes towards Muslim immigrants in two experimental conditions: participants read a text about the continuity of their national identity based on the Christian religion versus a text that alluded to the history of religious tolerance in the Netherlands through time. Dutch who read a representation of the collective continuity as based on the Christian religion were more likely to perceive Muslim immigrants as a threat to this national continuity. Therefore, they were more opposed to free expression for Muslims. However, Dutch who were exposed to a representation of collective continuity as based on religious tolerance were less likely to perceive a threat to this continuity and were less opposed to Muslims freely expressing their religion in public.

In the present research, we examine the impact of national continuity in terms of Christian religion on the efficacy of self- and group-affirmation procedures in decreasing opposition to Muslims' rights. Researchers distinguished between *personal beliefs* and *perceived social norms* regarding the same social object (e.g., endorsement of acculturation ideologies), (Guimond, Streight, & Roebroek, 2015). In a study carried in France, Guimond and his team (Guimond et al., 2015) assessed participants' support to multiculturalism, an acculturation ideology that encourages immigrants to maintain their culture of origin while adopting the host culture (Berry, Kalin, & Taylor, 1977; Berry, 2013). Results showed that respondents personally supported multiculturalism but thought that French people in general (i.e., social norm) were much less supportive of this ideology. This finding is essential because social norms are important factors explaining attitudes and behaviors, and consequently can be more predictive of prejudice and discrimination towards immigrants compared to personal attitudes (Guimond et al., 2013; for an overview of earlier distinctions along the lines of attitudes and norms, please see Ajzen & Fishbein, 1970 ; Ajzen, 1991).

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How do personal beliefs versus perception of social norms regarding the continuity of national identity affect the efficacy of affirmation procedures in reducing prejudice against Muslim immigrants? To answer this question, we argue that it is important to take into account the level of the self that is exposed to the national continuity threat (i.e., personal versus collective). People who are personally attached to the idea that French national continuity is based on Christian roots feel more threatened at the personal level of the self, while people who perceive Christian continuity as a social norm feel more threatened at the collective level of the self. Affirmation techniques can follow this distinction and target the personal level (self-affirmation) or the collective level of the self (group-affirmation).

Congruence between threatened and affirmed domains of the self

The affirmation procedure can be congruent with the threatened level of the self: majority group members who personally believe that their national continuity is defined by Christian roots may perceive Muslim immigrants as being more threatening at the personal level of the self and consequently be more sensitive to self-affirmation. Indeed, previous studies show that self-affirmation procedure is more effective among participants who feel personally threatened by an event (e.g., academic evaluation; terrorist attacks). In one study, participants who reported important personal values the week before an evaluation of their competencies had a reduced rate of adrenaline compared to those who had not elaborated on personal values before. This effect was even stronger for students who were particularly concerned about their university assessment (Sherman, Bunyan, Creswell, & Jaremka, 2009). In another study, French citizens who scored high on individualism expressed feeling more vulnerable to terrorism and were more responsive to self-affirmation (i.e., expressed lower support for discrimination); group-affirmation had no effect among individualistic people

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(Badea, Binning, et al., 2018). Thus, the more threat individuals experience, the more receptive they seem to be to the effects of a congruent affirmation.

Based on this *congruency approach*, we expect that (a) self-affirmation decreases opposition to the rights of Muslims compared to the other conditions among participants with strong personal beliefs that the continuity of national identity is defined by Christian roots; (b) group-affirmation decreases opposition to the rights of Muslims compared to the control condition among participants with a strong perception that it is the social norm that the continuity of national identity is defined by Christian roots; (c) these interaction effects are mediated by the perception of threat to national continuity.

In this approach, personal beliefs versus social norms there are predicted to have a positive impact on affirmation procedures when there is congruence between the threatened level of the self and the affirmation task (i.e., self-affirmation is more efficient when the threat to national continuity is felt at the personal level of the self, when people are personally attached to Christian continuity)¹. However, a large body of research in the field of self-affirmation showed that affirming participants in a different domain of the self from the threatened one is more efficient (*the incongruency approach* – Blanton, Cooper, Slkurnik, & Aronson, 1997; Sivanathan, Molden, Galinsky, & Ku, 2008). In other words, in our case, group-affirmation should be more effective among participants with higher personal beliefs that national continuity is rooted in Christian religion. We have not preregistered hypotheses based on the incongruency approach, and therefore only explore whether the affirmation procedure may be more successful when it targets an aspect other than the threatened one or a different level of the self.

Method

¹ We first tested these hypotheses in a pilot study with psychology students as participants. We present the procedure and the results of this study in the supplementary materials.

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Participants and design. This study was pre-registered (www.aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=z9id3i). We calculated the required sample size using G*Power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). Based on self-affirmation literature (McQueen & Klein, 2006), we expected an effect size of $f = .37$ / $f^2 = .13$ for the difference between self-affirmation on one hand, and group-affirmation, and control conditions on the other hand. Group-affirmation has not been consistently documented in previous studies. We therefore assumed a conservatively small effect size of $f^2 = .06$, which results in a required sample size of 182. To assess the hypothesized interaction effect with personal versus normative attachment to Christian continuity, we applied the tool developed by Schoemann, Boulton, and Short (2017). Taking together all conditions, for a sample size of $N = 400$ a power of .80 can be expected.

We recruited non-Muslim French participants on several professional networking and social media platforms (e.g., LinkedIn). The sample consisted of 458 French citizens who voluntarily took part in the study. Participants' ages ranged from 17 to 76 ($M = 24.97$, $SD = 12.58$); there were 353 females and 105 males. Four hundred and four participants indicated their native language to be French. Among them, 101 self-categorized as being Christian. We report analysis using all French participants (pre-registered analysis) and only those French participants who indicated to be Christian (exploratory analysis).

Procedure. There were three experimental conditions (self-affirmation, group-affirmation, control). Before the manipulation of affirmation procedures, we measured personal beliefs and perception of social norms regarding the meaning given to collective self-continuity in terms of Christian religion with items derived from work by Guimond and colleagues (2013), using a seven-point scale (1 = “*total disagreement*”, 7 = “*total agreement*”).

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Personal beliefs. We used the following items, adapted from Guimond and colleagues (2013): "I believe French people have passed on their Christian traditions to the next generations"; "I believe French identity is rooted in Christianity"; "I believe that Christian norms and values have always been part of the French identity"; "I believe that France should remain a country where Christian norms and values prevail"; "I believe the Christian faith and traditions should remain dominant in France" ($\alpha = .83$).

Perception of social norms. Items were again adapted from Guimond and colleagues (2013) and read: "Most French people believe French people have passed on their Christian traditions to the next generations"; "Most French people believe the French identity is rooted in Christianity"; "Most French people believe that Christian norms and values have always been part of the French identity"; "Most French people believe that France should remain a country where Christian norms and values prevail"; "Most French people believe the Christian faith and traditions should remain dominant in France" ($\alpha = .88$).

Induction of threat to the continuity of national identity. Then, we administered the threat to national identity continuity (Smeekes, & Verkuyten, 2013). All participants read the following text (in French): "For most people, family is really important. Family provides people with a sense of roots and lineage. Therefore, many people want to know who they descend from and what their family history is. Just like a family, the country one originates from provides people with a sense of descent and origin. One was born and raised in a country, like in a family. This is the reason why we use the words "fatherland" and "motherland". Because you are part of France, you have a shared history and future with other French people. This is why your country, like your family, can give you a feeling that you continue to exist through time." They were then asked to underline the two most important sentences in the text. Subsequently, participants received two assignments. The first assignment was a writing task in which they were asked to respond to the following: "Think

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about your family, your family history, and the feeling of roots and heritage they give you.

Imagine now that you do not know where you come from, who your parents and grandparents are, hence have no family memory. Please briefly write down how you feel.” Participants then proceeded to the second task in which they were asked the following: “Think about France as one big family with a shared heritage and future. Imagine that France no longer exists, hence there no longer is a shared national past and future. Try to imagine how you feel.”

Affirmation procedure. The self- versus group-affirmation versus control conditions were adapted from prior research (Badea, et al., 2018; Sherman et al., 2007). Participants in all conditions first ranked the importance of nine values used in previous studies (honesty, respect, listening, empathy, family, tolerance, love, loyalty, sharing – Badea et al., 2018). Participants in the self-affirmation condition ranked the importance of the values to them personally, and participants in the group-affirmation condition ranked the importance of the values to them as French citizens. In the control condition, participants ranked the importance of the values to someone else (a person of the same age and gender as the participant). Next, participants from all conditions wrote reasons why their top-rated value was important for them/group/other person and gave one example of something that showed the importance of this value in real life.

Dependent Measures. After the affirmation manipulation, participants completed a questionnaire that included measures of continuity threat and opposition to Muslims’ rights. Responses were presented on a seven-point scale (1 = “total disagreement” 7 = “total agreement”).

Measure of threat to continuity. We used three items to measure threat to national continuity by Muslim immigrants (“Muslim immigrants in France undermine the traditional French way of life”; “The maintenance of French norms and values is threatened by the presence of Muslim immigrants”; “The Muslim immigrants’ way of life threatens the

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continuity of French identity”, ($\alpha = .92$). These items are adapted from work by Stephan et al., 1998.

Measure of opposition to Muslims’ rights. Finally, six items were used to measure opposition to Muslims’ rights, adapted from Smeekes, & Verkuyten, 2013: “Muslim immigrants have the right to show and express their religion in the public space”; “The right to build Islamic schools should always exist in France”; “Some Islamic holidays should become French bank holidays”; “French television should broadcast more programs by and for Muslim immigrants”; “In France, wearing a headscarf should not be forbidden”; “Muslim immigrants should have the right to not only celebrate their Islamic holidays at home, but also in public”, ($\alpha = .82$).

Results

As specified in our pre-registration, we conducted multiple regression analyses with two orthogonal contrasts, allowing us to include all three experimental conditions and examine interactions between the categorical variable and continuous variables (personal beliefs and social norms), as recommended by Judd, McClelland, Ryan, Muller, and Yzerbyt, (2018). Contrast 1 coded self-affirmation as 2, control as -1, and group-affirmation as -1. Contrast 2 was orthogonal to Contrast 1, and it therefore coded self-affirmation as 0, control as -1, and group-affirmation as 1. In a first step, we included the two contrasts, the effect of personal beliefs (mean-centered) and perceptions of social norms (mean-centered). In a further step, we added the two two-way interactions between contrasts, personal beliefs, and perceptions of social norms. We report the results of the second step of this regression analysis using the two samples separately: all French participants and French participants who indicated to be Christian.

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Results for all participants are summarized in the Table 1. Contrary to our hypotheses, the results of the above regression analysis did not show a significant effect of the contrast opposing self-affirmation to the other two conditions on threat perception, $b = .04$, $t(395) = 1.05$, $p = .292$, and on prejudice, $b = .04$, $t(395) = 1.06$, $p = .293$. We noticed a significant effect of personal belief that national continuity is based on Christian roots on perception of threat, $b = .84$, $t(395) = 11.27$, $p < .001$, and on prejudice, $b = .31$, $t(395) = 4.46$, $p < .001$. The more participants believe that their national continuity is rooted in Christian religion, the more they perceive threat to this continuity associated with Muslim immigrants.

We then explored the data and found a significant interaction between personal belief and contrast 2 (group-affirmation vs control) on opposition to Muslims' rights, $b = -.22$, $t(395) = -2.42$, $p = .016$. The pattern of means showed that among participants with a stronger belief that national continuity is based on Christian roots, group-affirmation decreased the level of prejudice compared to the control condition. There is no significant difference between group-affirmation and control among participants with lower beliefs that national continuity is based on the Christian religion. The pattern of results did not allow for a test of the mediation hypothesis.

Results for French participants who indicated their religion to be Christian are summarized in Table 2. For them, results showed a significant effect of the contrast opposing self-affirmation to the two other conditions on perception of threat, $b = .21$, $t(92) = 2.01$, $p = .048$, and marginally on prejudice, $b = .19$, $t(92) = 1.98$, $p = .051$. Contrary to our hypothesis, participants in the self-affirmation condition perceived more threat and expressed more prejudice compared to participants in the two other conditions (group-affirmation and control). Again, the effect of personal belief that national continuity is based on Christian roots on perception of threat, $b = .98$, $t(92) = 7.82$, $p < .001$, and on prejudice, $b = .51$, $t(92) = 4.31$, $p < .001$, were significant. The interaction between personal belief and contrast 2 (group-

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affirmation vs control) on prejudice was also significant, $b = -.41$, $t(92) = -2.78$, $p = .006$. The pattern of means is illustrated in Figure 1. Christian participants with strong personal beliefs that France should remain a country in which Christian values prevail were sensitive to group-affirmation and expressed less prejudice compared to participants in the control condition. No significant differences between group-affirmation and control conditions were observed among Christian participants with low personal beliefs in favor of the Christian continuity of the national identity.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to test the potential of self- and group-affirmation for reducing prejudice towards Muslim immigrants when national identity continuity is threatened. We examined the impact of the personal vs. normative attachment to Christian roots of national identity on the efficacy of affirmation procedures, and of the congruence between the threatened and the affirmed domains of the self. We distinguished between personal beliefs and perception of social norms regarding the national continuity in terms of Christian roots. It is possible that perceiving a shared belief that national continuity is built on Christian roots (i.e., social norms, Guimond et al., 2013) increases the perception of threat associated with Muslim minorities at the collective level of the self. Consequently, we predicted that group-affirmation would be more effective among French people who perceive these norms. Based on a recent model provided by Badea and Sherman (2018), we set out to demonstrate that opposition to Muslims' rights would be lower in the self-affirmation condition compared to the other conditions, especially among participants with stronger personal beliefs that national continuity is defined in terms of Christian roots. We also expected a lower prejudice in group-affirmation condition compared to control, especially among participants who perceived a normative context less favorable to intergroup tolerance.

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The results of the study did not support our hypotheses but offered an interesting pattern of results. When we analyzed data with all French participants, the effect of the contrast opposing self-affirmation to the two other conditions (group-affirmation and control) on prejudice was not significant. However, when we explored data collected among Christian French participants, who may perceive themselves to be a more direct out-group to Muslim immigrants, this contrast had a significant effect on the opposition to Muslims' rights. Contrary to our hypothesis, the level of prejudice in self-affirmation was higher compared to the other experimental conditions: thinking about important values for oneself increased the opposition to Muslims' rights. In contrast, across both samples (all French participants and only Christian participants), group-affirmation decreased the level of prejudice compared to the control condition among individuals with stronger personal beliefs that national continuity is based on Christian roots. Thinking about important values as a French citizen decreased the opposition to Muslims' rights, especially among participants with strong personal beliefs that national continuity is rooted in Christianity.

One important limitation of our study is that we did not design it to be sufficiently powered to account for the interesting constellation involving only Christians in the sample. What is more, it is also possible that our specific finding that prejudice is reduced via group affirmation is limited to this specific group of individuals in this specific national context. Further, preregistered studies are required to test the robustness of this finding, and studies in other national contexts are needed to test its generalizability.

However, results are in line with the literature examining the non-congruence between the threatened and the affirmed domains of the self, and its impact on the efficacy of affirmation procedures. Previous research showed that affirmation in a different domain than the threatened one can be effective in reducing the targeted bias or attitude (Blanton, et al., 1997; Sivanathan, et al., 2008). For example, Sivanathan and colleagues (2008) examined the

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impact of self-affirmation on attachment to poor decisions. Results showed that participants who affirmed a skill not directly related to their flawed decision (e.g., creativity) reduced further commitment to their initial choice. In contrast, participants who affirmed a skill directly related to their flawed decision (e.g., decision-making ability) reported increased feelings of self-threat following negative feedback and further increased their commitment to the initial decision. Blanton and colleagues (1997) compared participants who reaffirmed the aspect of the self that was threatened by a dissonant behavior with individuals who reaffirmed aspects unrelated to the dissonant action. In their study, the participants advocated reducing funding for handicapped students, which challenged their belief that they are compassionate people. An irrelevant affirmation (in the domain of creativity) reduced this dissonance because it gave them alternative ways of feeling good about themselves.

Another possibility to increase the efficacy of affirmation procedures is to target a level of self other than the one that was threatened. For example, if social identity is threatened, one can target participants' personal identity. Derks, Scheepers, Van Laar, and Ellemers (2011) assessed cardiovascular response patterns linked to threat and challenge to compared the effects of self- and group affirmation on women's ability to cope with threat to social identity on the topic of car parking. Results showed that self-affirmation, targeting the personal self, was an effective strategy to cope with threat to social identity among women. In our sample, group-affirmation was more effective in reducing prejudice against Muslim immigrants among people personally attached to the idea that national continuity is based on Christian roots. The affirmation procedure targeted the collective level of their self, while the threat coming from Muslim immigrants was strongly perceived at the individual level.

The debates on secularism and the promulgation of laws banning the wearing of the Islamic veil in France may have sparked a feeling of threat coming from Muslim immigrants at the personal level of the self. Christian participants who believe that the continuity of their

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national identity is rooted in their religion may perceive threat at the personal level of the self. Thinking about personal values (i.e., self-affirmation) may activate this threat, while thinking about collective values as French citizens (i.e. group-affirmation), may broaden the perspective with which people view information and events in their lives (Sherman, 2013) and diminish the perception of Muslim threats.

Results are also in line with the acculturation literature, and in particular with the multiculturalism hypothesis (Berry et al., 1977; Berry, 2013). The multiculturalism hypothesis is expressed in the policy statement as “the belief that confidence in one’s identity will lead to sharing, respect for others, and the decrease of discriminatory attitudes” (Berry, 2013, p.1127). In other words, if French citizens feel confident about the continuity of their national identity, the possibility to build together a cultural heritage that they can pass on to the next generations, they can be more tolerant, more open to including other cultures rooted in a different religion or based on other criteria. The European Union adopted a set of “Common Basic Principles for Immigrants Integration” in 2005, containing the cornerstones of multiculturalism: the right of all peoples to keep their culture and religion; the right to participate in the life of the larger society; and the duty of all groups (majority and minorities) to engage in a process of mutual change (Berry, 2013). Even if this integration model is not implemented in France, these principles create a favorable framework for the construction of a French identity based on respect and tolerance towards other religions.

In this research, we examined the consequences of a threat to national identity continuity in terms of Christian roots on attitudes towards Muslim immigrants and the potential for a social intervention based on self- and group-affirmation to reduce intergroup prejudice. A future line of research should investigate the role and place of Christianity in France, and why this persists as a crucial marker of identity in spite of France’s secularism and demographic diversity. One possible explanation for the lasting effects of religion that

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needs to be tested is that recent legislation affecting the individual freedom to wear religious symbols in public places has increased the salience of such cultural markers and may have thereby increased group tensions.

Apart from religion, further hallmarks of national identity are mentioned when referring to immigrants and their practices: respect for democratic values and gender equality. Respect for these principles can become a common goal and bring together individuals from different cultures in a single, superordinate group membership. However, this national and European ideal built around democracy and equality between human beings can also be used in an exclusionary way: If immigrants are perceived to not respect these shared democratic values, majority group individuals may perceive it to be justified to reject and exclude those immigrants. Researchers should investigate further the conditions under which ethnic French, as well as majority group members in general, and immigrant individuals can share a superordinate identity that revolves around the respect of democratic values, which is central for both national and European identities.

Finally, our results are optimistic in the sense that collective values can be shaped via educational tools. Civic education in schools could convey values of tolerance, equality and respect towards all religions and build the continuity of national identity on this basis. Thus, regardless of individual religious practices, thinking of important values as a French citizen (i.e., group-affirmation) can contribute to harmonious intergroup relations.

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Table 1: Unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors for the effects of affirmation status on threat to continuity and opposition to Muslims' rights (All French participants, N=404).

	<i>Threat</i>	<i>Prejudice</i>
Contrast 1 = self (2), control (-1), group (-1)	.04 (.04)	0.04 (.04)
Contrast 2 = self (0), control (-1), group (1)	-0.02 (.07)	-0.07 (.07)
Personal belief (centered mean)	0.84 (.07)**	0.31 (.07)**
Social norm (centered mean)	-0.007 (.07)	.03 (.07)
Contrast 1*Personal belief	-0.003 (.04)	0.02 (.04)
Contrast 1*Societal norm	-0.06 (.05)	-0.03 (.05)
Contrast 2*Personal belief	-0.02 (.09)	-0.22* (.09)
Contrast 2*Societal norm	-0.09 (.09)	-.01 (.09)
	$R^2=.32$	$R^2=.11$

Note: $p^* < .05$, $p^{**} < .01$, $p^{***} < .001$

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Table 2: Unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors for the effects of affirmation status on threat to continuity threat and opposition to Muslims' rights (French Christian participants, N=101).

	<i>Threat</i>	<i>Prejudice</i>
Contrast 1 = self (2), control (-1), group (-1)	.24 (.11)*	0.19 (.09)*
Contrast 2 = self (0), control (-1), group (1)	0.001 (.18)	0.04 (.17)
Personal belief (centered mean)	0.69 (.11)**	0.35 (.09)**
Social norm (centered mean)	0.08 (.11)	.03 (.11)
Contrast 1*Personal belief	-0.07 (.09)	-0.03 (.08)
Contrast 1*Societal norm	-0.13 (.09)	-0.07 (.08)
Contrast 2*Personal belief	-0.11 (.15)	-0.42 (.14)**
Contrast 2*Societal norm	-0.23 (.16)	-.04 (.15)
	$R^2=.51$	$R^2=.32$

Note: $p^* < .05$, $p^{**} < .01$, $p^{***} < .001$

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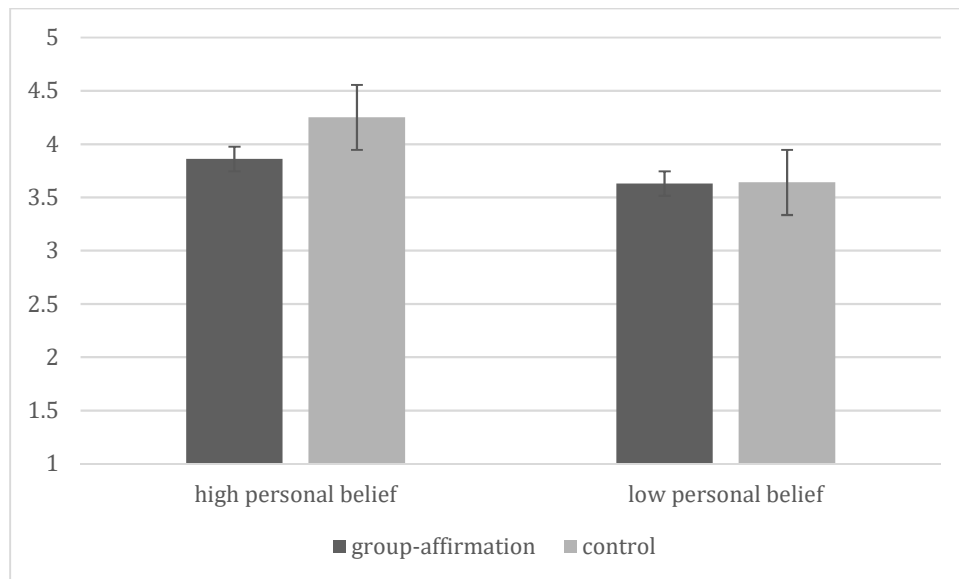


Figure 1: Opposition to Muslims' rights in group-affirmation and control conditions as a function of personal beliefs in Christian continuity (Christian participants)