Thanks for the Compliment? Emotional Reactions to Group-Level Versus Individual-Level Compliments and Insults
Amber L. Garcia, Daniel A. Miller, Eliot R. Smith and Diane M. Mackie
Group Processes Intergroup Relations 2006; 9; 307
DOI: 10.1177/1368430206064636

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://gpi.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/9/3/307

Additional services and information for Group Processes & Intergroup Relations can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://gpi.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts
Subscriptions: http://gpi.sagepub.com/subscriptions
Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav
Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations (this article cites 11 articles hosted on the SAGE Journals Online and HighWire Press platforms):
http://gpi.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/9/3/307#BIBL
Thanks for the Compliment? Emotional Reactions to Group-Level Versus Individual-Level Compliments and Insults

Amber L. Garcia, Daniel A. Miller and Eliot R. Smith

Purdue University

Diane M. Mackie

University of California, Santa Barbara

The current research investigated participants’ reactions to positive and negative comments directed toward them as individuals or as members of a social group. Using both perspective-taking (Studies 1 and 2) and actual interaction methodologies (Study 3), three studies found that participants generally responded negatively to negative comments regardless of the level of identity to which the comment was directed. Positive comments were generally viewed positively, except when the comment was directed at the group and was stereotype relevant. When the latter was the case, participants reported increased anger and desires to attack (and avoid) the speaker. Furthermore, these negative feelings and action tendencies were partially mediated by an attribution to prejudice to the speaker.

KEYWORDS compliments, intergroup emotions, prejudice

IMAGINE you are a woman in an advanced calculus course. You receive the highest score in the class on the first exam. The professor approaches you after class and says, ‘Wow you really did well on the test!’ How would you feel about receiving this compliment? According to emotion theory, you should feel positively. Conversely, you should feel negatively after receiving an insult. That reactions to compliments are generally more positive than reactions to insults is hardly a prediction that anyone would wish to dispute. However, according to major appraisal theories of emotion (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991; C. A. Smith & Ellsworth, 1985), several key appraisals help influence what specific emotions should be felt. So, if you
appraise the situation as having desirable elements, happiness should follow. Anger or fear might follow from appraising the situation as having undesirable elements.

Imagine the same situation, except that the professor says ‘Wow you really did well on the test, for a woman!’ The substantive content of the comment is the same, but would your feelings be different if the professor delivered this group-qualified compliment instead? In such a situation, appraisals and subsequently emotions should differ from the straightforward compliment or insult example.

The research reported here investigates people’s thoughts, emotions, and desires for action, in response to positive or negative comments directed at them either as an individual, or as a member of a social group. When comments are directed toward an individual, without mention of a group membership, then reactions to such comments should largely be determined by the valence of the comment. More interesting is how individuals respond to comments that explicitly or implicitly implicate their group membership.

**Intergroup Emotions Theory**

Intergroup Emotions Theory is the broader theoretical backdrop for our interest in emotional reactions driven by potentially stereotypic comments. Intergroup Emotions Theory (IET; Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000; E. R. Smith, 1993) holds that many of people’s reactions to social objects or events may be understood in terms of emotional responses on behalf of social groups with which they identify. That is, in contrast to the typical assumption that emotions only occur when events are directly and personally relevant to individuals, we postulate (following Social Identity Theory; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) that groups can become part of the psychological self. When this occurs, people react emotionally to events that affect their ingroups as well as to events that affect them individually. IET thus suggests that positive or negative comments made about your group might elicit emotional reactions that are just as intense as those elicited by identical personal-level comments, especially if those comments reveal stereotypes or prejudices that the speaker may hold about your group.

IET has been supported by several types of evidence (Devos, Silver, Mackie, & Smith, 2002; Mackie et al., 2000; Mackie, Silver, & Smith, 2002). However, the evidence to date has mostly involved general feelings about outgroups (e.g. groups that compete with or threaten the perceiver’s ingroup). IET studies have not yet examined emotions and other responses to specific events, such as the receipt of an insult or compliment, or made direct comparisons between otherwise similar events that implicate the group versus the individual level of the self. In cases where one’s group identity is made salient, appraisals of the situation might vary from cases where one’s individual identity is salient. One potential response to such group level comments is for the target to make attributions to the speaker’s prejudice.

**Attribution to prejudice**

There has been considerable investigation of inferences of prejudice by victims of clearly or ambiguously discriminatory treatment. Much of this research has been motivated by the hypothesis that this attribution serves a self-protective function: if one can attribute poor treatment or negative feedback to the other’s prejudice, one does not have to accept its negative implications for the self (Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002; McCoy & Major, 2003). Another perspective contends that especially for disadvantaged groups, attributing negative outcomes to prejudice is harmful to well-being (Kobrynowicz & Branscombe, 1997; Schmitt, Branscombe, Kobrynowicz, & Owen, 2002). When members of disadvantaged groups recognize discrimination based on an important social identity, they are reminded of their devalued social identity, which has negative implications for their personal identity. Correspondingly, most research on this topic has addressed self-esteem, the self-concept, or related dependent variables.

Our concern is quite different. Although making an attribution to another’s prejudice may either protect or harm self-esteem, the
The focus of these studies is on reactions to a comment that may have implications for the immediate interpersonal and intergroup situation. These implications may well be negative if a typical response to an attribution to prejudice is group-level anger (or other negative emotions) and desires to attack or confront the other person. Self-esteem protection and exacerbation of conflict due to attributed prejudice are by no means inconsistent, and may even occur simultaneously as Major, Kaiser, and McCoy (2003) found.

**Hypotheses**

When considering negative comments, either personal insults or group slurs, IET predicts that because people respond emotionally to group-level as well as individual-level events, both of these types of comment should elicit negative emotions such as anger, and behavioral action tendencies such as the desire to confront the speaker. We expect such reactions to be just as intense for group-level as for individual-level negative comments, despite the greater personal relevance of an individual insult—because IET holds that people can react strongly to events impinging on important and self-relevant groups, just as they do for events that affect them as individuals. Thus, we predict that negative comments will elicit strongly negative reactions, whether they are directed at the group or individual level.

Considering positive comments, the prediction from IET is somewhat different. Individual-level compliments should trigger unalloyed positive emotional reactions, in general. But group-level compliments should lead to negative reactions in one situation: when the comment is group-stereotypic, for example when an Asian student is told that Asians are good at math. Such a comment leads to evaluationally opposite reactions at the group and individual levels. While it might be pleasant to be told that one is good at math, the same comment affords the inference that the speaker holds stereotypes about one’s group. Since IET predicts that people are sensitive to such potentially threatening group-level events, the perceivers’ overall reactions should be negative. A neutral reaction might be predicted if one assumes that people weight equally the positive individual-level implications and the negative group-level implications of such a comment. However, we predict a negative reaction instead, because the inference that the speaker holds a stereotype destroys the value of the individual compliment. If the speaker is simply voicing vulgar stereotypes, the superficially positive comment no longer says much about the target as an individual. As research on shifting standards has demonstrated (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997), when people judge members of stereotyped groups on actions or behaviors that are stereotype-relevant, they tend to use a within-category judgment standard. So, when judging how well a woman performed on a math test, the standard is lower for women than for men because of the negative stereotype about women’s ability in this domain. In our studies, we predict that when recipients believe that a speaker has applied a stereotypic, within-category judgment standard, their emotional reaction to such evaluative comments will be negative.

Putting these predictions together, we expect (a) a main effect of valence, with more negative reactions to negative comments than to positive ones. We also expect (b) reactions to negative comments will be negative in all cases, but reactions to positive comments will be negative for group-level, stereotypical comments and positive in the other cases. These predictions apply to multiple types of reactions: the perceivers’ appraisals of the situation, emotions, and behavioral action tendencies. Finally, (c) the negative reactions to group-level, stereotypical comments should be mediated by perceptions that the speaker is prejudiced. Such a perception indicates directly that the perceivers are sensitive to the group-level (and not only individual-level) implications of the comment. Thus, encountering such comments should lead perceivers to conclude that the speaker is prejudiced, which should in turn lead to negative emotional reactions at the group level.

In the first study, we examined participants’ reactions to insults and compliments that were...
directed at either the individual level or the group level and that were either stereotype-relevant or stereotype-irrelevant. We expected participants to respond negatively to insults regardless of their level, and more positively to compliments, except in conditions where the compliment is directed at the group and implicates a group stereotype. In such conditions, we expected responses to be negative, mediated by attributions of prejudice to the speaker.

Study 1

Method

Participants and design Participants were 95 introductory psychology students at Purdue University (45 women, 50 men). Of those participants who reported ethnicity, 74 were European American, 10 were African American, and 10 were Asian American. The average age of the participants was 19. All participants received credit for their participation as partial fulfillment of their research experience requirement. Each participant read one target and one filler scenario in a 2 Attribution for Performance (group-level vs. individual-level) × 2 Relevance (stereotype-relevant vs. stereotype-irrelevant) × 2 Valence (positive vs. negative) between-subjects factorial design.

Procedure The study was described as examining reactions to positive and negative life events. Participants were told that they would read several scenarios and then report their emotions and reactions to each scenario. Five different scenarios were constructed which included either positive or negative comments. Each scenario asked the participant to imagine himself or herself as a member of a particular group, in a particular social context, and receiving either a positive or negative comment from another person (see Appendix A for scenarios).

The three positive scenarios included compliments regarding dancing, academic performance, and helping behavior. The two negative scenarios included insults regarding job performance and driving ability. For each of the five scenarios, two factors, described below, were manipulated. To maintain the cover story, the filler scenarios described other types of positive or negative life events (e.g. catch a cold, get a salary bonus) that did not involve insults or compliments.

Manipulation of group vs. individual nature of the performance appraisal As a between-subjects factor, the performance was either attributed to the individual’s merits (e.g. Wow, you sure are a good dancer!) or the individual’s group membership (e.g. Wow, Blacks sure are good dancers!).

Manipulation of stereotype-relevance Also between subjects, participants were asked to imagine themselves as members of a group to which the comment was stereotypically relevant or irrelevant. For example, when the comment was about dancing, participants were asked to imagine themselves as either an African American (stereotype-relevant) or as a Purdue University student (stereotype-irrelevant).

Measures Appraisal theory predicts that appraisals of the situation help determine specific emotional responses. We assessed two of these important aspects of the situations with single-item measures using 11-point scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 11 (extremely much). Participants indicated to what extent there were undesirable elements present and to what extent there were desirable elements present. To measure the attribution to group prejudice to the speaker, as an indication that the situation was perceived as relevant at the group and not only the individual level, participants also indicated their agreement or disagreement with the statement: ‘I feel that this person was prejudiced’.

To measure emotions, on 9-point scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 9 (extremely), participants indicated to what extent the situation made them feel eight emotions related to anger and happiness. From previous research (Miller, Smith, & Mackie, 2004), we have found that anger and happiness are strong emotions that are easily understood by participants (versus e.g. obsequiousness). Specifically, the following items were used: (a) disdainful,
scornful, angry, resentful, annoyed, contemptuous (six items measuring anger; $\alpha = .86$) and (b) happy and joyful (two items measuring happiness; $\alpha = .95$). Finally we measured action tendencies. On 11-point scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 11 (extremely much), participants indicated to what extent the situation made them want to: (a) argue with, attack or confront (three items measuring attack; $\alpha = .83$); (b) avoid; and (c) spend time with (affiliate with) the other person. These action tendencies were chosen because they directly correspond with the emotions measured.

**Results and discussion**

**Scenario comparisons** We examined whether we could collapse across the three positive and two negative scenarios. For each of the dependent measures, we performed a 2 Level (group-level vs. individual-level) $\times$ 2 Relevance (stereotype-relevant vs. stereotype-irrelevant) $\times$ 3 (positive) or 2 (negative) Scenario between-subjects analysis of variance. None of the three-way interactions were significant for either the positive ($p$ values between .09 and .76) or the negative ($p$ values between .07 and .93) scenarios, supporting our decision to collapse across the specific scenarios. Because of the absence of a three-way interaction between scenario, level of comment, and relevance and because we were not interested in main-effect differences due to the specifics of the scenarios (e.g. a compliment on dancing versus academic performance), we averaged all responses across the compliment and insult scenarios separately. In initial analyses, valence of the scenarios, group- versus individual-level, and stereotype-relevance were the factors. Across all scenarios, and for all dependent variables, there was a significant main effect for valence, confirming our first prediction. In general, participants reported more negative reactions and emotions to the negative comments (insults) compared to the positive comments (compliments).

Our second hypothesis was that reactions to negative comments would be negative in all cases, but reactions to positive comments would be negative for group-level, stereotypical comments only, and positive in the other three cases. To test this, we ran a planned comparison. Specifically, we compared the conditions where we expected negative reactions (five conditions) to the conditions where we expected positive reactions (three conditions). For all dependent measures this comparison was significant, in accordance with our prediction. To better interpret this complex pattern, in a way that would not be confounded with the overall valence effect, we analyzed positive and negative scenarios separately. Although we expected uniformly negative reaction to insults, regardless of the level at which they were aimed, our hypotheses translated into an expected interaction between the level of comment and stereotype relevance for all dependent variables in the positive (i.e. compliment) scenarios.

**Insult scenarios** Out of eight dependent measures, significant differences between conditions were found for only three of the dependent measures. Thus, in support of our hypotheses, responses were generally negative across all four negative conditions. The specific effects that were significant were unpredicted and not replicated in the second study, so they were not interpreted.\(^1\)

**Compliment scenarios**

**Appraisals** The predicted interaction between the level of comment and stereotype-relevance was significant for the appraisal of undesirability of the situation. Participants in the group-level stereotype-relevant condition appraised the situation as being more undesirable compared to those in the other three conditions (group-level irrelevant, individual-level relevant, or individual-level irrelevant). A similar pattern, although not significant, was found for the appraisal of desirability (see Table 1).

**Experienced emotions** The same interaction between the level of comment and stereotype-relevance was significant for anger and marginally significant for happiness. The one-cell-different-from-the-others pattern was found, where participants who received a group-level stereotype-relevant comment experienced the
most amount of anger and least amount of happiness, compared to those in the other three conditions (see Table 1).

**Action tendencies** The same interaction between the level of comment and stereotype-relevance was significant for desire to attack. A one-cell-different-from-the-others pattern was found, where participants in the group-level stereotype-relevant condition reported wanting to attack the target person most, compared to those in the other three conditions. Even though not statistically significant, the pattern of results for desire to avoid was similar to the pattern found for attack. There was no significant interaction between the level of comment and stereotype-relevance for the desire to affiliate (see Table 1).

**Mediational analyses** Our third hypothesis was that for the positive scenarios, perception of prejudice is the driving force behind negative reactions to stereotype-relevant compliments stated at the group level. This would indicate that the perceiver was sensitive to the group-level implications of the comment. First, is the perception of prejudice highest in that particular cell? The answer is yes. The interaction between the level of comment and stereotype-relevance was significant for attribution to prejudice. The same predicted one-cell-different-from-the-others pattern as for our other dependent variables was found, where participants in the group-level stereotype-relevant condition were most likely to see the speaker as prejudiced, compared to those in the other three conditions (see Table 1).

To test our prediction, we conducted mediational analyses testing the relations between the type of comment (group vs. individual and stereotype-relevant vs. irrelevant), attribution to prejudice, and key emotions and action tendencies. Because of the one-cell-different-from-the-others pattern found in the analyses of variance results, the group-level stereotype-relevant condition (coded as 1) was compared to the remaining three conditions (coded as zero) for the mediational analyses. Regression-based causal models were estimated (Baron & Kenny, 1986) to measure mediation (by attribution to prejudice) of the effect of type of comment on the emotion of anger. First, we found the hypothesized direct relationship between the type of comment and desire to attack ($B = 3.07, p < .0001$), such that participants who received a group-level stereotype-relevant compliment reported feeling more desire to attack compared to participants in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent measure</th>
<th>Group-level stereotype-relevant</th>
<th>Group-level stereotype-irrelevant</th>
<th>Individual-level stereotype-relevant</th>
<th>Individual-level stereotype-irrelevant</th>
<th>Test of level × relevance interaction $F(1,53)$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appraisals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undesirable</td>
<td>6.64$^a$</td>
<td>2.47$^b$</td>
<td>4.09$^b$</td>
<td>3.23$^b$</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>&lt;.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desirable</td>
<td>3.43$^a$</td>
<td>6.07$^b$</td>
<td>6.82$^b$</td>
<td>7.29$^b$</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>&lt;.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>2.75$^a$</td>
<td>5.60$^b$</td>
<td>5.59$^b$</td>
<td>6.18$^b$</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>&lt;.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>3.69$^a$</td>
<td>1.68$^b$</td>
<td>1.77$^b$</td>
<td>1.82$^b$</td>
<td>13.18</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action tendencies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack</td>
<td>5.49$^a$</td>
<td>2.82$^b$</td>
<td>2.21$^b$</td>
<td>2.20$^b$</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid</td>
<td>5.93$^a$</td>
<td>3.40$^b$</td>
<td>3.09$^b$</td>
<td>2.88$^b$</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>&lt;.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliate</td>
<td>3.14$^a$</td>
<td>4.87$^b$</td>
<td>5.73$^bc$</td>
<td>7.88$^c$</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>&lt;.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice</td>
<td>6.14$^a$</td>
<td>2.87$^b$</td>
<td>1.82$^b$</td>
<td>1.65$^b$</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td>&lt;.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Within each row, means sharing a common subscript do not differ from one another; those with a different subscript are significantly different from one another, $p < .05$. 

312
other three conditions (see Table 2). Second, we found that the group-level stereotype-relevant comment predicted perceptions of prejudice ($B = 4.03, p < .0001$); comments of this type were attributed to prejudice more than comments in the other three cells. As expected, prejudice predicted the desire to attack ($B = .46, p < .0001$); the more participants attributed the comment to prejudice, the more they wanted to attack the other person. Finally, when attribution to prejudice was included as a mediator, the direct effect of a group-level stereotype-relevant compliments on the desire to attack was significantly reduced ($B = 1.20, p = .05$; Sobel test $= 4.67$, $p < .0001$). Thus, the relationship between the group-level stereotype-relevant compliments and desire to attack was partially mediated by attribution to prejudice, as was expected. A similar but marginally significant pattern of mediation was found for anger, an emotion directly linked to attack (Sobel test $= 1.80$, $p < .07$), and desire to avoid the other person (Sobel test $= 1.70$, $p < .09$). That is, the relationship between the group-level stereotype-relevant compliments and anger was partially mediated by prejudice, as was the relationship between such a compliment and desire to avoid the other person. Thus, these results show that participants were more likely to infer prejudice when the compliment was group-level and stereotype-relevant and this inference partially mediated the direct effect of comment on desire to attack. The perception of group-level prejudice is partially responsible for negative responses to group-stereotypic compliments.

**Summary**

The results from this study support our hypotheses. First, obviously responses to negative comments (regardless of type) were more negative than responses to positive compliments. Second, the predicted planned comparison was significant, such that responses to negative comments were negative across the board, while responses to positive comments were generally positive, but negative in the case of group-level, stereotypic compliments. Third, the negative reactions in that one cell were partially mediated by an attribution to group prejudice to the speaker—a finding that clearly indicates that the group level was implicated for perceivers. Thus, while attributing negative comments to a speaker’s prejudice may have self-esteem protective effects (as other research has shown), making this attribution for a positive but stereotypic comment gives rise to feelings of anger and a desire to attack the speaker. This observation suggests the importance of examining group-level implications (e.g., negative implications for intergroup relations) as well as individual-level implications (e.g., self-esteem protection) when investigating effects of attribution to prejudice.

Overall, participants who imagined receiving a group-level comment reported experiencing emotions with an intensity at least as great as those receiving individual-level comments. Specifically, for negative scenarios there was no significant difference in emotion intensity between group and individual comments, and for positive scenarios emotion was stronger for group comments. This pattern supports the fundamental assumption underlying IET, that emotions can be experienced when thinking about oneself as a group member, as well as an individual.

An especially interesting cell in this study is that involving positive stereotypic comments that do not explicitly mention the group. For example, imagine that you are an Asian student and someone tells you that you are good at

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent measure</th>
<th>Total effect</th>
<th>Residual effect</th>
<th>% Mediated</th>
<th>Sobel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger emotion</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.80, $p &lt; .07$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack action tendency</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>4.67, $p &lt; .0001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid action tendency</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1.70, $p &lt; .09$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Table 2. Mediation analyses for the group-level positive condition considering prejudice as mediator for Study 1 |
math. This situation is quite ambiguous. On the surface, this is an individual-level compliment, which should lead to positive responses—which is what we found in this study. Yet the presence of a group stereotype is not very far beneath the surface. And other research, particularly on ‘stereotype threat’ (Steele & Aronson, 1998) shows that people can be extremely sensitive to the possibility that others hold stereotypes of their groups. If the perceiver infers that he or she is being stereotyped, negative group-based emotional responses ought to follow, according to IET. Our results showed that participants did not respond negatively to such individual-level stereotype-relevant compliments. Nor did they make strong attributions to the speaker’s prejudice in this condition (as they did for positive stereotypic comments that were explicitly directed at the group level). This is an interesting pattern, particularly because the wording of the scenarios made the perceiver’s hypothetical group membership quite salient, and the comments were clearly stereotypically relevant to the group. Possibly this is a case of motivated cognition: the desire to take the compliment at face value leads participants not to look beneath the surface to identify the possibility of prejudice.

The first study, then, provides a clear pattern of results indicating that not all compliments are positive. To provide more evidence for the idea that group-relevance as well as individual-level concerns drive responses to comments made by others, Study 2 focused on compliments or insults that directly implicate groups, in the form of group-qualified compliments and insults. That is, the target is either complimented or insulted, only to have the initial remark qualified by the target’s group membership. An example of a qualified compliment is ‘You’re pretty strong, for a woman’. Despite the fact that the target is being complimented on an individual characteristic, this statement is qualified by her gender, and possibly implies that the speaker holds lower standards for her gender group. Alternately, an insult can also be qualified by reference to a group membership, as in the example ‘You’re not very strong, for a man’. In this case, the individual is being insulted and because group membership is mentioned, it becomes even more apparent that such a deficiency is counterstereotypic for the group (i.e. men are supposed to be strong).

We expected group-level comments to elicit more negative responses than simple individual-level comments such as ‘You’re (pretty/not very) strong’. This is because in both group-level conditions, the comment also has implications for the target’s group, which (according to IET) can also drive emotional reactions. Specifically, a group-qualified compliment (‘pretty strong for a woman’), despite its positive implications at the individual level, also suggests that the speaker holds a low, and stereotypic, opinion of the target’s group. As our theory predicts (and as we found in Study 1), this should generate negative group-level emotional reactions. A group-qualified insult (‘not very strong, for a man’) should, we predict, generate negative reactions for two reasons. It is clearly a personal insult (perhaps even a particularly potent one because it suggests that the low performance is unexpected). The comment also suggests that the speaker holds a stereotype about the group, and even though the stereotype is positive in valence, Study 1 showed that negative group-based reactions typically result from this.

Finally (and unproblematically) we predict that the individual-level insult will be negative, and the individual-level compliment will be positive—making the latter the only cell that should generate positive reactions. When an individual-level comment is made, our results so far show that participants appear not to take it negatively, even if it directly touches on a group stereotype. Therefore our prediction for this study is for an interaction of level (group-qualified versus individual) by comment valence, with the means showing positive reactions in the individual-level positive condition and all three of the other cells being negative. We expect attributions to prejudice to mediate feelings of anger and desires to attack, for the group-qualified positive comments, indicating once again (as found in Study 1) that people are sensitive to the negative group-level implications of the comments.
Study 2

Study 2 examined reactions to qualified compliments and insults. Participants received insults and compliments that were either unqualified and directed toward them individually (e.g. You did a great/poor job!), or were qualified by their group membership (e.g. You did a great/poor job, for a woman/man!). Similar to Study 1, several different scenarios were constructed. Each participant read two of three possible target scenarios, together with three filler scenarios.

Method

Participants and design Participants were 90 introductory psychology students at Purdue University (52 women, 37 men, 1 unreported). Of those participants who reported ethnicity, 70 were European American, 4 were African American, 10 were Asian American, and 2 were Hispanic American. The average age of participants was 19. All participants received credit for their participation as partial fulfillment of their research experience requirement. Each participant read two target and three filler scenarios in a 2 Comment Qualification (group-qualified vs. individual-unqualified) × 2 Valence (positive vs. negative) mixed factorial design. The level of comment was a within-subjects factor and valence was a between-subjects factor.

Procedure As in Study 1, participants were told that they would read several scenarios and then report their emotions and reactions to each scenario. Three scenarios were constructed, within which two factors, described below, were manipulated. One scenario dealt with dancing ability, one with leadership ability, and one with academic ability (see Appendix B for scenarios).

Manipulation of group vs. individual nature of comment The comment was targeted at either the individual level or was qualified by group membership. An example of a group-qualified positive comment is:

Imagine yourself as a White American. You are at a dance club frequented by Purdue students. In a break between songs, a stranger leans over and says, ‘Wow, you sure are a good dancer, for a White guy!’

Manipulation of valence The comment was either a compliment or an insult to the individual target person. All comments, whether positive or negative, addressed the target’s stereotype inconsistent behavior. That is, for each of the comments, the actor violated their group’s stereotype and were either complimented or insulted because of their actions. For example, Blacks were insulted for being bad dancers, whereas Whites were complimented for being good dancers.

Results and discussion

Initial analyses Similar to Study 1, we ran a three-way analysis including scenarios for each of the dependent measures. Of the eight dependent measures, there was a significant three-way interaction between comment qualification, valence, and scenario for feelings of anger ($F(2, 84) = 5.99, p < .01$), desire to attack ($F(2, 84) = 11.09, p < .0001$), and perceptions of prejudice ($F(2, 82) = 10.18, p < .0002$). However, looking at the means for these three dependent measures, the directional results were consistent with our hypotheses in every case. That is, participants in the unqualified positive comment condition responded more positively than participants in the other three conditions, regardless of the particular scenario they received. The significant three-way interactions are largely due to the fact that in the individual negative condition, participants who were presented with the dancing scenario responded more negatively than participants presented with either the math or leadership performance scenarios, so the strength (but not the direction) of the predicted effect varied due to specific aspects of the different scenarios. Given that, and because we wanted to focus on overall patterns rather than detailed differences among scenarios, further analyses collapsed across scenarios.

Appraisals An interaction between comment qualification and valence was significant for
both appraisal measures: the undesirability of the situation and the desirability of the situation. Participants in the unqualified positive condition appraised the situation as being the least undesirable and most desirable compared to those in the other three conditions (unqualified negative, qualified positive, or qualified negative; see Table 3). These latter three conditions had generally similar results.

**Experienced emotions** An interaction between comment qualification and valence was found for both anger and happiness. Just as for the appraisal measures, participants in the unqualified positive condition reported the least amount of anger and most amount of happiness, compared to those in the other three conditions (see Table 3).

**Action tendencies** An interaction between comment qualification and valence was significant for all three action tendencies, desire to attack, avoid, and affiliate. Participants in the individual-level positive condition reported the least desire to attack or avoid and most desire to affiliate, compared to those in the other three conditions (see Table 3).

Summarizing, the appraisals, emotions, and action tendencies all showed that people responded negatively in three of the four conditions. Negative responses to insults (the two negative conditions) are no surprise. Nor is a positive response to a simple unqualified compliment. But how can we understand the negative response to the positive qualified comment (e.g. 'You’re a good dancer, for a White guy')? We hypothesized that the answer rests on the attribution to prejudice, which should mediate the relationship between positive qualified comments and negative responses. Recipients of such a comment should feel angry at the implied negative stereotype of their group, and want to attack the speaker to the extent that they attribute the remark to prejudice.

**Mediational analyses** Supporting this prediction, the same interaction between comment qualification and valence was significant for attribution to prejudice. Again, participants in the unqualified positive condition were least likely to attribute the comment to prejudice, compared to those in the other three conditions (see Table 3). To more formally test the mediation hypothesis for this cell, regression-based causal models were estimated to compare the positive qualified cell (the cell in which mediation is hypothesized) to the positive

**Table 3.** Mean appraisal, emotion, and action tendency measures by condition for Study 2

| Dependent measure | Individual positive | Individual negative | Group positive | Group negative | Test of level \(\times\) valence interaction  
F(1,88) | p            |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appraisals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undesirable</td>
<td>2.70(^a)</td>
<td>8.11(^bc)</td>
<td>7.68(^b)</td>
<td>8.78(^c)</td>
<td>42.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desirable</td>
<td>8.14(^a)</td>
<td>2.77(^b)</td>
<td>4.75(^c)</td>
<td>2.77(^b)</td>
<td>23.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>7.12(^a)</td>
<td>1.62(^b)</td>
<td>2.62(^c)</td>
<td>1.31(^b)</td>
<td>80.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>1.86(^a)</td>
<td>5.09(^b)</td>
<td>5.00(^b)</td>
<td>5.82(^c)</td>
<td>28.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action tendencies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack</td>
<td>2.69(^a)</td>
<td>5.75(^b)</td>
<td>7.01(^c)</td>
<td>7.26(^c)</td>
<td>13.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid</td>
<td>2.23(^a)</td>
<td>6.51(^b)</td>
<td>5.88(^b)</td>
<td>5.98(^b)</td>
<td>33.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliate</td>
<td>6.56(^a)</td>
<td>3.00(^b)</td>
<td>2.72(^bc)</td>
<td>2.00(^c)</td>
<td>16.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice</td>
<td>1.74(^a)</td>
<td>3.37(^b)</td>
<td>7.74(^c)</td>
<td>6.83(^c)</td>
<td>11.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Within each row, means sharing a common subscript do not differ from one another; those with a different subscript are significantly different from one another, \(p < .05\).
unqualified cell, which is treated as a baseline. First, we found the hypothesized direct relationship between type of comment and desire to attack ($B = 4.32, p < .0001$), such that participants who received a qualified positive comment reported wanting to attack more compared to participants who received an unqualified positive comment. Second, we found that the qualified positive comment predicted prejudice ($B = 6.00, p < .0001$); comments of this type were more likely to be attributed to prejudice compared to unqualified positive comments. As expected, prejudice predicted the desire to attack ($B = .83, p < .0001$); the more participants attributed the comment to prejudice, the more they wanted to attack. Finally, when attribution to prejudice was included as a mediator, the direct effect of qualified positive comments on the desire to attack was reduced to non-significance ($B = –.76, p < .50$, Sobel test = 4.73, $p < .0001$). Thus, the relationship between qualified positive comments and the desire to attack was significantly mediated by attribution to prejudice. A similar pattern of mediation was found for feelings of anger (Sobel test = 4.81, $p < .0001$) and desire to avoid (Sobel test = 2.04, $p < .05$; see Table 4). Again, the relationship between qualified positive comments and these negative responses was significantly mediated by attribution to prejudice. Anger was positively correlated with both the desire to attack ($r = .65, p < .0001$) and the desire to avoid ($r = .38, p < .001$).

The results of Study 2 show that qualified and unqualified insults, as well as qualified compliments, lead to negative appraisals, emotions, and action tendencies. As predicted, the negative responses to qualified compliments were mediated by the attribution to prejudice. Specifically, the mediational analyses suggest that comments that are positive at the individual level but that mention the group negatively generate anger and the desire to attack, mediated by the attribution to prejudice. In the other three cells (simple unqualified compliments, and qualified and unqualified insults), participants’ responses match the valence of the comment, not surprisingly.

Our findings on action tendencies showed that in the qualified positive cell, which produced anger, participants reported wanting to both attack and avoid the speaker. Attack is the action tendency most directly linked to anger according to emotion theory, so why do we also find avoidance? One possible answer is simply that avoidance as well as attack are negative reactions, and participants nonselectively choose any negative reaction to the disliked speaker. A more theoretically interesting possibility is that although anger gives rise to an immediate desire to attack, people recognize that social situations often constrain behaviors. It can be impolite, inconsistent with one’s self-image, or possibly even dangerous (physically or in terms of social status) to actively confront someone who makes offensive comments. For this reason people may often choose to avoid offenders rather than to approach and confront them. As Russell’s (2003) theory of emotion outlines, emotional action tendencies are not automatically and unthinkingly executed when people are in emotional states; rather, they are evaluated in light of the overall situation and other constraints on action such as social norms, competing desires and goals, etc.

In Studies 1 and 2, participants were asked to respond to hypothetical situations and also to take the perspective of another person. In some cases, that person was of a different gender or

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent measure</th>
<th>Total effect</th>
<th>Residual effect</th>
<th>% Mediated</th>
<th>Sobel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger emotion</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>–.08</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>4.81, $p &lt; .0001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack action tendency</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>–.76</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>4.73, $p &lt; .0001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid action tendency</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.04, $p &lt; .05$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Mediational analyses for the group-level positive condition considering prejudice as mediator for Study 2.
ethnicity from their own. It is possible that participants’ own group memberships might limit their ability to identify with the characters in the scenarios, limiting the validity of their responses. To examine this possibility, we performed a three-way analysis of variance including participant gender for all dependent measures in both studies. In Study 1, none of the three-way interactions were significant for positive scenarios (p values between .11 and .90), which were the scenarios of interest. For the negative scenarios, there was a significant three-way interaction between level, relevance, and gender on perceptions of prejudice (F(1, 30) = 5.16, p < .03). However, this finding should be interpreted with caution because of the small cell sizes that resulted from including gender in the analyses, which ranged from 1 to 9. In Study 2, there were no significant three-way interactions involving gender. In general, the paucity of interactions involving participant gender offers tentative support for the validity of the scenario methodology used in Studies 1 and 2, by suggesting that male and female participants have roughly equivalent reactions to the scenarios, even those involving gender.

To go beyond scenario methods to the study of actual interactions, Study 3 examined how participants would react to actual, not imagined, qualified compliments. Using a modification of the qualified compliment technique from Study 2, we expect women receiving a qualified compliment (‘Great job, for a woman!’) to respond more negatively compared to women receiving a simple compliment (‘Great job!’). As predicted in Studies 1 and 2, we again expect attributions to prejudice to mediate feelings of anger and desires to attack, for the group-qualified compliments.

Study 3

Study 3 examined reactions to qualified and unqualified compliments. Participants received compliments that were either unqualified and directed at them individually (e.g. ‘You did a great job!’), or were qualified by their group membership (e.g. ‘You did a great job, for a woman!’).

Method

Participants and design Participants were 42 female introductory psychology students at Purdue University. Of those participants who reported ethnicity, 33 were European American, 2 were African American, 4 were Asian American, and 2 were Hispanic American. The average age of participants was 19. All participants received credit for their participation as partial fulfillment of their research experience requirement. Participants were given either a compliment or a qualified compliment in response to their performance on a math test in a 2 Level (group-qualified vs. individual) design. The level of comment was a between-subjects factor.

Procedure Participants were brought into a lab with separate cubicles, each containing a computer. They were greeted by a male experimenter who took them to a cubicle, explained the procedures and then closed the door so that each participant could begin the study. For the first part of the study, participants were presented via the computer with 10 math problems of low to moderate difficulty. After they had completed the math problems they were presented with several filler questions about current events. Participants were told that while they were answering the filler questions, the computer was scoring their math test and sending the results to the experimenter. Following the filler questions, instructions on the computer directed them to wait for the experimenter to give them their scores on the math test.

When the experimenter observed (through a window in the cubicle door) that the participant had finished the math test and filler questions, he entered the cubicle and gave each participant a bogus printout of her performance on the test. Every participant received the same score (90%). On the performance feedback printout presented to participants, the experimenter circled the total score and wrote a compliment next to the score. The compliment was either, ‘Wow, you really did well on the math test!’ (individual-level) or ‘Wow, you really did well on the math test!'
Really well, for a woman!’ (group-level). The experimenter told each participant, ‘Please look over your performance feedback and then continue with the experiment’. After delivering these instructions, the experimenter closed the door and waited for the participant to finish the experiment. After the experimenter left the cubicle, the computer asked participants about their emotions and reactions to their performance feedback and to the experimenter. The measures were the same as those used in Study 2. Finally, participants were debriefed and thanked.

Results and discussion

Experienced emotions  A significant difference between unqualified and qualified compliments was found for anger ($t (40) = 3.46, p < .002$). Participants in the unqualified compliment condition reported less anger ($M = 1.36$) compared to those in the qualified compliment condition ($M = 2.67$).

Action tendencies  A significant difference between unqualified and qualified compliments was found for the desire to attack ($t (40) = 3.06, p < .005$) and avoid ($t (40) = 2.74, p < .01$). Participants in the unqualified compliment condition reported less desire to attack ($M = 1.32$) or avoid ($M = 1.29$) compared to those in the qualified condition ($M = 2.60, M = 2.48$, respectively).

Supporting our predictions, female participants responded with more anger and stronger desire to attack and to avoid the experimenter when given group-qualified compliments compared to unqualified compliments. We also predicted that participants in the qualified condition would be more likely to make attributions to prejudice, and that this attribution would mediate the effects of anger and desires to attack and avoid.

Mediational analyses  A significant difference between unqualified and qualified compliments was found for attributions to prejudice ($t (40) = 4.97, p < .0001$). Participants in the unqualified condition were less likely to attribute the comment to prejudice ($M = 1.57$) compared to those in the qualified condition ($M = 4.33$). To test the mediation hypothesis, regression-based causal models were estimated to compare the two cells. First, we found the hypothesized direct relationship between type of comment and desire to attack, as reported previously ($B = 1.29, p < .01$). Second, we found that the group-qualified comment predicted prejudice ($B = 2.76, p < .0001$); comments of this type were more likely to be attributed to prejudice compared to unqualified comments. As expected, prejudice predicted the desire to attack ($B = .33, p < .001$); the more participants attributed the comment to prejudice, the more they wanted to attack. Lastly, when attribution to prejudice was included as a mediator, the direct effect of qualified compliments on desire to attack was reduced to nonsignificance ($B = 1.29, p < .01$). Table 5 shows the results of these analyses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent measure</th>
<th>Total effect</th>
<th>Residual effect</th>
<th>% Mediated</th>
<th>Sobel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger emotion</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.47, $p &lt; .15$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack action tendency</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1.96, $p &lt; .06$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid action tendency</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2.42, $p &lt; .03$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the anger dependent variable, we were unable to establish clear evidence of mediation, because when both condition and prejudice are included in the model, neither prejudice nor condition are significant predictors. This is because prejudice and condition are strongly related, resulting in a high degree
of multicollinearity ($r = .62$, $p < .0001$). Nevertheless, we find both that condition strongly predicts the attribution to prejudice (as already noted) and, when condition is not included in the model, attribution to prejudice is a strong predictor of feelings of anger ($B = .27$, $p < .003$), supporting our predictions. Overall, we did not find that attribution to prejudice reliably mediates the relationship between qualified compliments and feelings of anger, but the pattern of mediation was in the predicted direction ($B = .86$, $p < .08$, Sobel test $= 1.47$, $p < .15$).

**General discussion**

Results across these three studies support several general points. All three studies showed that reactions to group-level stereotypic compliments (e.g. ‘Asians are good in math’) and group-qualified compliments (e.g. ‘You showed good leadership, for a woman’) were generally negative rather than positive. When group membership is implicated by the comment, the normally positive event of receiving a compliment can become negative and result in feelings of anger and desires to attack or avoid the speaker.

Results in all three studies further demonstrated that negative reactions to comments that implicate group stereotypes were mediated by attributions of prejudice to the speaker. This mediational finding shows specifically that people were responding negatively because they saw the implications of the comment for their groups. Confirming results of studies using other methods (Devos et al., 2002; Mackie et al., 2000), this research shows again that people are ready to experience group-based emotions in response to events that implicate their significant group memberships—not only events that impinge on them specifically as an individual.

Across the three studies, it appears that people are sensitive to others’ stereotypes of their group, as Steele and Aronson (1998) also found in their seminal work on stereotype threat. People notice and react negatively to comments that implicate either negative or, perhaps more interestingly, positive stereotypes of their groups. Imagining oneself as a woman, and then being told that women are nurturing, is not a compliment at all. In such a case, the individual’s accomplishment or achievement is no longer attributed to them as an individual, and instead becomes a part of the stereotype of that group. Stereotype threat research (Steele & Aronson, 1998) demonstrates that when a stigmatized social identity or relevant stereotype is made salient, performance on a related task is hindered. Similarly, our studies demonstrate that when one’s group membership is made salient and a compliment is given that is stereotypically relevant to the group, negative emotional reactions ensue.

Given people’s demonstrated sensitivity to group-related threats, perhaps the most curious finding from Study 1 is the lack of negative responses to compliments that were stereotype-relevant but did not explicitly mention the group (e.g. ‘You’re so nurturing’, directed at a woman). If people are extremely sensitive to the possibility of being stereotyped, we might expect angry responses in such a condition. After all, scenarios asked participants to think of themselves as members of the particular group, presumably making that social identity salient. But we found negative responses only when the compliment explicitly mentioned the group. We speculate that people are motivated to take compliments at face value (just as they tend to be susceptible to flattery; Vonk, 2002). Thus, disregarding subtle cues that might invalidate a compliment may be an instance of motivated cognition. Of course, this response would not be expected in situations where the compliment is clearly and explicitly driven by prejudice. Nevertheless, these findings offer a unique exception to the pattern that people are generally sensitive to being stereotyped.

How might emotional reactions to stereotypic comments affect people’s future behavior? Consider, for example, a woman who is angered by a stereotypic comment that women are nurturing. One possibility is the type of disidentification process outlined by stereotype threat research, whereby individuals psychologically withdraw from the relevant task domain. In the example, a woman might decide that being nurturing is not important to her own identity
as a woman. Alternatively, the attribution to prejudice could serve as a buffer against the negative effects of being stereotyped. Other research (Crocker & Major, 1989; McCoy & Major, 2003) shows that under some conditions, when people attribute others’ negative evaluations to prejudice, they are able to escape damage to their self-esteem. Our studies extend this line of research by showing that people may attribute positive comments (compliments) as well as insults to prejudice, if those compliments are stereotypic and specifically mention group membership. Our studies also show that even if the attribution to prejudice helps preserve self-esteem or other indicators of subjective well-being, it still leads directly to feelings of anger and desires to attack or avoid the speaker. Thus, an attribution to prejudice, while potentially positive for individual well-being, may have negative effects for future interpersonal or intergroup relations.

These studies suggest the intricate interlocking of individual and group aspects of the psychological self (see E. R. Smith & Henry, 1996). A compliment or insult may implicate either or both of these levels, and the ways in which it does so has major consequences for people’s emotional and behavioral responses. People are evidently sensitive to the group-level implications of others’ comments, even to the point of responding with anger to comments that on the surface are complimentary.

Notes

1. A main effect for the level of comment on desirability of the situation was found (\( F(1, 34) = 4.09, p < .06 \)). Participants appraised the situation as more desirable after reading a group-level (\( M = 3.83 \)) compared to an individual-level (\( M = 2.13 \)) comment. There was a main effect for level of comment (\( F(1, 34) = 18.57, p < .0001 \)) and stereotype-relevance (\( F(1, 34) = 9.09, p < .005 \)) on prejudice. Participants who received a group-level comment (\( M = 6.78 \)) were more likely to attribute the comment to prejudice compared to those who received the individual-level comment (\( M = 2.53 \)). Also, participants who received a stereotype-relevant comment (\( M = 6.89 \)) were more likely to attribute the comment to prejudice compared to those who received the stereotype-irrelevant comment (\( M = 3.50 \)).

2. Appraisal theory says that other appraisals (e.g., undesirability) should also mediate the effect of the nature of the comment on the emotional reactions and action tendencies. This analysis tests for mediation by the attribution to prejudice, because the conventional appraisal measures such as undesirability fail to differentiate between a situation that is negative for some individual-level reason and one that is negative for a group-level reason. Our prediction is that the group-level relevant cell should give rise to anger and the desire to attack specifically because it is perceived as posing a threat at the group level (measured by the attribution to prejudice to the speaker). This justifies the way we specified the mediational analyses. Conceptually, further research should explore ways of measuring appraisals (such as undesirability) in ways that distinguish undesirability at the individual level from undesirability at the group level. Empirically, in this study when the attribution to prejudice and the other appraisal measures are included simultaneously as mediators in exploratory analyses, the attribution to prejudice is generally the strongest mediator, except for the effects of appraised desirability and undesirability on the emotion of happiness.

Acknowledgments

The research reported here was supported by Grant R01 MH63762 and Fellowship F31 MH070352 from the National Institute of Mental Health.

References


Paper received 25 March 2004; revised version accepted 2 August 2005.

Appendix A

**Study 1: Positive scenarios**

*Group compliment, relevant/irrelevant conditions*

Imagine yourself as (an African American/a Purdue student). You are at a dance club frequented by Purdue students. In a break between songs, a stranger leans over and says, ‘Wow, (Blacks/Purdue students) sure are good dancers!’

Imagine yourself as (an Asian American/a sophomore). You are in an advanced math class and the professor has just handed back the midterm. While leaving the class, another student asks you your score, which just happens to be one of the highest in the class. He responds, ‘Yeah, (Asians/sophomores) are great at math!’

Imagine yourself as (a female/teenager). You are in a park reading a book, when a child on the play equipment falls and starts to cry. You go over to the child to see if any help is needed. Another person in the park remarks, ‘(Women/teenagers) are so nurturing!’

*Individual compliment, relevant/irrelevant conditions*

Imagine yourself as (an African American/a Purdue student). You are at a dance club frequented by
Purdue students. In a break between songs, a stranger leans over and says, ‘Wow, you sure are a good dancer!’

Imagine yourself as an Asian American/a sophomore. You are in an advanced math class and the professor has just handed back the midterm. While leaving the class, another student asks you your score, which just happens to be one of the highest in the class. He responds, ‘Yeah, that’s a great score[,] considering you’re Black!’

Imagine yourself as a female. You are in a very important board meeting when an argument breaks out between two board members. You manage to quickly come up with a compromise solution and the issue is resolved successfully. After the meeting, your boss says, ‘You really showed great leadership skills in there[—not what I expected from a woman].’

Study 1: Negative scenarios

Group slur, relevant/irrelevant conditions
Imagine yourself as a (female/Hoosier—a person from the state of Indiana). You are in your car in the supermarket parking lot. While slowly backing out of a parking space, you hit another car directly behind you. The driver of the other car gets out and yells, ‘You (women/Hoosiers) can’t drive!’

Imagine yourself as a (Mexican American/New Englander). Your shift at work begins at 5:00 p.m., but you oversleep and don’t show up until 6:00 p.m. A co-worker leans over and says, ‘Man, you’re always late. (Mexicans/New Enganders) are lazy!’

Personal insult, relevant/irrelevant conditions
Imagine yourself as a (female/Hoosier). You are in your car in the supermarket parking lot. While slowly backing out of a parking space, you hit another car directly behind you. The driver of the other car gets out and yells, ‘You can’t drive!’

Imagine yourself as a (Mexican American/New Englander). Your shift at work begins at 5:00 p.m., but you oversleep and don’t show up until 6:00 p.m. A co-worker leans over and says, ‘Man, you’re always late. You are lazy!’

Appendix B

Study 2: Scenarios

Relevant positive [Group-qualified condition adds portion in brackets]
Imagine yourself as a White American. You are at a dance club frequented by Purdue students. In a break between songs, a stranger leans over and says, ‘Wow, you sure are a good dancer[,] for a White guy!’

Imagine yourself as an African American. You are in an advanced math class and the professor has just handed back the midterm. While leaving the class, another student asks you your score, which just happens to be one of the highest in the class. He responds, ‘Yeah, that’s a great score[,] considering you’re Black!’

Imaginatively as a Black American. You are in an advanced math class and the professor has just handed back the midterm. While leaving the class, another student asks you your score, which just happens to be one of the lowest in the class. He responds, ‘Yeah, that’s a terrible score[,] considering you’re Asian!’

Imagine yourself as a female. You are in a very important board meeting when an argument breaks out between two board members. You fail to come up with a compromise solution and the issue is not resolved. After the meeting, your boss says, ‘You really lacked leadership skills in there[—not what I expected from a man].’

Biographical notes

AMBER L. GARCIA is a visiting assistant professor of psychology at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia. She received her PhD from Purdue University. Her research interests include intergroup ideologies, intergroup emotions, and prejudice.

DANIEL A. MILLER is an assistant professor of psychology at Indiana University—Purdue University, Fort Wayne. He received his PhD from Purdue University. His research interests include intergroup emotions, collective action, and social cognition.

ELIOT R. SMITH is professor of psychology and cognitive science at Indiana University, Bloomington, where he moved in 2003 from Purdue University. His PhD is from Harvard.
University. His work centers on intergroup emotions, implicit and explicit memory, and socially situated cognition. He currently serves as editor of Personality and Social Psychology Review.

Diane M. Mackie is professor of psychology and communication at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She received her PhD from Princeton University. Her research interests include the affective antecedents and consequences of intergroup relations, as well as social influence and persuasion. With Eliot Smith, she is co-editor of From Prejudice to Intergroup Emotions (Psychology Press, 2002).