

# How feeling connected to one's own community can increase support for addressing injustice impacting outgroup communities

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## Abstract

How can agents of social change increase public support for minority communities? In three studies, we demonstrate how heightened feelings of community connection can predict support for addressing injustice in minority communities. Community connection, when experimentally evoked (Study 1) or measured (Study 3), was associated with heightened support for the government addressing substandard conditions in an African American housing project (Studies 1 and 3) and Native American reservations (Study 1). Mediation analyses revealed that this effect emerges, at least in part, because of a heightened perceived value of *all* communities—not merely one's own (Studies 1 and 3). One reason that stronger feelings of community connection lead to (Study 2) or are associated with (Study 3) greater valuing of communities is a strengthened superordinate community identity. We tested additional potential mediators of the community connection–support relationship; out-group identification mediated but outgroup attachment did not. Implications for social change are discussed.

## Keywords

community connection, impact validity, intergroup relations, social action

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Communities fulfill a variety of important psychological needs. The more that people feel part of a community, the greater their life satisfaction (Davidson & Cotter, 1991), well-being (Pretty, Conroy, Dugay, Fowler, & Williams, 1996), and physical health (Kitchen, Williams, & Chowhan, 2012), and the lower their feelings of loneliness (Cicognani, Klimstra, & Goossens, 2014). Indeed, community psychologists have long argued that a strong sense of community is vital for psychological health (e.g., McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sarason, 1974).

Accordingly, disruptions to communities have negative consequences. Sarason (1974) argued that the “dilution or absence of the psychological

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sense of community is the most destructive dynamic in the lives of people in our society” (p. vii). For example, consider the historical impact of governments forcibly relocating or disbanding communities, such as Canada’s relocation of Black (i.e., Africville; Clairmont & Magill, 1999) and Indigenous communities (e.g., the relocation of the Sayisi Dene, the Inuit High Arctic relocation; Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010; Bussidor & Bilgen-Reinart, 2000). In these and similar cases, the disruption of communities is linked to increased rates of violence and crime, mental illness and suicide, and other negative health issues (Adelson, 2005; Bussidor & Bilgen-Reinart, 2000; Clairmont & Magill, 1999; McNicoll, Tester, & Kulchyski, 1999; Napier, Mandisodza, Andersen, & Jost, 2006; Samson, 2003; Shkilynyk, 1985; Tester & Kulchyski, 1994).

Despite the wealth of research demonstrating the positive effects of maintaining communities and negative effects of disbanding them, it is often difficult to compel people to care about addressing injustice facing an outgroup community (e.g., Kay, 2011; McParland, 2011). Indeed, decades of social psychological research on system justification (Jost & Banaji, 1994), social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and belief in a just world (Lerner, 1980) theories respectively suggest that people sometimes respond defensively to injustices that question the legitimacy of their social systems (e.g., Gaucher, Kay, & Laurin, 2010; Kay & Friesen, 2011), the benevolence of their social groups (e.g., Gunn & Wilson, 2011), or the belief that the world is fair (e.g., Hafer & Bégué, 2005). Put differently, merely telling people about an injustice facing another community does *not* reliably lead to social action (Jost, Gaucher, & Stern, 2015; Starzyk, Gaucher, Boese, & Neufeld, 2014).

How, then, can people garner public support for rectifying injustice in an outgroup community? Drawing from the community psychology literature, we reasoned that reminding people of how they are connected to their own communities could overcome their tendency to acquiesce to injustice and make them more likely to support

another’s community. This is the first published paper, to our knowledge, that directly tests whether experimentally evoking community connection increases support for addressing injustice facing another community. It is also one of few papers to integrate social-psychological theories of intergroup relations with concepts from community psychology (for notable exceptions see Marcus, Omoto, & Winter, 2011; Omoto & Snyder, 2002).

## A Psychological Sense of Community

Although exact conceptualizations of a psychological sense of community vary between researchers and studies (Zeldin & Topitzes, 2002), they largely center on those proposed by community psychologists Sarason (1974) and McMillan and Chavis (1986). In his seminal work, Sarason (1974) defined a psychological sense of community as the following:

The perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, and the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure. (p. 157)

Relatedly, McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined a sense of community as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9). This definition applied to both common conceptions of community—to geographical and territorial communities (e.g., Native American reservations, a housing project, a neighborhood) and to relational communities (e.g., Native American people, breast cancer survivors, Catholics; Gusfield, 1975).

Using the previous definitions as a guiding framework, subsequent correlational research on a psychological sense of community has found a

variety of positive correlates related to the current research. For instance, a psychological sense of community is associated with several forms of civic engagement (see Talò, Mannarini, & Rochira, 2014, for a meta-analytic review). People with a stronger sense of community are more likely to participate in neighborhood block associations (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990) and political events in their community (Peterson, Speer, & McMillan, 2008); they also have stronger feelings of collective efficacy (i.e., the sense that together a group of people can create change; McNamara, Stevenson, & Muldoon, 2013). Similarly, Davidson and Cotter (1989) found that a sense of community is associated with political participation. In their study, participants who reported greater feelings of community connection were more likely to vote, contact local officials, work on public problems, and talk about politics—not only within the context of their community, but in other communities as well. This latter point is an important one, suggesting that the positive effects associated with a strong sense of community are not limited to one's own community, but may also extend to other communities.

Further support for this idea—that an individual's feelings of community connection may result in benefits for people in outgroup communities—comes from the literature on prosocial behavior. In a sample of older adults with lumbar spine disorders, feelings of community connection were positively associated with a measure of general helping behaviors, such as agreement with items like “I have helped a stranger carry their belongings” (Schwartz et al., 2012). Importantly, most items pertained to actions completed for strangers without an expectation of reciprocity—somewhat akin to helping people in a community to which you do not belong. Relatedly, Wenner and Randall (2016) studied middle-aged and older adults, and found that a sense of community predicted prosocial behavior. Here, prosocial behavior was operationalized as the frequency with which participants had engaged in five behaviors over the past year, including volunteering or donating to a cause; the items did not specify whether the actions were

performed within or for participants' own communities. Finally, Okun and Michel (2006) found that as young older adults' feelings of community connection increased, so did the number of hours they volunteered each week—volunteer hours often performed for strangers and without expectations of reciprocity.

### *Community Connection: A Precursor of Support for Social Change Benefitting Outgroups?*

Drawing from the literature on a psychological sense of community, we chose to investigate the effects of *community connection*.<sup>1</sup> Community connection is here operationalized as a sense of connection to or “roots” in one's community, such as a neighborhood or an ethnic community. Although no research has directly tested the hypothesized relationship between community connection and support for addressing injustice in another's community, it is clear that a sense of community can shape perceptions of social issues as well as motivate and sustain action to address them (see Marcus et al., 2011; Omoto & Snyder, 2002). As reviewed before, people with a stronger sense of community are more inclined to engage in civic action and prosocial behaviors—that benefit not only their own community, but also people in other communities. These findings are all correlational, as no known research has experimentally induced community connection; however, past research does suggest this feeling is malleable (Loomis, Dockett, & Brodsky, 2004). Thus, we hypothesized that inducing this feeling would yield positive effects similar to those found among people with a stronger sense of community. Specifically, we expected that heightened feelings of community connection would lead to greater support for assisting communities facing injustice because they lead people to perceive more value in *all* communities, not just their own.

As for why a sense of community connection would increase the perceived value of all communities, we had two exploratory hypotheses. One was a superordinate community identity: Perhaps evoking community connection

broadens people's construal of "community," leading them to identify more strongly with people in *all* communities. Following the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), reconceptualizing a former outgroup as sharing a superordinate community identity should improve attitudes towards them (e.g., Banfield & Dovidio, 2013; Nier et al., 2001). Thus, if considering one's own community connection elicits a superordinate community identity that includes people in other communities, it may also increase the perceived value of all communities, and in turn, support for addressing injustice in outgroup communities.

We also wondered whether another explanation for the relationship between heightened feelings of community connection and perceived value in all communities was an increase in compassionate love. Compassionate love is an orientation to help others, characterized by caring, concern, and tenderness (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005). This construct is associated with a variety of prosocial outcomes in interpersonal contexts, including higher levels of volunteerism (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005), social support for close others (Neff & Karney, 2005; Sprecher & Fehr, 2005), and caregiving (Gouriluk, 2009). Recent research finds that these positive effects emerge in intergroup contexts as well: Higher levels of compassionate love, both chronic and induced, are associated with lower levels of prejudice and more positive attitudes towards outgroups (Sinclair, Fehr, Wang, & Regehr, 2016; see also Welker, Slatcher, Baker, & Aron, 2014). It therefore seems plausible that making people feel connected to their communities increases their compassionate love, which could lead them to see more value in all communities and subsequently show support for ending injustice in other communities.

## The Current Research

The main goal of the current research was to investigate the link between evoking community connection and support for an outgroup community. Support was operationalized as support for government action to address injustice facing the

community. We predicted that evoking a sense of community connection to one's own community would lead to greater support for others' communities because people would see more value in *all* communities, not simply their own (Study 1). To further understand the link between community connection and perceived value of communities, we tested two potential mediators in Study 2: a superordinate community identity and compassion for strangers. Finally, in Study 3 we tested a complex mediation model of community connection on support. Informed by the results of the prior studies, we conducted a confirmatory test of our proposed model—that feelings of community connection heighten a superordinate community identity, which leads to greater perceived value of all communities and subsequently greater support for government action.

## Study 1

The goal of Study 1 was to determine whether inducing community connection increases support for government action to address an injustice facing an outgroup community. We tested this hypothesis in two samples, which focused on different injustices. One focused on the forcible relocation of residents from Cabrini–Green, a Chicago housing project ultimately demolished by the City of Chicago, and the other focused on the inadequate housing and sanitation conditions in Native American reservations. We also tested for a likely mechanism of this effect: people's perceived value in all communities.

### Method

#### Participants

*Sample 1.* One hundred and fifteen American adults accessed the survey through Amazon Mechanical Turk and received US\$0.50 for completing the survey. To ensure participant responses reflected opinions on outgroup issues, we excluded from the analyses 14 participants who were African American. The final sample comprised of 101 American adults who were not African American (81% were White/European;

55% were men;  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.25$  years,  $SD = 11.73$ ; 63% had completed at least 3 years of education after high school). When asked to describe the community they wrote about in the manipulation, 38.60% classified it as suburban, 39.60% classified it as urban, and 21.80% classified it as rural.

*Sample 2.* Participants were 109 non-Native American Amazon Mechanical Turk users (52% were women; 77% were White). On average, the sample was 33.58 years old ( $SD = 12.16$ ) and had completed 5 years of postsecondary education. Regarding the community they wrote about in the manipulation, most said it was either urban (33.90%) or suburban (40.40%), and some said rural (25.70%). Participants received US\$0.40 for their participation.

*Procedure.* Participants first completed the community connection manipulation wherein they were randomly assigned to write about how they were connected to their community (Sample 1:  $n = 50$ ; Sample 2:  $n = 54$ ) or disconnected from their community (Sample 1:  $n = 50$ ; Sample 2:  $n = 55$ ).<sup>2</sup> Next, they completed a manipulation check and reported how much they valued their community. Participants then read a factual passage describing the injustice (Sample 1: Cabrini–Green; Sample 2: Native American housing) and indicated their feelings toward the issue including their support for government action.<sup>3</sup> Finally, they reported demographic information and read a debriefing form. Except where otherwise noted, all items used a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). We created all materials for this study, and used the average scores for multi-item measures to form composite indices of the construct.

*Community connection manipulation.* Both conditions began, “Here we are interested in your thoughts about community. Now we’d like you to think about the community where you currently live. What is the name of the community?” Subsequent instructions read (disconnection text in brackets),

Think about how you’re connected to [disconnected from] your community—how you have [not] set down roots. Consider the people that you [don’t] know, the places that you [don’t] frequently go, and the events that you [don’t] attend. Please describe all of these things below.

Participants wrote about their neighborhoods and cities/towns.

*Community connection manipulation check.* To assess the strength of the connection manipulation, participants responded to three items that tapped their feelings of community connection: (a) “I feel connected to my community,” (b) “I have strong ‘roots’ in my community,” and (c) “My community is important to my overall happiness.”

*Perceived value of communities.* Participants self-reported the extent to which they value all communities by indicating their agreement with three statements: (a) “In general, preserving communities should be a national priority,” (b) “Creating strong and healthy communities should be a national priority,” and (c) “Communities are valuable.”

*Passage.* Participants read a factual passage concerning either the Cabrini–Green case (Sample 1) or substandard conditions on Native American reservations (Sample 2; see supplementary materials).

*Support for government action, Sample 1.* Participants indicated their agreement with six statements that we created: (a) “The federal government should have covered the cost of fixing problems at Cabrini–Green,” (b) “Making sure that the community of Cabrini–Green remained together should have been top priority,” (c) “The federal government should have done everything they could to make sure that Cabrini–Green residents stayed together,” (d) “Providing adequate housing to all former Cabrini–Green residents should be one of the federal government’s top priorities,” (e) “The federal government should do more to help former Cabrini–Green residents,”

and (f) “Former Cabrini–Green residents should be compensated by the federal government.”

*Support for government action, Sample 2.* Participants reported how much they felt the government should help Native Americans by indicating their agreement with seven items we created: (a) “The government should ensure Native American communities have access to adequate housing,” (b) “The government has a moral responsibility to provide adequate housing to Native American communities,” (c) “Native American communities should do more to take care of themselves” (reverse-scored), (d) “The government should cover the cost of providing adequate housing to Native American communities,” (e) “I support my tax dollars going towards helping Native American people living without running water,” (f) “Providing adequate housing to Native American communities should be one of America’s top priorities,” and (g) “The government should be doing more to help Native American communities.”

## Results

*Descriptives.* See supplemental materials for a summary of descriptive statistics for the dependent measures. In this and all other studies, we checked for univariate normality by calculating the skew and kurtosis divided by their respective standard errors. When values exceeded  $\pm 2$  and  $\pm 7$  for skew and kurtosis, respectively (Curran, West, & Finch, 1996), we inspected the variable for extreme outliers using box-plots. As no outliers were extreme, we did not remove any outliers. Given that our statistical tests are robust to moderate departures of normality (which is true for  $t$  tests when cell sizes are equal, as they were in all our studies), we did not transform our variables.

*t tests.* To test our main hypotheses, we first conducted  $t$  tests where community connection was the independent variable (dummy coded as 0 = disconnected, 1 = connected) and the dependent variable was support for government action or perceived value of communities.

*Sample 1.* Compared to participants who considered how they were disconnected from their community, participants who considered how they were connected to their community reported more support for government action to resolve the situation in Cabrini–Green ( $M_{\text{Disconnection}} = 3.86, SD = 1.51; M_{\text{Connection}} = 4.54, SD = 1.48$ ),  $t(98) = -2.28, p = .01, d = -0.46$ , 95% CI  $[-1.28, -0.09]$ .<sup>4</sup> Participants in the community connection condition also perceived more value in communities ( $M_{\text{Disconnection}} = 4.56, SD = 1.13; M_{\text{Connection}} = 5.50, SD = 1.14$ ),  $t(98) = -4.15, p < .001, d = -0.83$ , 95% CI  $[-1.39, -0.49]$ .

*Sample 2.* Community connection had a small effect on support for addressing Native American housing issues. Although not statistically significant, participants reminded of their community connection were more supportive of government action than were participants reminded of their community disconnection ( $M_{\text{Connection}} = 4.78, SD = 1.40$  vs.  $M_{\text{Disconnection}} = 4.41, SD = 1.48$ ),  $t(107) = 3.49, p = .09, d = 0.25$ , 95% CI  $[-0.18, 0.91]$ . A similar, statistically significant pattern emerged for perceived value of communities ( $M_{\text{Connection}} = 5.42, SD = 1.14$  vs.  $M_{\text{Disconnection}} = 4.59, SD = 1.33$ ),  $t(107) = 1.32, p < .001, d = 0.67$ , 95% CI  $[0.36, 1.29]$ .

*Mediation analyses.* Next we conducted mediation analyses using percentile bootstraps (10,000 iterations) with Hayes’s (2013) PROCESS macro. We entered connection as the independent variable, support for government action as the dependent variable, and perceived value of communities as the mediator. See Table 1 for mediation details; the indirect effects are reported in what follows.

*Sample 1.* Consistent with hypotheses, there was an indirect effect of community connection on support for government action through perceived value of communities,  $b = 0.49$ , bootstrapped  $SE = 0.16$ , 95% CI  $[0.21, 0.84]$ .

*Sample 2.* Once again, the expected indirect effect emerged,  $b = 0.24$ , bootstrapped  $SE = 0.12$ , 95% CI  $[0.05, 0.50]$ .

**Table 1.** Study 1: Unstandardized regression coefficients, standard errors, and model summary information for mediation analysis.

Sample	Antecedent		Consequent							
			M (Value of communities)			Y (Support for government action)				
			C	SE	<i>p</i>	C	SE	<i>p</i>		
Sample 1	X (Community connection)	<i>a</i>	0.94	0.23	< .001	<i>c'</i>	0.19	0.30	.52	
	M (Value of communities)					<i>b</i>	0.52	0.12	< .001	
	Constant	<i>i<sub>M</sub></i>	4.56	0.16	< .001	<i>i<sub>Y</sub></i>	1.49	0.60	.01	
			R <sup>2</sup> = .15 F(1, 98) = 17.19 <i>p</i> < .001				R <sup>2</sup> = .20 F(2, 97) = 11.94 <i>p</i> < .001			
Sample 2	X (Community connection)	<i>a</i>	0.83	0.24	< .01	<i>c'</i>	0.12	0.28	.67	
	M (Value of communities)					<i>b</i>	0.30	0.11	< .01	
	Constant	<i>i<sub>M</sub></i>	4.59	0.17	< .001	<i>i<sub>Y</sub></i>	3.06	0.54	< .001	
			R <sup>2</sup> = .10 F(1, 107) = 12.18 <i>p</i> < .01				R <sup>2</sup> = .08 F(2, 106) = 4.57 <i>p</i> = .01			

Note. C = unstandardized coefficient, SE = standard error.

*Community connection manipulation check.* To confirm the effectiveness of the connection manipulation, we conducted *t* tests where the community connection manipulation was the independent variable and the community connection manipulation check was the dependent variable.

*Sample 1.* Participants in the connection condition reported greater community connection than did those in the disconnection condition ( $M_{\text{Connection}} = 4.59, SD = 1.72; M_{\text{Disconnection}} = 3.03, SD = 1.38$ ),  $t(98) = 5.03, p < .001, d = 1.01, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.95, 2.18]$ .

*Sample 2.* The same pattern emerged in Sample 2 ( $M_{\text{Connection}} = 4.70, SD = 1.57$  vs.  $M_{\text{Disconnection}} = 3.15, SD = 1.42$ , respectively),  $t(107) = 5.38, p < .001, d = 1.03, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.98, 2.12]$ .

## Discussion

Across two contexts, we investigated whether community connection can increase support for

addressing government action, and if perceived value of communities was a mechanism of this effect. Evoking community connection (vs. disconnection) led to a significant increase in support for government action for compensating former residents of a Black housing project; a similar but non-significant trend emerged in the sample who considered substandard housing in Native American reservations. In both contexts, mediation analyses indicate that community connection may increase support for addressing injustice through a heightened perceived value of communities *generally*—not simply participants' *own* communities.

## Study 2

Study 1 found that evoking community connection can increase the perceived value of all communities, which in turn increases support for addressing injustice in outgroup communities. Wanting to better understand precisely why evoking community connection increased the perceived value of communities, in Study 2 we tested

two potential mechanisms of this effect: compassion for strangers and a superordinate community identity. Thus, the goal of this study was to isolate the mediator(s) of community connection on perceived value of communities.

### Method

*Participants and procedure.* Participants were 210 Amazon Mechanical Turk users located in the US (80% White, 47% women); each received US\$0.50 in remuneration. On average, participants were 38.8 years old ( $SD = 14.18$ ). As in Study 1, they first completed the community connection manipulation and manipulation check. Next, however, participants were randomly assigned to complete the remaining measures in one of two orders: (a) superordinate community identity, compassion for strangers, value of communities ( $n = 105$ ), or (b) compassion for strangers, value of communities, superordinate community identity ( $n = 105$ ). Participants then provided demographic information and were debriefed.

*Materials.* The community connection manipulation and manipulation check, as well as the perceived value of communities measure, were identical to those used in Study 1.

*Compassion for strangers.* Participants' proclivity to feel compassion for strangers was assessed with a five-item abbreviated version of Sprecher and Fehr's (2005) Compassion for Strangers Scale (Hwang, Plante, & Lackey, 2008). An example item reads, "I tend to feel compassion for people, even though I do not know them". Possible responses ranged from 1 (*not at all true of me*) to 7 (*very true of me*).

*Superordinate community identity.* We used an adapted version of the Inclusion of Other in Self Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) to measure participants' superordinate community identity, that is, the extent to which they identified with people in other communities. We presented participants with six sets of two circles, one labeled "Self" and one labeled "People in other

communities." Like the original scale, each set of circles was identical except for one key element: The extent to which they overlapped varied, where more overlap indicated a stronger superordinate community identity. Participants selected the pair of circles they felt best described their current relationship with people in other communities. To score this measure, we coded the circles in order of least to most overlap with scores from 1 to 6; higher scores indicate a stronger superordinate community identity.

### Results

*Preliminary analyses.* Descriptive statistics for all measures can be found in the supplemental materials. To check for order effects, we first ran ANOVAs where community connection and measure order were entered as independent variables. As no interactions or main effects of order were significant, we collapse across order and report only the community connection manipulation's effects.

#### Main analyses

*Value of communities.* Reminding people of how they are connected to (vs. disconnected from) their own community led them to see more value in all communities ( $M_{\text{Connection}} = 5.45$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ;  $M_{\text{Disconnection}} = 5.02$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ),  $t(207) = 2.87$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $d = 0.40$ , 95% CI [0.14, 0.74].

*Compassion for strangers.* Although not significant, participants in the connection condition reported more compassion for strangers than did those in the disconnection condition ( $M_{\text{Connection}} = 5.04$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ;  $M_{\text{Disconnection}} = 4.78$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ),  $t(197.18) = 1.37$ ,  $p = .17$ ,  $d = 0.19$ , [-0.11, 0.63].

*Superordinate community identity.* Evoking community connection (vs. disconnection) led people to identify more closely with people from other communities ( $M_{\text{Connection}} = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ;  $M_{\text{Disconnection}} = 2.12$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ),  $t(207) = 3.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.50$ , 95% CI [0.27, 0.92].

*Multiple mediation.* We then tested whether superordinate community identity and compassion



for strangers explained the relationship between community connection and perceived value of communities. In the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013), we entered the connection manipulation as the independent variable, value of communities as the dependent variable, and superordinate community identity and compassion for strangers as simultaneous mediators; we requested 10,000 bootstrap samples and percentile-method bootstrapped confidence intervals. Zero was not included in bootstrapped confidence intervals for the total indirect effect ( $b = 0.21$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ , 95% CI [0.06, 0.38]) or the indirect effect of superordinate community identity ( $b = 0.14$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ , 95% CI [0.05, 0.25]), but it was included in the confidence interval for the indirect effect of compassion for strangers ( $b = 0.07$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ , 95% CI [-0.03, 0.21]). Thus, a superordinate community identity mediated the relationship between community connection and value of communities, but compassion for strangers did not. Further mediation details can be found in Table 2.

*Manipulation check.* The community connection manipulation again increased participants' community connection ( $M_{\text{Disconnection}} = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ;  $M_{\text{Connection}} = 4.57$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ),  $t(208) = 6.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.83$ , 95% CI [0.91, 1.80].

### Discussion

As in Study 1, Study 2 demonstrated that the community connection manipulation increased the amount participants valued all communities. In addition, Study 2 provides insight into why this effect emerges: Community connection increases the perceived value of communities at least in part because of a strengthened superordinate community identity—a stronger sense that participants are linked to people in other communities. Compassion for strangers, however, did not mediate this relationship. Why? One possibility is that the word “stranger”—which appears throughout Hwang et al.'s (2008) scale used here—evokes feelings of interpersonal distance that are at odds with people's ideas about

community. Perhaps using another compassion scale that is more conceptually linked to the present independent and dependent variables, such as compassion for *humanity* (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005), would yield different results; future research should test this possibility.

### Study 3

In Study 1, we suggest that our community connection manipulation increases feelings of community connection, which is responsible for the subsequent increase in support for government action. Without a baseline measure of connection, however, other possibilities exist. For instance, it is possible that the community disconnection condition decreases feelings of connection while the community connection condition does not impact feelings of community connection. We aimed to clarify the direction of the effect in Study 3 by including a control condition.

Additionally, in Study 3 we sought to replicate and extend the effects of the previous studies in several ways. Study 1 demonstrated that evoking community connection increased the perceived value of all communities, which in turn increased support for government action to address injustice impacting those communities. Study 2 isolated and explained the community connection–perceived value of communities link, finding that a heightened superordinate community identity mediated this relationship. These studies provide insight into the relationship between community connection and support for government action, but none simultaneously test our entire hypothesized chain; we do so in Study 3.

Of course, there may be other reasons why a sense of connection to one's own community might engender support for addressing injustice in an outgroup community, two of which relate to the outgroup community experiencing injustice. In the previous lines we outlined an argument for the link between community connection and a superordinate community identity—one that encompasses people in other communities

**Table 2.** Study 2: Unstandardized regression coefficients, standard errors, and model summary information for mediation analysis.

Antecedent	Consequent											
	$M_1$ (Superordinate community identity)			$M_2$ (Compassion for strangers)			Y (Value of communities)					
	C	SE	$p$	C	SE	$p$	C	SE	$p$			
$X$ (Community connection)	$a_1$	0.59	0.16	.001	$a_2$	0.26	0.19	.17	$d$	0.22	0.14	.12
$M_1$ (Superordinate community identity)									$b_1$	0.23	0.06	< .001
$M_2$ (Compassion for strangers)									$b_2$	0.28	0.05	< .001
Constant	$i_{M1}$	2.13	0.12	< .001	$i_{M2}$	4.78	0.13	< .001	$i_Y$	3.22	0.26	< .001
		$R^2 = .06$				$R^2 = .01$				$R^2 = .27$		
		$F(1, 206) = 12.61$				$F(1, 206) = 1.87$				$F(3, 204) = 25.15$		
		$p = .001$				$p = .17$				$p < .001$		

Note. C = unstandardized coefficient, SE = standard error.

generally, not the wronged outgroup specifically. It is also conceivable, however, that a sense of community could manifest as affiliation with the specific outgroup experiencing injustice, such as identification or attachment.<sup>5</sup> Typically, research on intergroup relations finds that the more people identify with a group or feel attached to it, the more supportive they are of improving that group's position, such as through collective action (e.g., Deaux, Reid, Martin, & Bikmen, 2006; Klandermans, 1997; Tropp & Wright, 1999) or sharing resources (Baldassarri & Grossman, 2013). Although such research has been generally conducted in the context of ingroups, it seems possible that its principles could extend to outgroups as well. In other words, outgroup identification or outgroup attachment may also explain the relationship between community connection and support for addressing an injustice impacting that outgroup; we tested these alternative explanations in Study 3.

### Method

**Participants.** Participants were 389 Amazon Mechanical Turk users based in the US, who accessed the survey online and received US\$0.50

for their participation. We excluded from the analyses participants who spent 10 seconds or fewer reading the passage ( $n = 40$ ), identified as Black (to ensure the issue was an outgroup issue;  $n = 32$ ), or did not agree to complete the survey independently and with minimal distractions ( $n = 8$ ). The final sample comprised 313 participants ( $M_{age} = 35.82$ ,  $SD = 11.23$ ; 87% reported White/European as their ethnicity; 47% were women; 51% had completed at least one university degree or professional program). On average, participants had lived in the community they wrote about in the manipulation for 13.36 years (range = 0–55 years). This sample size was determined based on an a priori power analysis to detect an effect size of  $d = 0.38$ , which was the unweighted average of the effect sizes found in Samples 1 and 2 of Study 1.

**Procedure.** Participants first indicated their commitment to completing the survey independently and with minimal distractions. Next, based on random assignment, participants completed one of three community connection conditions. As in our prior studies, participants in the connection condition wrote about how they are connected to their communities ( $n = 105$ ), whereas participants

in the disconnection condition wrote about how they are disconnected from their communities ( $n = 102$ ). Participants in the control condition received no instructions; this was an empty control condition ( $n = 106$ ). Participants then read a factual description about Cabrini–Green and completed self-report measures of a superordinate community identity, value of communities, support for government action, outgroup identification, and outgroup attachment. Finally, participants completed a manipulation check, reported demographic information, and were debriefed.

*Materials.* The following measures were identical to those reported earlier: community connection manipulation (Studies 1–2), value of communities (Studies 1–2), support for government action (Studies 1–2), superordinate community identity (Study 2), and the manipulation check (Studies 1–3). Except where noted, the following measures had 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*); all multi-item measures were averaged to create composite scores.

*Commitment.* Participants answered “yes” or “no” to the following:

Please complete the following questions in the order in which they appear. Do NOT try to look ahead or go back. Clicking “back” will lead the survey to close. It is also important to us that you do NOT use outside sources, like the internet or a friend, to search for answers to the questions in this study. Finally, it is important that you complete this study in one sitting, free of distractions such as text messages or emails. Will you answer the following questions without help from outside sources, and minimize potential distractions?

*Passage.* Participants read a description of the injustice, which was an updated version of that presented in Study 1 (see supplementary materials).

*Outgroup identification.* Participants indicated the extent to which they identified with former members of Cabrini–Green by reporting their

agreement with six items adapted from Leach et al.’s (2008) measure of in-group identification; specifically, we used items 1–3 and 11–12. A sample item is, “I feel solidarity with former Cabrini–Green members.”

*Outgroup attachment.* Instructions for this measure read,

Now imagine meeting and getting to know former Cabrini–Green Residents. Please respond to the following statements on the basis of how you feel about former Cabrini–Green Residents. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these statements; we are interested in your own personal reactions and opinions.

Participants then indicated their agreement with six items adapted from Smith, Murphy, and Coats’s (1999) Social Groups Attachment Scale, including, “I would often worry that former Cabrini–Green Residents would not really accept me.” Thus, lower scores indicated more secure outgroup attachment.

## Results

*Descriptives.* Descriptive statistics for all measures can be found in the supplemental materials.

*Main analyses.* To conduct the main analyses, we conducted one-way linear trend ANOVAs with the community connection condition variable as the independent variable (effect coded as  $-1 =$  disconnection,  $0 =$  control, and  $1 =$  connection), and specified two planned orthogonal contrasts: one to test for difference between the control condition and the other two conditions (control and disconnection), and another to test for difference between the latter two conditions. We first examined the effects of the community connection manipulation on support for government action. The homogeneity of variance assumption was violated, so Welch’s  $F$  ratio is reported. The omnibus test was not significant,  $F(2, 202.77) = 1.26, p = .29, \eta^2 < .01$ , nor were the contrasts,  $t_s < 1.58, p_s > .12$ .

Next, we tested whether the manipulation successfully induced feelings of community connection by entering community connection (the manipulation check) as the dependent variable. The omnibus test for the linear trend was significant,  $F(2, 308) = 42.02, p < .001, \eta^2 = .12$ . The first contrast indicated that participants in the disconnection and control conditions felt less connected to their communities than did participants in the connection condition ( $M_{\text{Disconnection}} = 3.52, SD = 1.49; M_{\text{Control}} = 4.40, SD = 1.38; M_{\text{Connection}} = 4.90, SD = 1.70$ ),  $t(308) = -5.13, p < .001$ . The second contrast indicated that participants in the disconnection condition felt less connected to their communities than did participants in the control condition,  $t(308) = -4.14, p < .001, d = -0.61$ .

*Path analysis.* We used Mplus software (Version 6.11; Muthén & Muthén, 2010) to conduct a path analysis among our variables (see correlations in Table 3) because it allows for estimation of specific indirect effects and complex serial mediation. We specified a bootstrapping analysis with 10,000 bootstrapped samples and used fully standardized parameter estimates (i.e., STDYX). Given that the community connection manipulation impacted participants' reported community connection as intended, we used measured (i.e., not manipulated) community connection as the predictor variable. The relationships we specified among community connection, the potential mediators, and support for government action are illustrated in Figure 1.

*Path estimates.* Bootstrapped standardized path estimates are represented in Figure 1.

*Indirect effects.* We tested several indirect effects (see Table 4). First, we tested our main hypothesis: that community connection would indirectly impact support through increasing a superordinate community identity, which would increase perceived value of communities. The confidence interval of the indirect effect did not include zero, thereby supporting our hypothesis. To explore alternate explanations of the relationship between community connection and support for

government action, we tested two more indirect effects: one where outgroup attachment was the mediator and one where outgroup identification was the mediator. Only the indirect effect of outgroup identification emerged.

## Discussion

Unlike in Study 1, here the community connection manipulation did not significantly impact support for government action to address injustice in an outgroup community. The manipulation did, however, impact self-reported community connection (the manipulation check) as predicted: participants who considered how they were connected to their own communities reported a stronger sense of community connection than did participants in the control and disconnection conditions, and participants in the control condition reported a stronger sense of community connection than did participants in the disconnection condition. This finding is noteworthy for two reasons. First, it helps clarify the direction of the effects in our prior experiments: relative to baseline, the connection manipulation increases community connection, whereas the disconnection manipulation decreases it. Second, it provided grounds to test our hypothesized relationships between community connection and support for government action by using measured community connection (instead of manipulated community connection). Conceptually corroborating results from Studies 1–3, feelings of community connection were associated with greater perceived value in all communities because of a stronger superordinate community identity; in turn, greater perceived value of communities was associated with stronger support for government action. We also simultaneously tested two other potential mechanisms, outgroup identification and outgroup attachment; only outgroup identification mediated the relationship between community connection and support for government action. Thus, stronger feelings of community connection appear to engender identification with the focal outgroup community specifically and outgroup communities generally (i.e., superordinate community identity). Note that although these constructs

**Table 3.** Study 3: Correlations among variables in path analysis ( $N = 311$ ).

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Community connection						
2. Superordinate community identity	.42**					
3. Value of communities	.31**	.25**				
4. Outgroup identification	.27**	.40**	.38**			
5. Outgroup attachment	-.05	-.20**	-.17**	-.40**		
6. Support for government action	.13*	.20**	.70**	.52**	-.29**	

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 4.** Study 3: Statistics for total and all specific indirect effects.

Predictor	Mediator(s)	Outcome	Standardized indirect effect	Bootstrapped <i>SE</i>	Bootstrapped 95% CI
Community connection	Superordinate community identity; value of communities; outgroup attachment; outgroup identification	Support for government action	.29**	0.05	[0.21, 0.38]
Community connection	Superordinate community identity; value of communities	Support for government action	.04*	0.02	[0.01, 0.07]
Community connection	Outgroup attachment	Support for government action	.004	0.01	[-0.01, 0.01]
Community connection	Outgroup identification	Support for government action	.09**	0.03	[0.05, 0.13]

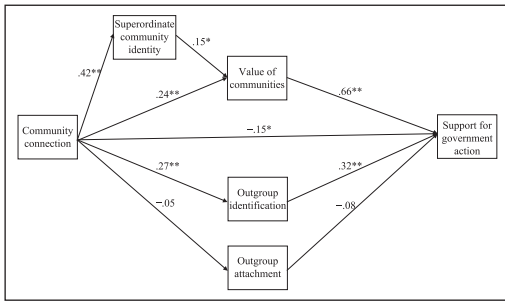
*Note.* The first row of results represent the total indirect effect; all others are specific indirect effects. All effects used fully standardized parameter estimates (STDYX; Muthén & Muthén, 2010).

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .001$ .

may sound quite similar, they are distinct, as they correlate at .40.

Finally, the perceptive reader may have noticed that measured community connection and support for government action correlate positively in Table 3, but are negatively related in Figure 1. One potential reason for this seeming discrepancy is that after accounting for the effects of superordinate community identity and value of communities on support for government action, what is left of community connection may

amount to ingroup identification. In many cases, strong ingroup identification predicts negative intergroup outcomes, such as derogation (e.g., Brewer, 2001) and less solidarity (e.g., Iyer & Ryan, 2009), which may here manifest as decreased support for government action to compensate an outgroup. Nonetheless, recall that the predicted indirect effect—of community connection on support for government action through a superordinate community identity and value of communities—was positive.



**Figure 1.** Model testing effects of community connection on support for government action in Study 3. *Note.* The community connection variable was a measured variable (the manipulation check) where higher values signify stronger feelings of community connection. All path estimates are fully standardized. \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .001$ .

## General Discussion

The current research demonstrates and explains the relationship between feelings of community connection and support for addressing injustice impacting an outgroup community. Taken together, the experimental (Studies 1–2) and correlational (Study 3) findings suggest that feelings of community connection predict a stronger superordinate community identity, which is associated with greater valuing of communities; the more people value all communities—not merely their own—the more they support government action for addressing injustice in minority outgroup communities. We found evidence of these relationships in the contexts of displaced residents of a Black housing project (Studies 1 and 3) and the substandard housing conditions in Native American reservations (Study 1). In Study 3 we also provide preliminary evidence for the mediating role of outgroup identification; future research should aim to replicate this effect.

It is unclear why the community connection manipulation did not impact support for government action in Study 3 but did in both of Study 1's samples—one of which (Sample 1) learned about the same issue as did Study 3 participants. However, differences in their experimental materials provide some insight. The passages were nearly identical, except for their descriptions of the former Cabrini–Green

residents' fate: the Study 3 passage contains an additional, detailed paragraph not presented to Sample 1 of Study 1. A comparison of the experimental passages in Sample 2 and Study 3 is less straightforward, but the former does appear to be less detailed than the latter. Perhaps the extra details in Study 3 made the injustice so clear that support was strong and unable to be swayed by our subtle manipulation. Indeed, highlighting continued suffering and injustice are factors known to increase support for addressing injustice (e.g., Starzyk & Ross, 2008). Another potential reason the community connection manipulation did not impact support for government action in Study 3 is statistical chance. Clearly, further research is needed to better understand the conditions under which the community connection manipulation does and does not impact support for addressing injustice in outgroup communities.

Future research should thus examine how the community connection manipulation is impacted by contextual factors. In addition to perceptions of injustice, other factors to consider include perceptions of the feasibility of government action or whether the group continues to suffer (i.e., privity)—both are known predictors of outgroup support (Neufeld, Starzyk, Gaucher, & Boese, 2012; Starzyk, Blatz, & Ross, 2009; Starzyk & Ross, 2008). Systematically manipulating these factors alongside community connection may help explain why the community connection manipulation failed to impact support for government action in Study 3.

Whether or not participants' communities are responsible for the injustice may also determine the effects of community connection on support for addressing the injustice. The current research was situated in contexts where participants' communities were (largely) not responsible for the injustice (Sample 1 of Study 1, Study 3) or where responsibility was perhaps unclear or not salient (Sample 2 of Study 1). Yet sometimes, minority groups seek reparations for harms clearly perpetrated by another community; Indigenous peoples' campaign for restitution for the State- and Church-run Indian Residential Schools in Canada

and the United States is one example (Starzyk et al., 2014; Starzyk, Neufeld, El-Gabalawy, & Boese, 2018; see also Starzyk & Ross, 2008). Drawing on system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), we propose that evoking connection in such cases might either have no effect or backfire: making salient participants' connection to the perpetrator could question the legitimacy or fairness of people's social systems or groups (e.g., Jost et al., 2015; Starzyk et al., 2014). Thus, if people are led to feel a heightened sense of community connection, and then learn about an injustice for which their ingroup or community is responsible, it is plausible that their support for the issue may decrease.

Although the community connection manipulation may not always significantly impact support for government action, this research is the first to demonstrate that it is possible. Prior research on a psychological sense of community shows its associations with collective action and suggests (but do not test) that it may motivate collective efficacy (McNamara et al., 2013). This paper provides experimental evidence that it is possible to induce community connection (at least in some contexts), and that doing so can motivate support for addressing injustice in an outgroup community. In Study 1, the effects of the manipulation on support for government action were small in magnitude as per Cohen's (1988) conventions. This is perhaps unsurprising given the relatively subtle nature of the manipulation and the strong psychological barriers to improving an outgroup community's condition, as reviewed in the introduction. But it is precisely because of these difficulties in "awakening the sense of injustice" (Deutsch & Steil, 1988) that we think community connection has promise for advocacy and is deserving of further study.

Further, the subtlety of the manipulation is one of its strengths. Given that the manipulation simply involves having people reflect on their connection to their own community, it is portable: it could be used by anyone—not only researchers—across a variety of contexts outside

of a laboratory, such as a conversation, a lecture, or an advocacy campaign. Following Massey and Barreras's (2013) call for research that has impact validity (i.e., research that plays an active role in creating social change), we encourage readers to explore the impact of our manipulation in the aforementioned contexts. Those seeking a larger effect on support for government action may consider a heavier handed approach, such as pairing the community connection manipulation with a prejudice reduction strategy (but see Wright & Baray, 2012).

### *Conclusion*

The current research suggests that evoking a sense of community connection may be one way to increase people's support for all communities—not just their own. Doing so can create a superordinate community identity, which increases the perceived value of all communities, and in turn, increases support for rectifying injustice in other communities. Thus, community connection may be an effective tool for creating intergroup solidarity and achieving positive social change.

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### **Notes**

1. Although the current research is heavily influenced by conceptualizations put forward by Sarason (1974) or McMillan and Chavis (1986), we do not purport that community

connection is the *same* as those concepts. Those are multifaceted, whereas our examination is unidimensional.

2. The study completed by Sample 1 was part of a larger study wherein we manipulated the system participants were connected to or disconnected from: either their community or country. We had manipulated system hoping to better understand whether and how a system's responsibility for the injustice impacted participant support for addressing the injustice; however, system responsibility was not made explicit in the manipulation, complicating interpretation. For this reason, we do not report the country connection results. We further discuss this system responsibility hypothesis in the General Discussion section.
3. Participants in Sample 1 also indicated their support for relocation before indicating their support for government action. Additionally, after indicating their support for government action, participants in both samples reported their moral outrage, empathy, and perceived feasibility. Although we expected the manipulation would impact these measures, it did not, so we do not discuss them further; see the supplemental materials for measures and results.
4. Due to our directional, a priori hypotheses, all reported *p* values for *t* tests are one-tailed.
5. We are grateful to the editor for suggesting these possible mechanisms.

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