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Protecting Threatened Identity: Sticking With the Group by Emphasizing Ingroup Heterogeneity

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In two studies (Ns = 163, 164), the authors tested the prediction that perceptions of group variability can steer and guide the way that loyalty is expressed in times of identity threat. In both studies, participants were classified as lower or higher identifiers on the basis of their scores on a group identification measure, and manipulations involved group variability perceptions (homogeneous ingroup vs. heterogeneous ingroup) and threat to the ingroup. Higher identifiers presented with a homogeneous ingroup perceived more ingroup homogeneity under threat than when there was no threat. In contrast, higher identifiers who perceived the ingroup initially as heterogeneous perceived more ingroup heterogeneity under threat than in no threat conditions. Lower identifiers perceived more ingroup heterogeneity under threat (vs. no threat) irrespective of manipulated group variability perceptions. Discussion focuses on different ways that group loyalty can be expressed in times of identity threat.

Keywords: *group variability; stereotypes; social identity; group identification; threat; group processes*

Research on perceived group variability suggests that perceptions of ingroup homogeneity or heterogeneity can serve an identity maintenance function (for a review, see Doosje & Ellemers, 1997). One line of research has explored how group variability judgments are moderated by the level or strength of group identification and identity threat. A central finding in this research has been that high identifiers respond to threats to the ingroup by emphasizing ingroup homogeneity, whereas low identifiers stress ingroup heterogeneity (Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995; Doosje, Spears, Ellemers, & Koomen, 1999). This is consistent with the social identity

theory-derived prediction that high identifiers express solidarity and commitment to the ingroup when it is threatened, whereas low identifiers are more inclined to abandon the group and pursue more individualistic means of maintaining a positive (personal) identity (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Doosje & Ellemers, 1997; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997; Jetten, Spears, Hogg, & Manstead, 2000; Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

In the current research, we focus not only on the level or strength of identification with the ingroup but also on group members' perceptions of the ingroup prior to the threat. The aim is to demonstrate how initial perceptions of ingroup homogeneity or heterogeneity can influence subsequent group variability judgments as a function of group identification and identity threat. Our central argument is that expressions of solidarity and commitment to the group in times of identity threat need not necessarily result in the perception of ingroup members as undifferentiated and interchangeable (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Rather, we propose that perceptions of ingroup heterogeneity also can be a way for high identifiers to "stick with" the ingroup when

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it is threatened if this is consistent with the way the group is construed prior to the threat.

Effects of Group Size and Status on Perceived Group Variability

Although people tend to perceive more homogeneity among outgroup members than among ingroup members—the outgroup homogeneity effect (e.g., Brauer, 2001; Judd & Park, 1988; Linville, Fischer, & Salovey, 1989; Park & Judd, 1990; Park, Judd, & Ryan, 1991; Park & Rothbart, 1982; Quattrone, 1986)—there is an increasing body of research showing that members of minority or low-status groups often perceive more ingroup than outgroup homogeneity (e.g., Lorenzi-Cioldi, Eagly, & Stewart, 1995; Mullen & Hu, 1989; Simon, 1992; Simon & Brown, 1987; Simon & Pettigrew, 1990; for a review, see Voci, 2000). Explanations of this effect have suggested that there may be a stable difference in the perception of variability in groups varying in size or status (e.g., Fiske, 1993; Guinote, 2004; Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993; Simon & Brown, 1987). Simon and Brown (1987) argued that members of minority groups, because of their smaller size, may feel threatened in terms of their self-esteem. Because of this threat, members of minority groups may benefit from perceiving the ingroup as homogeneous rather than heterogeneous, thereby sustaining their identity as a distinctive and entitative group (Campbell, 1958).

Several empirical findings are supportive of this account (e.g., Castano & Yzerbyt, 1998; Doosje et al., 1995; Kelly, 1989; Lee & Ottati, 1995; Mullen & Hu, 1989; Rothgerber, 1997). For example, Rothgerber (1997) observed that students who were led to believe that their group had been judged unfairly perceived more homogeneity among ingroup members than did students who believed that the ingroup had been judged fairly. Along similar lines, Lee and Ottati (1995) found that Chinese students at an American university who were confronted with stereotypic traits that were consistent with the auto-stereotype of most Chinese people (e.g., inhibited, shy) perceived more ingroup heterogeneity than did control participants who were not presented with stereotypic traits. In contrast, participants presented with stereotypic traits that were inconsistent with the Chinese auto-stereotype (e.g., sly, dishonest) perceived more ingroup homogeneity than did control participants.

Group Identification and Perceived Group Variability

Other research has examined directly the relation between group identification and perceived group variability. A central finding in this research has been that high identifiers generally perceive ingroup members as more homogeneous and undifferentiated than low

identifiers (Castano & Yzerbyt, 1998; Doosje et al., 1995; Kelly, 1989; Simon & Pettigrew, 1990). For instance, Kelly (1989) observed that supporters of a political party who were also official party members, and who were therefore assumed to identify strongly with the party, perceived more homogeneity in the party than did supporters who were not official party members. Furthermore, in a minimal group study, Simon and Pettigrew (1990) found a significant negative correlation between the importance of group membership and perceived group variability. More recently, Castano and Yzerbyt (1998) reported a study in which they divided the participants, all psychology students, into groups according to their level of identification with the larger group of psychology students and found that high identifiers judged psychology students as more homogeneous and undifferentiated than an outgroup of social workers, whereas this difference was absent for low identifiers. Similar results were reported by Ellemers et al. (1997), who manipulated rather than measured group identification and found that when intergroup boundaries were salient, high identifiers perceived more homogeneity among group members than did low identifiers.

The preceding evidence suggests at first sight that a combination of group identification and identity threat will result in the perception of ingroup members as undifferentiated and interchangeable. This occurs because homogenized ingroup perceptions help in the mobilization of group members and prepare the way for a collective response to threat (Reicher, 1996; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Stott & Drury, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Wright, 2001). This prediction was tested directly in a series of studies examining the combined effects of group identification and identity threat on ingroup variability judgments (Doosje et al., 1995; Doosje et al., 1999; see also Cameron, Duck, Terry, & Lalonde, 2005). In one study, Doosje et al. (1995, Experiment 1) asked participants, all psychology students, to complete a group identification measure before manipulating identity threat by informing them that psychology students were generally either more or less intelligent than business students. Perceived group variability was measured by asking participants to rate how similar or different they perceived psychology students to be. Results indicated that group identification influenced variability judgments only when participants believed that psychology students were less intelligent than business students; high identifiers emphasized ingroup homogeneity, whereas low identifiers stressed ingroup heterogeneity. Similar results were obtained in a minimal group study (Doosje et al., 1995, Experiment 2) in which the level of group identification was manipulated rather than measured.

Doosje and colleagues (1995) suggested that perceiving the ingroup as homogeneous may contribute to

the perceived positivity of the ingroup and highlight the solidarity and social support it offers to its members (see also Allen, 1985; Simon & Brown, 1987; Spears et al., 1997). On the other hand, a heterogeneous ingroup may allow low identifiers to even further detach or psychologically withdraw from the group when it is threatened. This interpretation is supported further by evidence that self-stereotyping decreases for low identifiers, but not high identifiers, when group membership is threatened (Cameron et al., 2005; Spears et al., 1997). Together, these findings are consistent with the social identity theory-derived prediction that high identifiers will defend and “stick with” the ingroup in times of identity threat, whereas low identifiers are more inclined to abandon the group and pursue strategies aimed at protecting their personal identity rather than the group’s identity (Branscombe et al., 1999; Doosje & Ellemers, 1997; Jetten et al., 2000; Spears et al., 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Sticking With the Group by Emphasizing Ingroup Heterogeneity

The findings by Doosje and colleagues (1995) also are consistent with predictions derived from self-categorization theory’s metacontrast principle (Turner, 1985; Turner et al., 1987). This states that social category salience and group identification lead to the accentuation of intergroup differences and intragroup similarities. Under such conditions, perception is depersonalized and ingroup members judge one another in ingroup stereotypical terms rather than as unique individuals. It therefore follows that the conditions where a group identity is salient (e.g., under identity threat) are also those where there will be increased perceptions of homogeneity among ingroup members. Several studies have provided support for this prediction (Haslam, Oakes, Turner, & McGarty, 1995; Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994; Reynolds, Oakes, Haslam, Turner, & Ryan, 2004).

Of importance, though, in social identity and self-categorization theories, when a group identity is salient, it is the perceived content of that identity that determines self-definition and therefore steers and guides perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Jetten & Postmes, 2006; Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002; Postmes, Spears, & Cihangir, 2001; Reicher, 1996; Stott & Drury, 2004; Stott, Hutchison, & Drury, 2001). It follows that there may be conditions where social identity expression and emphasizing ingroup variability become intertwined. Indeed, group variability may itself be an important aspect of the perceived content of a group’s identity, for example, in multicultural or individualist societies (Haslam, 2004; Jetten et al., 2002; Postmes et al., 2001; van Knippenberg & Haslam, 2003; see also Durkheim,

1984; Jetten & Postmes, 2006). Group variability perceptions may be seen as beliefs about what actually makes the group a group: Group members may feel that it is their commonalities that make them a distinctive and entitative group (Campbell, 1958), whereas others may believe that it is the diversity among ingroup members that defines the ingroup and distinguishes it from other groups. The important implication of this distinction for current purposes is that if heterogeneity is perceived as a defining feature of the ingroup, then the expression of solidarity and commitment to the group may manifest itself, paradoxically, in the perception of heterogeneity among ingroup members. Note that this prediction is not incompatible with the metacontrast principle but follows directly from self-categorization theory’s focus on the context and content of identity—a threatening intergroup context concensualizes perceptions of ingroup defining features (Oakes et al., 1994; Reicher, 1996; Turner et al., 1987).

Overview

The research described above is consistent with the notion that threats to the ingroup can increase perceptions of ingroup homogeneity or heterogeneity in the service of identity maintenance. The current research focuses on another factor that we predict will affect group variability judgments in times of identity threat: how the ingroup is perceived, homogeneous or heterogeneous, prior to the threat. Two studies were conducted to test the prediction that perceptions of group variability can steer and guide the way that group loyalty is stressed following a threat to the ingroup. We propose that commitment to the group cannot only be expressed by stressing ingroup homogeneity, as previous research has shown, but that perceiving the ingroup as heterogeneous also may be a way to stick with the ingroup when it is threatened, if this is how the group is construed prior to the threat. Both studies used a paradigm that was conceptually similar to the one used by Doosje et al. (1995). In both studies, participants were classified as either lower or higher identifiers on the basis of their responses to a group identification measure. Different tasks were used in the two studies to manipulate perceptions of group variability. To manipulate identity threat, participants were asked to read the purported results of a previous study indicating that the ingroup compared favorably (no threat condition) or unfavorably (threat condition) with a relevant outgroup (see Doosje et al., 1995; Jetten et al., 2002; Spears et al., 1997, for similar manipulations). Perceived group variability was measured using items assessing the extent to which members of the ingroup are perceived as similar or different among themselves without referring to specific traits or

attributes (see Quattrone, 1986; Simon & Pettigrew, 1990; Voci, 2000; Voci & Capozza, 1999, for similar measures).

Following the results reported by Doosje et al. (1995) and findings from previous research on reactions to threats to the ingroup (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999), we expected that group members would regard information that their own group compared unfavorably with the outgroup as threatening. This threat, we expected, would lead higher identifiers to express solidarity and commitment to the ingroup, whereas lower identifiers were expected to attempt to psychologically distance themselves from the group. However, for reasons stated above, it also was expected that expression of solidarity and commitment to the ingroup would manifest itself in different ways depending on how the group was perceived by higher identifiers prior to the threat. This led us to make the following predictions: If the ingroup is perceived a priori as homogeneous, that is, following the group variability manipulation, then higher identifiers should perceive more homogeneity among ingroup members when threatened than when there is no threat to the ingroup. On the other hand, if the ingroup is perceived initially as heterogeneous, higher identifiers should perceive more ingroup heterogeneity after threat than in the no threat condition. We expected that lower identifiers would be less likely than higher identifiers to internalize a salient group identity, and therefore would be less motivated to act in accordance with that identity when the ingroup was threatened (Turner et al., 1987). In addition, a number of findings in the literature indicate that lower identifiers will strive to distance themselves from the group when it is threatened; stressing heterogeneity among ingroup members might provide a convenient and legitimate opportunity for lower identifiers to achieve this (Doosje & Ellemers, 1997; Doosje et al., 1995). This led us to predict that lower identifiers would perceive more ingroup heterogeneity in the threat condition than in the no threat condition, irrespective of previously manipulated perceptions of group variability.

STUDY 1

Participants

A total of 163 undergraduate students from different courses at the University of Exeter participated on a voluntary basis. Ninety-five were women, 66 were men, and 2 did not specify their gender. The age range was from 18 to 39, with a mean of 20.55 years ($SD = 4.46$ years). Because gender or age had no main or interactive effects in subsequent analyses, these variables are not considered further.

Design

A 2 (group identification: lower vs. higher) \times 2 (identity threat: threat vs. no threat) \times 2 (group variability: homogeneous ingroup vs. heterogeneous ingroup) between-participants design was used. Group variability and identity threat were manipulated variables and participants were classified as lower or higher identifiers on the basis of their responses to a group identification measure.¹

Materials and Procedure

Participants were approached on a university campus and asked to participate in a study on perceptions of the university that was being conducted by researchers at the university's Psychology Department. All participants received a questionnaire containing the instructions and all independent and dependent variables, which were presented in the same order as described below. After they had completed the questionnaires, participants were asked to report any suspicions they might have about the true purpose of the study. No accurate suspicions were reported. A debriefing sheet was handed to each participant at the end of the study.

Group identification. Four items measured participants' level of identification with their university (from Doosje et al., 1995): "I see myself as a University of Exeter student," "I am pleased to be a University of Exeter student," "I feel strong ties with University of Exeter students," and "I identify with other University of Exeter students." Responses to these and subsequent items were recorded on 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). The identification items were averaged to form a single group identification score (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$). Group identification did not differ across the different experimental conditions (homogeneous/no threat condition, $M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.29$; homogeneous/threat condition, $M = 5.54$, $SD = 0.91$; heterogeneous/no threat condition, $M = 5.53$, $SD = 1.09$; heterogeneous/threat condition, $M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.26$), $F(1, 158) = 2.24$, $p = .14$. As in the Doosje et al. (1995) studies, a median split procedure was used to classify participants as lower identifiers ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.07$) or higher identifiers ($M = 6.35$, $SD = 0.53$), $F(1, 160) = 173.75$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .52$. Given that the overall level of group identification was high, it may be more appropriate to refer to moderate rather than lower identifiers. However, we use the terminology lower versus higher identifiers in subsequent analyses to remain consistent with previous research.

Group variability manipulation. Participants were told that previous research had assessed the attitudes and

opinions of students at their own and other universities on a range of issues and that the results had shown that there was either a high degree of homogeneity or heterogeneity among the students at their university. This was conveyed to participants in a short paragraph:

Previous research revealed that Exeter students hold fairly different [similar] attitudes and opinions to each other. On a range of issues, there is a high degree of diversity [consensus] in the attitudes and opinions expressed by Exeter students. The research also showed that Exeter students value diversity [consensus] because it contributes to an environment in which students can interact with people who hold different [similar] attitudes and opinions to themselves, which allows them to question and challenge [validate] their own judgments.

To reinforce the information contained in the above paragraph, participants were then asked to describe in a few words or sentences how [what] University of Exeter students differ from each other [have in common].

Identity threat manipulation. Participants were informed that previous research also had indicated that University of Exeter students compared either favorably (no threat condition) or unfavorably (threat condition) with students at other universities on a range of identity-relevant dimensions (from Doosje et al., 1995; Jetten et al., 2002; Spears et al., 1997). This was again conveyed to participants in a short paragraph:

Previous research revealed that the academic achievements of University of Exeter students compared unfavorably [favorably] with the achievements of students of other universities; compared to the national average there are more [less] drop-outs and failures among Exeter students; the prospects on the job market are significantly worse [better] for Exeter students compared to the national average; and there is some evidence to suggest that Exeter students will continue to under [over] achieve in the years to come.

Two items were included to assess the effectiveness of the manipulation in arousing differences in threat perceptions (from Jetten et al., 2002): "I feel positive when I read this information about Exeter students" and "I feel threatened when I read this information about Exeter students." The first item was reverse-scored and combined with the second item to form a single identity threat measure ($\alpha = .56$). A higher mean score indicates more perceived threat.

Perceived group variability. Perceived group variability was measured using two items adapted from previous studies (Doosje et al., 1995; Simon & Pettigrew, 1990;

for a review, see Voci, 2000). The items assess the extent to which members of a group are perceived as similar or different among themselves without making reference to particular traits or attributes: "Students at this university are similar to each other" and "Students at this university are different from each other." The first item was reverse-scored and combined with the second item to form a single perceived group variability measure ($\alpha = .63$), with a higher score indicating more perceived heterogeneity among ingroup members.

Results

IDENTITY THREAT

A $2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVA on the identity threat scores revealed a significant main effect of threat, $F(1, 154) = 116.46, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .43$. No other effects were significant. As expected, participants in the threat condition ($M = 4.69, SD = 1.10$) perceived significantly more threat than did those in the no threat condition ($M = 2.35, SD = 1.53$).

PERCEIVED GROUP VARIABILITY

A $2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVA on the perceived group variability scores revealed a marginally significant main effect of group variability, $F(1, 154) = 2.82, p = .09, \eta_p^2 = .018$. Consistent with the manipulation, the ingroup was perceived as more homogeneous in the homogeneous ingroup condition ($M = 4.19, SD = 1.18$) than in the heterogeneous ingroup condition ($M = 4.55, SD = 1.05$). The only other effect to emerge was a significant Group Identification \times Identity Threat \times Group Variability interaction, $F(1, 154) = 7.10, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .044$. To test our specific hypotheses, we examined the independent and interactive effects of group variability and identity threat for lower and higher identifiers separately (see Figure 1).

For lower identifiers, the threat main effect was marginally significant, $F(1, 85) = 3.20, p = 0.07, \eta_p^2 = .036$. Lower identifiers perceived more ingroup heterogeneity in the threat condition ($M = 4.50, SD = 1.13$) than in the no threat condition ($M = 3.99, SD = 1.13$). No other effects were significant for lower identifiers.

For higher identifiers, the only effect to emerge was a significant Identity Threat \times Group Variability interaction, $F(1, 69) = 7.37, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .097$. Simple effects tests revealed that in the homogeneous ingroup condition, higher identifiers who were threatened ($M = 3.92, SD = 1.49$) perceived more ingroup homogeneity than did those in the no threat condition ($M = 4.75, SD = 1.10$), $F(1, 69) = 3.93, p = .05, \eta_p^2 = .054$. In contrast, in the heterogeneous ingroup condition, higher identifiers under threat ($M = 5.03, SD = 0.94$) perceived marginally

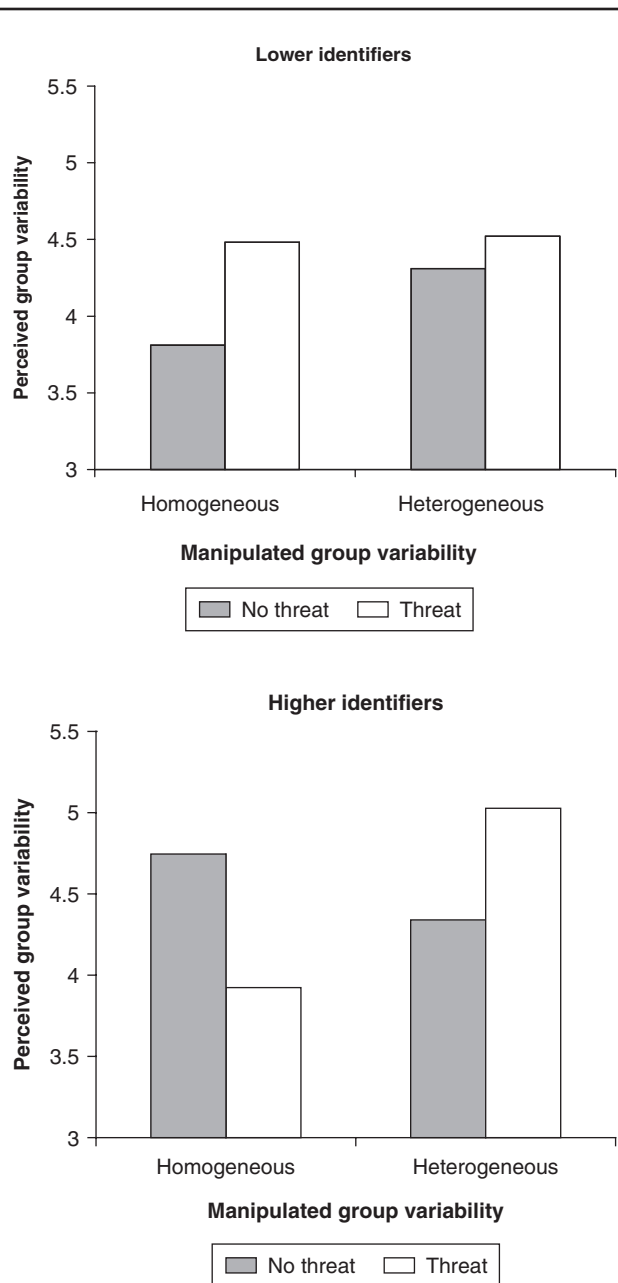


Figure 1 Perceived group variability as a function of group identification, identity threat, and manipulated group variability: Study 1.

more heterogeneity than did those who in the no threat condition ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 1.11$), $F(1, 69) = 3.45$, $p = .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .048$. In addition, higher identifiers in the threat condition perceived more ingroup heterogeneity in the heterogeneous ingroup condition than in the homogeneous ingroup condition, $F(1, 69) = 8.19$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .106$, whereas this difference was absent when there was no threat to the ingroup, $F(1, 69) = 1.03$, $p = .31$.

Discussion

The results are consistent with predictions. Consistent with the manipulation and with previous research (Doosje et al., 1995; Jetten et al., 2002; Spears et al., 1997), participants in the identity threat condition felt significantly more threatened than did those in the no threat condition. Moreover, higher identifiers who perceived the ingroup as homogeneous following the group variability manipulation perceived more ingroup homogeneity in the threat condition than in the no threat condition. In contrast, higher identifiers who perceived the ingroup initially as heterogeneous tended to perceive more ingroup heterogeneity under threat than when there was no threat to the ingroup. These findings are consistent with the prediction that the way that solidarity and commitment to the group is manifested can vary widely depending on the perceived content of the group's identity and group norms (Doosje et al., 1999; Jetten et al., 2002; Turner et al., 1987). The results also revealed that under identity threat, higher identifiers perceived more ingroup heterogeneity in the heterogeneous ingroup condition than in the homogeneous ingroup condition, whereas this difference was absent when there was no threat to the ingroup. This finding is consistent with our reasoning that it is especially under conditions that may be perceived as threatening to the ingroup that high identifiers act in accordance with the content of their group's identity (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999; Doosje & Ellemers, 1997; Jetten et al., 2002; Turner et al., 1987).

As expected, a different pattern emerged for lower identifiers, who perceived more heterogeneity within the group under identity threat than when the ingroup was not threatened, irrespective of manipulated perceptions of a priori group variability. This finding for lower identifiers is consistent with the results reported by Doosje et al. (1995) and the social identity theory-based prediction that low identifiers will attempt to put psychological distance between themselves and other ingroup members when the ingroup is threatened (e.g., Doosje & Ellemers, 1997; Ellemers et al., 1997; Spears et al., 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

STUDY 2

A second study was conducted to test the robustness of these findings. Study 2 was conceptually similar to Study 1 but we used a different group variability manipulation. Whereas in Study 1 participants were informed that the ingroup was either homogeneous or heterogeneous, in Study 2, we used a task in which participants themselves generated perceptions of group variability.

A manipulation check item was included to assess the effectiveness of this task in generating perceptions of ingroup homogeneity or ingroup heterogeneity before participants read the information in the identity threat manipulation. In addition, we included a postthreat group identification measure to examine and rule out an alternative explanation for the findings of Study 1 in terms of higher identifiers “bailing out” by emphasizing ingroup heterogeneity in the face of a threat to the ingroup. Specifically, to strengthen our argument that higher identifiers stressing ingroup heterogeneity can be an expression of group loyalty, we aimed to show that the perception of heterogeneity under threat is accompanied by decreased group identification for lower identifiers but not higher identifiers. This would provide further support for the idea that the perception of ingroup heterogeneity for higher identifiers represents an expression of loyalty and commitment to the ingroup in difficult times rather than a psychological “exit strategy” (Doosje & Ellemers, 1997).

Participants and Design

A total of 164 students from different under- and postgraduate courses at the University of Birmingham participated on a voluntary basis. One hundred and ten were women, 51 were men, and 3 did not specify their gender. The age range was from 18 to 36 with a mean of 22.65 years ($SD = 2.89$ years). Preliminary analyses revealed again that gender or age did not have an effect and that these variables are not considered further. The design was identical to the first study.

Materials and Procedure

Participants were approached on a university campus and, as in Study 1, were asked to participate in a study on student life that was being conducted by researchers at their university's Psychology Department. Independent and dependent variables were presented in the same order as reported below and participants received a debriefing information sheet on completion of the questionnaire.

Group identification. Group identification was measured using the same four items used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .83$). Participants were again classified as lower identifiers ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.67$) or higher identifiers ($M = 6.04$, $SD = 0.49$) using a median split procedure, $F(1, 162) = 269.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .625$.² The level of group identification did not differ across the different experimental conditions (homogeneous/no threat condition, $M = 5.22$, $SD = 0.99$; homogeneous/threat condition, $M = 5.49$, $SD = 0.72$; heterogeneous/no threat condition, $M = 5.12$, $SD = 0.78$; heterogeneous/threat condition, $M = 5.26$, $SD = 0.86$), $F(1, 160) < 1$, *ns*. As in Study 1, the overall level of group

identification was high and, therefore, it may be more appropriate to refer to moderate rather than lower identifiers. However, as in Study 1, we use the terminology lower versus higher identifiers to remain consistent with previous and research.

Group variability manipulation. Participants completed a series of questions about students at their university that would make salient similarities within the group of Birmingham students (homogeneous ingroup condition; e.g., Estimate what percentage of University of Birmingham students: went to school in United Kingdom; engage in sports; prefer popular music over classical music; like to watch movies) or that would make salient intragroup differences (heterogeneous ingroup condition; e.g., Estimate what percentage of University of Birmingham students: went to school in Birmingham; engage in sports every day; have the following music as their first preference: dance, rock, hip hop, pop, classical; have the following types of movies as their first preference: sci-fi, love stories, comedy, martial arts, western). The questions presented to participants in the homogeneous ingroup condition related to a more inclusive category (e.g., students who attended school in the United Kingdom) than the questions presented to those in the heterogeneous ingroup condition (e.g., attended school in Birmingham). We predicted that participants in the homogeneous ingroup condition would generate a more homogeneous perception of the ingroup than those in the heterogeneous ingroup condition. Participants also were encouraged to focus on ingroup homogeneity or heterogeneity by asking them to “Describe in a few words or sentences how [what] University of Birmingham students differ from each other [have in common].” Immediately after this manipulation, a single item was used to check its effectiveness. Participants were asked to indicate on a scale ranging from 1 (*similar to each other*) to 7 (*different from each other*) how they perceived students at their university.

Identity threat manipulation. Identity threat was manipulated using the same materials as used in Study 1 and the same two items were used to check the effectiveness of the manipulation ($\alpha = .69$).

Perceived group variability. Perceived group variability was measured using the same two items as used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .80$).

Postthreat group identification. A single item was used to measure the degree of group identification following the identity threat manipulation: “Being a University of Birmingham student is important to me” (Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, & Turner, 1999). Previous research has shown that this item correlates highly with other global measures of group identification (Haslam, 2004; Haslam et al., 1999; Mael, 1988).

Results

GROUP VARIABILITY MANIPULATION CHECK

A 2 × 2 × 2 ANOVA on the group variability manipulation check scores revealed a significant main effect of group variability, $F(1, 156) = 5.52, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .034$. No other effects were significant. Consistent with the manipulation, prior to the threat manipulation, participants perceived more heterogeneity among ingroup members in the heterogeneous ingroup condition ($M = 4.76, SD = 1.15$) than in the homogeneous ingroup condition ($M = 4.28, SD = 1.49$). This confirms that the task was successful in manipulating perceptions of group variability prior to the identity threat manipulation.

IDENTITY THREAT

Analysis of the identity threat scores revealed a significant main effect of threat, $F(1, 156) = 197.56, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .559$. As expected, participants felt more threatened in the threat condition ($M = 4.49, SD = 1.39$) than in the no threat condition ($M = 2.02, SD = 0.79$). The Identity Threat × Group Identification interaction also was significant, $F(1, 156) = 3.94, p = .05, \eta_p^2 = .025$, but there were no other significant effects. Post hoc analyses indicated that, in the threat condition, lower ($M = 4.33, SD = 1.40$) and higher identifiers ($M = 4.64, SD = 1.39$) felt equally threatened, $F(1, 156) = 1.36, p = .25$. In the no threat condition, the mean level of threat for higher identifiers ($M = 1.79, SD = 0.70$) was slightly lower than the threat perceived by lower identifiers ($M = 2.21, SD = 0.77$), but this difference was not significant, $F(1, 156) = 2.69, p = .10$. In sum, the significant interaction was a less strong effect than the predicted main effect of threat, providing confidence in the success of the manipulation to generate differences in perceived threat.

PERCEIVED GROUP VARIABILITY

The analysis revealed a significant main effect of group variability, $F(1, 156) = 5.00, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .031$. As expected, the group was judged as more heterogeneous in the heterogeneous ingroup condition ($M = 5.01, SD = 1.34$) than in the homogeneous ingroup condition ($M = 4.46, SD = 1.41$). The Identity Threat × Group Identification × Group Variability interaction also was significant, $F(1, 156) = 6.79, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .042$, and there were no other significant effects. As in Study 1, to test our specific hypotheses we examined the independent and interactive effects of group variability and identity threat for lower and higher identifiers separately (see Figure 2).

For lower identifiers, the group variability main effect was marginally significant, $F(1, 79) = 3.74, p = .06, \eta_p^2 = .045$. Lower identifiers tended to perceive the ingroup as more heterogeneous in the heterogeneous ingroup condition ($M = 5.13, SD = 1.50$) than in the

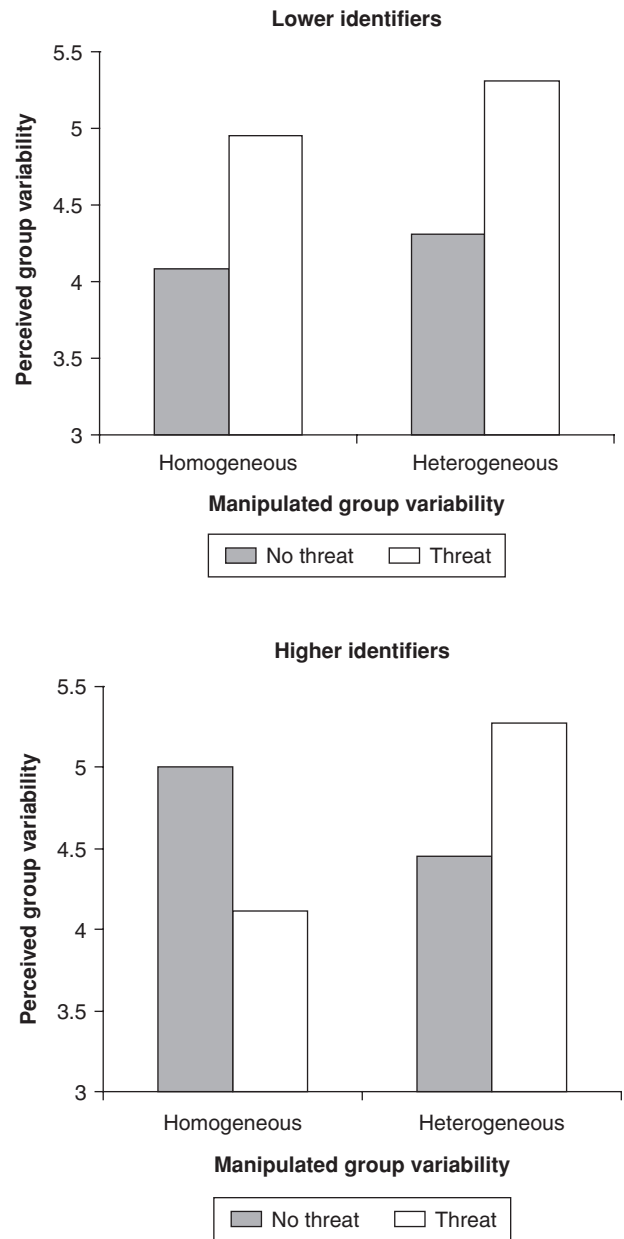


Figure 2 Perceived group variability as a function of group identification, identity threat, and manipulated group variability: Study 2.

homogeneous ingroup condition ($M = 4.43, SD = 1.49$). The threat main effect also was marginally significant for lower identifiers, $F(1, 79) = 3.28, p = .07, \eta_p^2 = .040$. Lower identifiers tended to perceive the ingroup as more heterogeneous in the threat condition ($M = 5.13, SD = 1.19$) than in the no threat condition ($M = 4.89, SD = 1.72$). The Identity Threat × Group Variability interaction was not significant for lower identifiers.

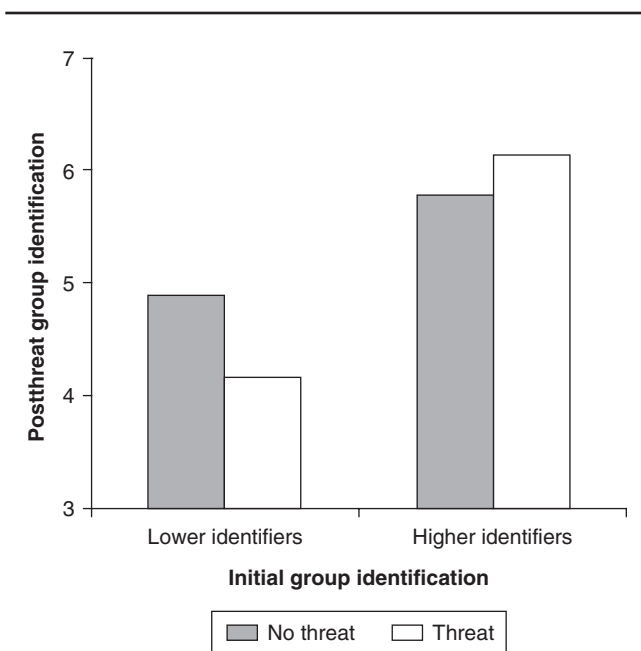


Figure 3 Postthreat group identification as a function of initial group identification and identity threat.

For higher identifiers, the only effect to emerge was a significant Identity Threat \times Group Variability interaction, $F(1, 77) = 10.58, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .121$. Simple effects tests indicated that in the homogeneous ingroup condition, higher identifiers who felt that the ingroup was threatened ($M = 4.11, SD = 1.41$) perceived more ingroup homogeneity than did those in the no threat condition ($M = 5.00, SD = 1.07$), $F(1, 77) = 5.66, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .068$. In contrast, in the heterogeneous ingroup condition, higher identifiers under threat ($M = 5.28, SD = 0.93$) perceived more heterogeneity among ingroup members than did those in the no threat condition ($M = 4.45, SD = 1.26$), $F(1, 77) = 4.93, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .060$. Moreover, as in Study 1, when the ingroup was threatened, higher identifiers perceived more ingroup heterogeneity in the heterogeneous ingroup condition than in the homogeneous ingroup condition, $F(1, 77) = 10.72, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .122$, whereas this difference was absent when there was no threat to the ingroup, $F(1, 77) = 1.99, p = .16$.

POSTTHREAT GROUP IDENTIFICATION

The postthreat group identification scores were analyzed using a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANCOVA with the initial group identification scores as a covariate. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of group identification, $F(1, 155) = 11.77, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .071$. Lower identifiers ($M = 4.55, SD = 1.48$) indicated a lower level of postthreat group identification than did higher

identifiers ($M = 5.97, SD = .87$). The Identity Threat \times Group Identification interaction also was significant, $F(1, 155) = 6.97, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .043$, but no other effects were significant. Means are graphed in Figure 3. Simple effects tests indicated that the level of postthreat group identification expressed by lower identifiers was lower in the threat condition ($M = 4.16, SD = 1.65$) than in the no threat condition ($M = 4.89, SD = 1.25$), $F(1, 155) = 7.02, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .043$. In contrast, for higher identifiers, postthreat identification was the same in the threat ($M = 6.14, SD = 0.79$) and no threat conditions ($M = 5.78, SD = 0.92$), $F(1, 155) = 1.22, p = .27$. Furthermore, for higher identifiers in the threat condition, postthreat identification in the homogeneous ingroup condition ($M = 6.17, SD = 0.72$) did not differ from identification in the heterogeneous ingroup condition ($M = 6.09, SD = 0.90$), $F(1, 77) < 1, ns$.

Discussion

Results of Study 2 are consistent with predictions. Participants felt more threatened in the threat condition than in the no threat condition. The group variability manipulation task also had the intended effect. Participants judged ingroup members to be more similar among themselves in the homogeneous ingroup condition compared to the heterogeneous ingroup condition.

With regard to perceived group variability, replicating the effects observed in Study 1, higher identifiers who perceived the ingroup as homogeneous following the group variability manipulation perceived more ingroup homogeneity under threat compared to those in the no threat condition. In contrast, higher identifiers who initially perceived the ingroup as heterogeneous judged the ingroup as more heterogeneous in the threat condition than when there was no threat to the ingroup. Again replicating the effects observed in Study 1, unlike higher identifiers, lower identifiers tended to perceive more ingroup heterogeneity under threat than in the no threat condition, irrespective of initially manipulated group variability perceptions.

Furthermore, the postthreat group identification ratings indicated that higher identifiers maintained a relatively high degree of group identification across the identity threat and no threat conditions, whereas the level of group identification expressed by lower identifiers was significantly lower under threat than in the no threat condition. These results further support the proposal that stressing heterogeneity in the face of a threat to the ingroup can correspond to an expression of solidarity and commitment to the group on the part of higher identifiers rather than a psychological "exit strategy" (Doosje & Ellemers, 1997).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Two studies examined the prediction that group variability perceptions can steer and guide the way that group loyalty is stressed in times of identity threat. Previous research has demonstrated that perceptions of ingroup variability can vary as a function of the level or strength of group identification and identity threat. Specifically, when the ingroup faces a threat, high identifiers emphasize ingroup homogeneity, whereas low identifiers stress ingroup heterogeneity (e.g., Doosje et al., 1995). It has been suggested that high identifiers “stick with” the ingroup and emphasize cohesion in times of identity threat, whereas low identifiers are more inclined to “bail out” (e.g., Doosje & Ellemers, 1997). In the present studies, we focused not only on the level or strength of identification with the ingroup but also on another factor that we predicted would affect group variability judgments when the ingroup faced a threat: how the group is perceived, homogeneous or heterogeneous, prior to the threat. In both studies, we manipulated group variability perceptions and examined the impact of these initial perceptions on subsequent judgments of ingroup variability as a function of group identification and identity threat.

The results suggest that although it may well be that high identifiers will express solidarity and commitment to the ingroup when it faces a threat, the perception of ingroup members as undifferentiated and interchangeable is not an inevitable consequence. Rather, our findings suggest that expression of group loyalty can take different forms depending on group members' perceptions of the content of the ingroup identity. This can involve perceptions of homogeneity or heterogeneity (see also Doosje et al., 1999; van Knippenberg & Haslam, 2003). In both studies, after threatening the ingroup identity by providing an unfavorable comparison with an outgroup, higher identifiers judged ingroup members consistent with previously manipulated group variability perceptions. Thus, in groups that are initially perceived as homogeneous, sticking with the ingroup in difficult or challenging times may result in the increased perception of homogeneity among ingroup members. On the other hand, if the ingroup is construed initially as heterogeneous, perceived ingroup heterogeneity can be an expression of group loyalty. Our findings therefore suggest that perceptions of group variability are guided not only by the level or strength of group identification, as previous research has shown (e.g., Kelly, 1989; Simon & Pettigrew, 1990), but also are fundamentally influenced by the perceived content of the group's identity.

It could be argued that stressing ingroup heterogeneity in difficult times might reflect a strategy on the part of higher identifiers to detach or psychologically withdraw from a heterogeneous ingroup. In other words, perceived

heterogeneity may provide that opportunity and excuse to bail out more readily compared to homogeneous groups. However, this explanation runs counter to a number of research findings indicating that highly committed group members will use every available opportunity to uphold and defend the interests of their group, often at high personal costs, especially when the group is under threat (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999; Doosje et al., 1995; Spears et al., 1997). With this in mind, it seems unlikely in our view that the variability judgments expressed by higher identifiers in the present studies were an attempt on the part of those members to distance themselves from the group. Rather, our findings suggest that ingroup heterogeneity or diversity may serve as a standard or norm for some groups and that higher identifiers in such groups may believe that emphasizing ingroup heterogeneity is an appropriate way to protect the interests of the group and its members (see also Haslam, 2004; Jetten et al., 2002; Jetten & Postmes, 2006; McAuliffe, Jetten, Hornsey, & Hogg, 2003; van Knippenberg & Haslam, 2003).

The postthreat group identification ratings in Study 2 provide further support for this analysis. We found that higher identifiers maintained a relatively high degree of group identification across the identity threat and no threat conditions irrespective of previously manipulated perceptions of ingroup variability. On the other hand, lower identifiers indicated a relatively reduced level of group identification under threat than when there was no threat to the ingroup. These results further suggest that stressing ingroup heterogeneity in the face of a threat to the ingroup might reflect a different strategy on the part of lower identifiers compared to higher identifiers. Specifically, for lower identifiers, perceiving the ingroup as heterogeneous would seem to reflect an attempt to detach or psychologically withdraw from the ingroup when it is challenged (Doosje & Ellemers, 1997). This interpretation is consistent with evidence that self-stereotyping also is decreased for low identifiers, but not high identifiers, when the status of the ingroup is threatened (Spears et al., 1997; see also Cameron et al., 2005).

It is also interesting to relate our findings to other approaches to the study of perceived group variability. As mentioned in the introduction, a number of models predict a stable asymmetry in the perception of groups varying in size or status (e.g., Fiske, 1993; Guinote, 2004; Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993; Simon & Brown, 1987; for a review, see Voci, 2000). Although these models often provide different explanations for the predicted asymmetry, they share the common assumption that being in a minority or low-status group results in the perception of much homogeneity among ingroup members. Our findings for higher identifiers in the homogeneous

ingroup condition—who perceived more ingroup homogeneity when the ingroup was threatened than when there was no threat to the ingroup—would seem to be consistent with these explanations. On the other hand, we also found that group members who perceived the ingroup as heterogeneous following the group variability manipulation perceived more ingroup heterogeneity under threat compared to the no threat condition. These results not only suggest that the asymmetric perceptions of group variability predicted by the aforementioned models may not be as widespread and universal as was originally thought but they also provide further support for the idea that group variability judgments may be influenced by motivational and strategic concerns related to the protection and enhancement of social identity (Allen, 1985; Doosje et al., 1995; Simon & Brown, 1987; Spears et al., 1997).

Although the current findings seem to be consistent with the identity maintenance assumptions of social identity theory, at face value, the increase in perceived ingroup heterogeneity by higher identifiers under threat may be seen as undermining the principle of metacontrast as specified in self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985; Turner et al., 1987). This principle holds that group variability perceptions are contingent on identity salience such that when a group identity is salient, perception is depersonalized and people view themselves and other ingroup members not as unique individuals but as interchangeable representatives of the ingroup prototype—a shared representation of the features that define the ingroup and distinguish it from other groups (Oakes et al., 1994). It has therefore been predicted from a self-categorization theory perspective that conditions where a group identity is salient also are those where the perception of ingroup homogeneity will be more pronounced (e.g., Haslam, 2004; Oakes et al., 1994; Reynolds et al., 2004). It is important to note, however, that in some groups the group prototype may be constructed on the basis of group consensus about the value of diversity among ingroup members, for example, in multicultural societies or in groups with norms of individualism (Jetten et al., 2002). This means that in such groups, “sticking with” the ingroup should increase rather than decrease the perception of differences among ingroup members and thus the perception of ingroup heterogeneity. Our findings therefore are not incompatible with self-categorization theory but rather may be viewed as a special case of the predictions derivable from the theory’s metacontrast principle.

In the current research, we use the terminology “identity threat” and “no threat” to describe the conditions created by the identity threat manipulation. It should be noted, however, that the information received by participants in the no threat condition was not only

nonthreatening but also favorable and positive for ingroup members. Indeed, some previous studies in which the same or similar manipulations have been used have referred instead to “low-status” versus “high-status” conditions (e.g., Doosje et al., 1995; Spears et al., 1997). The implication in much of this research has been that low group status results in identity threat, an assumption that also is central to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This link also has been empirically demonstrated not only in this research but also in previous studies (e.g., Jetten et al., 2002). The aim of the current research was to assess how individuals who differ in their level of group identification might use variability perceptions to cope with the threat associated with an unfavorable intergroup comparison (or low group status), and the manipulation check measures indicate that the important preconditions were in place, that is, participants felt more threatened in the threat condition than in the no threat condition. In addition, the results indicate that the predicted effects were a result of processes occurring within the threat condition, not in the no threat condition. Indeed, inspection of the mean group variability scores indicates that the group variability manipulation influenced variability judgments only in the identity threat condition. This is consistent with the social identity theory-based prediction that it is especially under conditions that may be perceived as threatening to the ingroup that high identifiers will act in accordance with their group’s identity (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999; Doosje et al., 1995; Jetten et al., 2002; Spears et al., 1997). In sum, although participants in the no threat condition received information that was not only nonthreatening but also favorable for the ingroup, this potential confound between threat and valence does not affect our conclusion that perceptions of group variability can steer and guide the way that loyalty is expressed in times of identity threat.

A potential limitation with our measure of perceived group variability also must be noted. In both studies, perceived group variability was measured by asking participants to estimate how similar or different they perceived ingroup members to be without making reference to specific traits or attributes. An advantage of measuring variability in terms of general similarity and difference is that it avoids some of the problems surrounding the contextual specificity of particular dimensions or traits (Oakes et al., 1994; Spears et al., 1997). It also allows for direct comparisons with the results reported by Doosje and colleagues (1995). However, group variability has been operationalized in many different ways, and different measures of perceived group variability can produce different results in the same context (for reviews, see Park & Judd, 1990; Voci, 2000). There is also a possibility that measures of perceived group variability that involve

overtly asking participants to judge the variability within their group may be more susceptible to evaluative consistency effects or biases than measures designed to assess the variability of the group representations stored in memory. Future research should therefore assess how the independent variables examined in the current research might affect different components and measures of perceived group variability.

Another potential limitation with the present research relates to the group identification measure. For reasons stated previously, we dichotomized this measure, resulting in two groups differentiated by their level of identification. Inspection of the mean identification values for the two groups indicates that both groups scored above the scale midpoint, and thus, it would be conceptually misleading to refer to low versus high identifiers as is generally done in the literature. Future research should examine these hypotheses among true low identifiers. It should be noted, however, that in the current research we are more interested in the relative levels of group identification in the two groups than in the absolute levels and thus our use of the terminology lower versus higher identifiers in this case seems appropriate.

In conclusion, the results of two studies suggest that perceived ingroup homogeneity is not the only way that high identifiers might stick with the ingroup in threatening times; stressing ingroup heterogeneity also can reflect group loyalty if this is how the group is construed prior to the threat. Thus, our research points to the importance of taking group members' perceptions of the ingroup identity into account when considering the relationship between the level or strength of group identification and perceived group variability because they may moderate this relationship.

NOTES

1. We dichotomized the group identification scores rather than using a continuous variable in the analyses because the mean levels of group identification for both lower and higher identifiers were above the scale midpoint, indicating that the distribution of identification scores was severely negatively skewed, making regression analyses problematic (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). Tabachnick and Fidell (1996, pp. 80-84) propose that it is appropriate to dichotomize severely skewed variables.

2. As in Study 1, we dichotomized the group identification measure because the lack of variability and skewed distribution of the group identification scores made regression analyses problematic (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). We return to this issue in the General Discussion.

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