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ARTICLE

The identification-similarity relationship as a function of ingroup status: A social identity perspective

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the role of ingroup status in the relationship between ingroup identification and self-ingroup similarity. Studies 1a-1b showed that this relationship was stronger in low-status groups than in high-status groups, suggesting that high identifiers from the low-status group seek collective support by assimilating to the ingroup, whereas low identifiers get rid of the unsatisfactory group membership by distancing themselves from the ingroup. Two further studies showed that the identification-similarity relationship vanished when the low-status group members were given the opportunity to rely on a social creativity strategy (group affirmation in Study 2, alternative dimension of intergroup comparison in Study 3). Finally, Study 4 showed that the identification-similarity relationship was weaker in the high-status group than in both low-status and status-unspecified groups, providing stronger support for an identity motive explanation than for an identity threat explanation.

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People have a repertoire of different ways to perceive themselves, ranging from personal qualities and idiosyncrasies to shared ingroup characteristics (e.g., Hogg & Abrams, 1988). These self-perceptions depend not only on individual differences, but also on contextual cues. Intergroup relations provide some of the most influential contexts that shape self-perception. Indeed, self-perception is largely contingent on the positioning of the ingroup in a social structure. The present research examined the impact of ingroup identification and group status on the perception of fit between self and ingroup.

Ingroup identification and self-ingroup similarity

Though ingroup identification and self-ingroup similarity are related constructs, they are conceptually distinct (see Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997). The social identity approach emphasizes the multifaceted character of ingroup identification by defining social identity as “the part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his [sic] membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). This definition

suggests that self-ingroup similarity is only one component of ingroup identification. Additional components are, for instance, the affective, the evaluative and the motivational ones (see Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). This is manifested in the way ingroup identification is most often captured by means of psychometric scales. To illustrate, the five-factor identification scale developed by Leach et al. (2008) comprises 14 items, and only two of them assess self-ingroup similarity. Likewise, Cameron's (2004) three-factor identification scale consists of 18 items, only one of them assessing self-ingroup similarity, as does the 10-item, three-factor identification scale developed by Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999). Social identification is not merely, and even not primarily, self-ingroup similarity (see Spears et al., 1997). Not surprisingly, research that has examined the relationship between ingroup identification and self-ingroup similarity shows mixed findings, revealing positive correlations ranging from weak to moderate (e.g., Coats, Smith, Claypool, & Banner, 2000; Verkuyten & Nekuee, 1999).

The role of ingroup status

Despite its marginal role in defining the notion of social identity, self-ingroup similarity accomplishes an important function as a coping mechanism when people face a threat to their social identity's value. This function is particularly relevant for members of low-status groups, since their social identity's value is challenged by the unfavorable position in the status hierarchy. By feeling similar to the ingroup, members of low-status groups gain resources to cope with the disadvantage (Bakouri & Staerklé, 2015; Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998). There is indeed evidence that the accentuation of self-ingroup similarity has protective implications for members of low-status groups (Crocker & Major, 1989). Feelings of similarity with the ingroup foster a sense of community among the group members, and provide them with higher levels of collective efficacy in reaching their goals (Bandura, 2000; Lent, Schmidt, & Schmidt, 2006; Wombacher & Felfe, 2012). But focus on self-ingroup similarity is likely to be a function of ingroup identification. According to the social identity threat model (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999), high identifiers move closer to the ingroup prototype in order to gain collective support, whereas low identifiers distance themselves from the ingroup in order to create a gap with their unsatisfactory ingroup. Conversely, since members of the high-status group are typically granted evaluative superiority, high and low identifiers have no need to use strategies to alter the intergroup context.

Some research provides support for this conjecture. Doosje, Ellemers, and Spears (1995) ran two studies in which participants (psychology students) received bogus feedback about the favorable or unfavorable status of their group as compared with a relevant outgroup (business students). Ingroup identification was either assessed or experimentally manipulated. In both cases, high levels of ingroup identification led participants in the low-status condition to strengthen ingroup homogeneity (which is partly based on the tendency to perceive the self as similar to the ingroup; Boldry, Gaertner, & Quinn, 2007; Brewer, 1993), while such tendency did not emerge among participants in the high-status condition. Likewise, Iacoviello and Lorenzi-Cioldi (2015) manipulated ingroup status and assessed ingroup identification as well as the endorsement of collectivistic (versus individualistic) worldviews. Ingroup identification did not influence the level of collectivism among members of the high-status group, whereas high identifiers from the low-status group, compared to the low identifiers, firmly

increased the expression of collectivism. Finally, Spears et al. (1997) primed psychology students with either a favorable or an unfavorable intergroup comparison, and found that ingroup identification and self-ingroup similarity were positively related in the low-status condition, but not in the high-status condition. In sum, existing evidence allows for the prediction that the identification-similarity relationship should be more prominent in low-status groups than in high-status groups.

Pathways to self-worth

High identifiers emphasize self-ingroup similarity to defend against threats to their social identity. However, other coping strategies exist. An effective way to cope with the threatening implications of an unchallengeable low-status position is to engage in social creativity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Two major social creativity strategies consist of reassessing the value and importance of an ingroup attribute (e.g., Jackson, Sullivan, Harnish, & Hodge, 1996), and of focusing on an alternative dimension of comparison on which the ingroup can be evaluated as superior to the outgroup (e.g., Lalonde, 1992; Lemaire, 1974). Although these strategies do not openly challenge the current hierarchy, they bring relief to the threatening implications of the low-status group membership (Becker, 2012). When members of a low-status group cope with the social identity threat by enhancing self-worth on such alternative paths, the high identifiers' tendency to assimilate with the ingroup and the low identifiers' tendency to distance from the ingroup should be reduced. In sum, the identification-similarity relationship in low-status groups should fade away when the group members have unraveled the social identity threat by means of social creativity strategies, despite the fact that such strategies do not question the groups' hierarchy.

The identity motive and the identity threat explanations

According to the identity threat explanation (Branscombe et al., 1999), self-ingroup similarity is bolstered in the low-status group because of an explicit social identity threat. A slightly different perspective is based on the motive for a positive social identity. It predicts that self-ingroup similarity is bolstered when people are motivated to achieve a positive social identity. This relationship is therefore eased in the high-status group because the group members' motive for a positive social identity is already fulfilled. Indeed, since the group members' positive social identity is granted by their advantaged status, high and low identifiers have no need to use the contrasting strategies (e.g., Marques, Abrams, & Serôdio, 2001). According to this perspective, explicit threat is not a necessary condition. The mere fact of doubting the ingroup status is enough to trigger the identification-similarity relationship. When comparing a low-status group to a high-status group, these two perspectives lead to the same prediction. To disentangle them, it is therefore necessary to devise a control condition in which the ingroup status is unspecified. Such condition is similar to the low-status condition (but dissimilar to the high-status condition) in that the members' positive social identity is not granted. It is however dissimilar to the low-status condition (but similar to the high-status condition) in that the members' social identity is not explicitly threatened. Comparing this condition to the high- and low-status conditions would provide insights about the process underlying the identification-similarity

relationship. The present research is the first to attempt to investigate the relative power of the identity motive and the identity threat explanations.

Relevance of the dimensions of intergroup comparison

Perceptions of self and the group are partly contingent on the dimensions on which they are assessed. The self and the group can indeed be appraised on dimensions that are relevant for intergroup comparisons (i.e., characteristics, habits and behaviors that stereotypically distinguish between ingroup and outgroup) or on dimensions that are irrelevant (i.e., characteristics, habits and behaviors that do not stereotypically distinguish between ingroup and outgroup). The literature shows that self-ingroup similarity (Biernat, Vescio, & Green, 1996; Latrofa, Vaes, Cadinu, & Carnaghi, 2010), and ingroup bias (Bettencourt, Charlton, Dorr, & Hume, 2001), are larger on relevant than on irrelevant dimensions of intergroup comparison. In light of this evidence, we may wonder whether the expected status moderation of the identification-similarity relationship would appear primarily on a relevant (vs. irrelevant) dimension. In the absence of more direct theoretical and empirical elements, we will make no specific hypothesis about the role of dimensions' relevance and take an explorative stand regarding this matter.

Current research

The present research examined three hypotheses. Replicating the existing literature (i.e., Spears et al., 1997), Hypothesis 1 (H1) predicts that the relationship between ingroup identification and self-ingroup similarity should be more prominent in the low-status group than in the high-status group (Studies 1a-1b). Going one step further, Hypothesis 2 (H2) is that this relationship should vanish when members of the low-status group enact a social creativity strategy to boost their social identity's value (Studies 2-3). A final hypothesis was devised to disentangle the two alternative explanations of this status effect. Such a test was performed in Study 4 by comparing status groups to status-unspecified groups. Based on the identity motive explanation, Hypothesis 3a (H3a) predicts that the identification-similarity relationship should be the weakest in the high-status group compared to both the low-status and the status-unspecified groups. Based on the identity threat explanation, Hypothesis 3b (H3b) alternatively predicts that this relationship should be the strongest in the low-status group compared to both the high-status and the status-unspecified groups. Across studies, we manipulated group status in naturalistic settings and in the lab, and we examined the identification-similarity relationship with the use of two different measures. Moreover, we examined the role of the dimensions' relevance to the groups' status. All of the studies (with the exception of Study 1a) included status-relevant and status-irrelevant characteristics.

Study 1a

The first study used a quasi-experimental design in which students learned about the superior or the inferior status of their university as compared to a nearby rival university. The main dependent variable consisted of the perceived similarity between participant and the other ingroup students on several personality traits. The prediction is a status moderation of the identification-similarity relationship (H1). Specifically, in the low-status

condition, ingroup identification should be positively associated with the perceived similarity between self and other ingroup members. In the high-status condition, this association should be of weaker magnitude.

Method

Participants

Students from the University of Geneva were recruited in the common areas of the university and were asked to complete a paper-pencil questionnaire about “various aspects of your life as a student”. For practical reasons the recruitment lasted two weeks. The final sample consisted of 78 students (48 women and 30 men, $M_{\text{age}} = 21.3$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.31$) who agreed to complete the questionnaire. We were satisfied with the sample size, as we aimed at recruiting at least 20 participants per experimental cell (which was the commonly-used criteria at the time of the study).

Procedure

Participants first answered items assessing ingroup identification. They were then presented with a fictitious newspaper article aimed at manipulating ingroup status, and answered a status-check question. Self-ingroup similarity was then assessed. At the end of the questionnaire, participants completed their demographics, and were fully debriefed about the purpose of the study.

Ingroup identification

Ingroup identification was assessed using a six-item scale. Sample items are: “When I introduce myself, I like to mention that I am a student from the University of Geneva”, “When someone praises students from my university, it feels like a personal compliment”, and “Students of the University of Geneva should be proud of themselves” (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *completely*). We computed an ingroup identification score by averaging the six items ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.04$, $\alpha = .73$).

Ingroup status

Ingroup status was manipulated following a procedure used by Iacoviello and Lorenzi-Cioldi (2015, Studies 2–3). Participants were presented with an excerpt of a fictitious newspaper article about the rank order of universities around the world. The article explained that an organization named *Ranking of World Universities* ordered universities on the basis of the quality of teaching and research and of the students’ achievements at the end of their academic career. The excerpt focused on the comparison between two nearby universities: Geneva (ingroup) and Lausanne (outgroup). In the high-status condition, participants learned that their university

possessed higher status than the outgroup university. This information was illustrated by a graph showing that, in the course of time, University of Geneva had received better scores than University of Lausanne. In the low-status condition, participants were given information that reversed the situation, with Geneva being depicted as inferior to Lausanne.

Manipulation check

Participants answered a status-check question by reporting which university had been ranked in a higher position by the *Ranking of World Universities* (response options were: *University of Geneva*, *University of Lausanne*, and *same rank*).

Self-ingroup similarity

Participants rated the similarity between themselves and other ingroup students on four personality traits (*sympathetic*, *independent*, *warm*, and *assertive*). These judgments were performed using a 7-point scale shaped like a pyramid (see Schwarz, 1996). Participants were instructed that answers on the wider boxes, toward the bottom of the pyramid (coded 7), meant that they shared the trait with a large number of other students from the University of Geneva. Answers on the narrower boxes, toward the top of the pyramid (coded 1), meant that they shared the characteristic with a small number of other ingroup students. A self-ingroup similarity score was computed by averaging the four personality traits ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.05$, $\alpha = .61$).

Results

Manipulation check

On the status-check question, two participants (one in each status condition) failed to provide the right answer and were excluded from the analyses. The final sample consisted of 76 participants.

Self-ingroup similarity

We performed a linear regression analysis on the score of self-ingroup similarity with status (coded -1 for high status, and 1 for low status), ingroup identification (centered continuous variable), and their interaction as predictors. The analysis only produced the expected Status $\times$ Identification interaction, $B = 0.25$, $t(72) = 2.21$, $p = .03$, $d = 0.52$, 95% CI = $[0.03, 0.48]$. Ingroup identification was positively related to self-ingroup similarity in the low-status condition, $B = 0.36$, $t(72) = 2.19$, $p = .03$, $d = 0.52$, 95% CI = $[0.03, 0.69]$, but not in the high-status condition, $B = -0.15$, $t(72) = -0.92$, $p = .36$, $d = 0.22$, 95% CI = $[-0.47, 0.17]$ (see Table 1).

Table 1. Estimated means and standard errors (in brackets) of self-ingroup similarity according to ingroup status and ingroup identification (Studies 1a and 1b).

Status conditions	Study 1a		Study 1b			
	Pyramid		Pyramid		Absolute difference	
			Identification			
	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Low status	3.89 (0.23)	4.64 (0.24)	2.86 (0.24)	3.98 (0.31)	−1.97 (0.21)	−0.59 (0.27)
High status	4.51 (0.24)	4.21 (0.23)	3.99 (0.29)	3.50 (0.23)	−1.13 (0.25)	−1.06 (0.20)

Note. Low and high identification are assessed at −1 SD and + 1 SD, respectively.

Study 1b

The findings from Study 1a support H1 and are consistent with existing research (e.g., Spears et al., 1997). Study 1b was aimed at replicating and refining these results. The design reproduced Study 1a, with three modifications. First, participants in the present study were students from the University of Lausanne, and the comparison target was the University of Geneva. This modification should warrant the validity of our findings by corroborating that they are not contingent on actual differences between the two nearby universities. Second, to ensure the construct validity of the pyramid-shaped measure of self-ingroup similarity, we added a measure based on a standard rating scale format. Third, in order to examine boundary conditions of the predicted identification-similarity relationship, self-ingroup similarity was assessed via status-relevant and status-irrelevant characteristics.

Method

Participants

Students from the University of Lausanne were invited by email to participate in an online survey. Because access to participants' emails was limited (due to the fact that they were from a different university than the researchers'), the recruitment was quite troublesome and lasted a few weeks. When the criterion of 20 participants per cell was (almost) met, we decided to end the recruitment. The final sample consisted of 39 students (25 women, 12 men, and 2 sex-unspecified, $M_{\text{age}} = 22.1$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.61$).

Procedure

Participants filled in the identification measure ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.32$, $\alpha = .83$), were instructed of the superior or inferior status of their home university compared to the nearby university, and answered the status-check question (all participants provided the correct answer). Participants then completed two measures aimed at assessing self-ingroup similarity: The pyramid measure and a more classical measure based on self-descriptions and ingroup descriptions. At the end of the study, participants reported their demographics and were fully debriefed.

Self-ingroup similarity

To supply status-relevant and irrelevant characteristics, we conducted a pilot study in which we asked 20 students to imagine “A student who is academically successful”. Participants were then presented with 12 characteristics, and guessed the extent to which this person possesses each of the characteristics (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *completely*). To be considered as status-relevant, a characteristic should reach a high mean, and to be irrelevant, it should possess a mean close to the middle of the scale (4). Three characteristics could be considered as relevant: *Analytic skills* ($M = 6.40$), *reflection* ($M = 6.35$), and *logical mind* ($M = 6.15$), and three others as irrelevant: *humor* ($M = 4.35$), *physical strength* ($M = 3.75$) and *artistic sensibility* ($M = 3.75$). We averaged the three relevant characteristics and the three irrelevant characteristics, and examined the gap between each of them and the mid-point of the scale. A paired-samples t-test analysis corroborated that the absolute difference between the score and the mid-point of the scale was greater for the relevant characteristics than for the irrelevant ones ($M_s = 2.30$ and 0.82 , respectively), $t(19) = 8.81$, $p < .001$, $d = 4.04$.

Pyramid

Participants assessed the degree of similarity between self and other ingroup members on the six characteristics using a 6-point pyramid-shaped scale. Because our hypotheses relate to the overall self-ingroup similarity, we first computed a self-ingroup similarity score by averaging the six characteristics ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 0.89$, $\alpha = .73$).

Absolute difference

In the second measure, participants assessed the degree to which those same characteristics described themselves and the other ingroup students (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *completely*). To estimate self-ingroup similarity, we first calculated, for each characteristics, the absolute value of the difference between the assessments of self and ingroup members. We then reversed this score so that “0” represented the maximum similarity between self and ingroup, and “- 6” the maximum difference. The self-ingroup similarity score consisted of the mean score of the six characteristics ($M = -1.25$, $SD = 0.85$, $\alpha = .68$).

Results

Self-ingroup similarity

The pyramid and the absolute difference scores were significantly correlated, $r(39) = .42$, $p = .008$. In order to test H1, we performed, separately for each score, a linear regression analysis with status (coded -1 for high status, and 1 for low status), ingroup identification (centered continuous variable), and their interaction as predictors.

Pyramid

The analysis of the pyramid score revealed the expected Status $\times$ Identification interaction, $B = 0.28$, $t(35) = -2.78$, $p = .009$, $d = -0.94$, 95% CI = [0.08, 0.49] (see Table 1). Inspection of simple effects substantiated the impact of identification in the low-status

group, $B = 0.43$, $t(35) = 2.96$, $p = .006$, $d = 1.00$, 95% CI = [0.13, 0.72], and its absence in the high-status group, $B = -0.14$, $t(35) = -0.98$, $p = .33$, $d = 0.33$, 95% CI = [-0.43, 0.15].

Absolute difference

Analysis of the absolute difference score produced a main effect of identification, $B = 0.27$, $t(35) = 3.07$, $p = .004$, $d = 1.04$, 95% CI = [0.09, 0.46], and the expected Status $\times$ Identification interaction, $B = 0.25$, $t(35) = 2.78$, $p = .009$, $d = 0.94$, 95% CI = [0.07, 0.43]. As shown in Table 1, ingroup identification impacted on self-ingroup similarity in the low-status group, $B = 0.52$, $t(35) = 4.14$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.40$, 95% CI = [0.26, 0.78], but not in the high-status group, $B = 0.03$, $t(35) = 0.20$, $p = .84$, $d = 0.07$, 95% CI = [-0.23, 0.28].

In a second step, we examined the role of trait relevance. For both the pyramid and the absolute difference measures, we first computed a difference score between the relevant and the irrelevant characteristics, and then performed a linear regression analysis on this score with status, ingroup identification, and their interaction as predictors. None of the two Status $\times$ Identification interactions revealed significant ($B = -0.09$, $t(35) = -0.51$, $p = .61$, $d = 0.17$, 95% CI = [-0.44, 0.26], for the pyramid score; $B = -0.03$, $t(35) = -0.25$, $p = .81$, $d = 0.08$, 95% CI = [-0.31, 0.24], for the difference score), indicating that the pattern of results did not differ according to characteristics' relevance. However, on the difference score, characteristics' relevance impacted on overall self-ingroup similarity, which was greater on status-relevant than on status-irrelevant characteristics ($M_s = -0.90$ and -1.47 , respectively), $B = 0.57$, $t(35) = 3.17$, $p = .003$, $d = 1.07$, 95% CI = [0.20, 0.93]. On the pyramid score, this difference was not significant ($M_s = 3.79$ and 3.31 , respectively), $B = 0.28$, $t(35) = 1.23$, $p = .22$, $d = 0.42$, 95% CI = [-0.18, 0.75].

Discussion

Consistent with H1 and previous research (e.g., Spears et al., 1997), Studies 1a and 1b showed a reliable relationship between ingroup identification and self-ingroup similarity in the low-status group, but not in the high-status group. High identifiers in the low-status group judged their self as quite similar to other ingroup members, whereas low identifiers tended to distance themselves from the ingroup. Importantly, this outcome was found in the two samples of students (i.e., Geneva as the ingroup in Study 1a, and Lausanne as the ingroup in Study 1b), and on two distinct measures of self-ingroup similarity. Accordingly, both the pyramid and the absolute difference measures appear to be reliable indicators of perceived self-ingroup similarity. In the remainder of this research, we will therefore use only one of them, either the pyramid or the self and ingroup ratings measure. Study 2 was devised to extend these findings and to test H2.

Taking into account that we did not run any a priori power analysis to determine the appropriate sample size, we ran a sensitivity power analysis, which indicates the minimal effect size that our studies were able to detect with a power of 80% (see Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). Analyses using G*Power showed that the sample sizes from Studies 1a and 1b were able to detect effect sizes of $d = 0.21$ and $d = 0.43$ (or greater), respectively. Comparisons of these effect sizes with the effect sizes found in Spears et al. (1997) (i.e., $d = 0.31$ in their first study, and $d = 0.28$ in their second study) suggest that

Study 1a was well-powered, but not Study 1b. Nevertheless, considering that both studies provided similar results and were consistent with previous research (Spears et al., 1997), we are quite confident about the validity of these results.

Study 2

Study 2 introduced a manipulation of group affirmation, consisting of asking participants to provide positive characteristics of the ingroup (ingroup affirmation condition) or of an irrelevant outgroup with respect to the groups' hierarchy (control condition). This manipulation was primarily meant to allow members of the low-status group to enact a social creativity strategy in order to subjectively enhance their social identity's value (e.g., Derks, van Laar, & Ellemers, 2009). Following H2, members of the low-status group should show a weaker identification-similarity relationship in the ingroup affirmation condition than in the control condition, whereas members of the high-status group should be unaffected by this manipulation.

Method

Participants

Students from the University of Geneva were invited by email to participate in an online questionnaire. We aimed at recruiting at least 40 participants in each cell of the 2 (ingroup status) $\times$ 2 (group affirmation) design, that is, at least 160 participants. When this criterion was reached, we stopped recruitment and obtained a total of 172 participants (120 women, 51 men, and 1 sex-unspecified, $M_{\text{age}} = 23.89$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 6.86$). A sensitivity power analysis using G*Power suggests that this sample size provided 80% power to detect effect sizes of $d = 0.10$ or greater. Considering that the effect sizes of the previous studies and of Spears et al.'s (1997) research were greater than this threshold, the present sample size appears well-powered.

Procedure

Like the previous studies, participants completed the ingroup identification scale ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.19$, $\alpha = .84$), were primed with ingroup status, and answered the status-check question. They then completed the group affirmation task, and provided self and ingroup judgments. Finally, participants provided their demographics and were fully debriefed.

Group affirmation

In the ingroup affirmation condition, participants were asked to provide three positive characteristics of students from their university. In the control condition, they provided three positive characteristics of "retired people". This target group was chosen because it is irrelevant in the context of a comparison between universities, and it is unlikely to be a participants' social category.

Self-ingroup similarity

Self-ingroup similarity was assessed by means of the absolute difference between ratings of self and ingroup on the same six characteristics as in Study 1b ($M = -1.04$, $SD = 0.66$, $\alpha = .64$).

Results

Manipulation check

On the status-check question, 11 participants (8 in the low-status condition, and 3 in the high-status condition) failed to provide the right answer. The final sample consisted of 161 participants.

Self-ingroup similarity

We performed a linear regression analysis on the score of self-ingroup similarity with status (coded -1 for high status, and 1 for low status), group affirmation (coded -1 for group affirmation, and 1 for control), identification (centered continuous variable), and their interactions as predictors. This analysis produced the expected Status $\times$ Identification $\times$ Group Affirmation interaction, $B = 0.10$, $t(153) = 2.22$, $p = .03$, $d = 0.36$, 95% CI = $[0.01; 0.20]$. As it is apparent from Figure 1 (left panel), the control condition produced a Status $\times$ Identification interaction, $B = 0.16$, $t(153) = 2.25$, $p = .03$, $d = 0.36$, 95% CI = $[0.02; 0.30]$. In this condition, the pattern of means for self-ingroup similarity mirrored the patterns observed in the previous studies: Self-ingroup similarity was positively related to identification in the low-status group, $B = 0.23$, $t(153) = 2.15$, $p = .03$, $d = 0.35$, 95% CI = $[0.02; 0.43]$, but not in the high-status group, $B = -0.09$, $t(153) = -0.98$, $d = 0.01$, $p = .33$, 95% CI = $[-0.28; 0.09]$. No effects reached significance in

Figure 1. Self-ingroup similarity according to ingroup identification, ingroup status, and group affirmation (Study 2). Error bars represent standard errors.

the ingroup affirmation condition (all $ps > .43$; see [Figure 1](#), right panel), thus revealing similar patterns of means in the high- and the low-status groups.

Further inspection of the means revealed that, in the low-status condition, the Group Affirmation $\times$ Identification interaction was significant, $B = 0.14$, $t(153) = 2.21$, $p = .03$, $d = 0.36$, 95% CI = [0.02; 0.27], testifying to the stronger identification-similarity relationship in the control condition than in the ingroup affirmation condition. Conversely, the high-status condition did not reveal the Group Affirmation $\times$ Identification interaction, $B = -0.06$, $t(153) = -0.93$, $p = .35$, $d = 0.15$, 95% CI = [-0.19; 0.07].

Similar to the preceding studies, a linear regression analysis on the score of difference between relevant and irrelevant characteristics with status, ingroup identification, and their interaction as predictors showed that the above-mentioned pattern of results was unaffected by characteristics' relevance, $B = 0.01$, $t(153) = 0.19$, $p = .85$, $d = 0.03$, 95% CI = [-0.11; 0.14]. Again, self-ingroup similarity was overall greater on status-relevant than on status-irrelevant characteristics ($Ms = -0.85$ and -1.24 , respectively), $B = 0.40$, $t(153) = 5.56$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.90$, 95% CI = [0.26; 0.54].

Discussion

The findings from Study 2 provided support for H2. The enactment of a social creativity strategy, in terms of ingroup affirmation, revealed successful as a coping strategy in the low-status group. In the absence of social creativity (control condition), the findings replicated Studies 1a-1b, showing a reliable ingroup identification-similarity relationship in the low-status group. Conversely, ingroup identification was no longer related to self-ingroup similarity when members of the low-status group could take advantage of cognitively enhancing the ingroup's value by focusing on its positive characteristics. In this condition, low-status and high-status participants showed an identification-similarity relationship of similarly weak magnitude.

Study 3

In this study, we used a minimal procedure to create the groups' hierarchy, and we introduced a different social creativity strategy, consisting of changing the dimension of comparison with the outgroup to a more favorable one (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, we assigned participants to status groups, and varied the dimension of comparison between groups by focusing participants on a dimension on which the groups' status remained either unchanged or was reversed. In this latter case, as predicted by H2, we expect the positive identification-similarity relationship to fade away in the low-status group.

Method

Participants

French-speaking participants were invited through social networks to take part in an online questionnaire about people's artistic abilities. This study was conducted as part of a workshop about experimental methods in social psychology at the University of

Geneva. Recruitment should not exceed one month. When this period was over, the sample consisted of 236 participants (141 women and 95 men), aged from 16 to 59 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 29.09$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 9.57$). One hundred and eighty-eight of them were living in Switzerland, 42 in France, 2 in the UK, 2 in Bolivia, 1 in Spain, and 1 in the Netherlands (8 participants did not mention their place of residence). A sensitivity power analysis using G*Power revealed that this sample size provided 80% power to detect effect sizes of $d = 0.07$ or greater. On the basis of past research, we considered this study to have enough power to detect effects of interest.

Procedure

Participants performed an aesthetic task that served to assign them to a high- or a low-status group. They then completed an ingroup identification measure, and were informed that they would perform a further task which required either similar or different aesthetic skills. Finally, participants answered the self-ingroup similarity measure, reported their demographics, and were fully debriefed.

Ingroup status

Ingroup status was created using a minimal group procedure adapted from Lorenzi-Cioldi (1998). Participants were informed that they would be shown 5 pairs of abstract paintings. In each pair, one painting was allegedly created by a painter named Dusek and the other by a painter named Tausig. They were also informed that art experts unanimously judged Dusek's paintings to be of better quality than Tausig's. The participants' task was to guess, in each pair, which painting was of a better quality. After completion of the task, participants received bogus information that they had succeeded the task and had been assigned to the Dusek group (high status), or that they had failed the task and had been assigned to the Tausig group (low status). In order to avoid a potential confound of group status and group size (see Simon & Brown, 1987), participants were instructed that there were approximately as many people in both groups.

Ingroup identification

To assess identification with the freshly-assigned group, we used a pictorial measure of ingroup identification (see Tropp & Wright, 2001). Participants were shown seven pairs of circles that increasingly overlapped. In each pair, a small circle represented them as an individual and a larger circle represented their membership group. Participants were asked to choose the pair that best represented their "level of identification with the ingroup". The closer the circles, the greater the ingroup identification ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 2.05$).

Hierarchy pervasiveness

Participants were instructed that they would perform a further aesthetic task consisting of the evaluation of paintings from a different artistic movement than the paintings used

in the previous task. The social creativity manipulation introduced at this point either preserved or altered the status structure. In the pervasiveness condition, participants were informed that the members of the Dusek group typically achieve better performances on this new task than the members of the Tausig group. In this way the social hierarchy remained unchanged, so that the Duseks preserved their superior status. In the non-pervasiveness condition, participants were informed that the members of the Tausig group typically achieve better performances on the new task than the Duseks. Thus, on this successive task, the hierarchy was reversed so that the Tausigs gained superiority over the Duseks. In this condition, members of the low-status group could rely on a social creativity strategy in order to achieve a better-valued social identity.

Self-ingroup similarity

To assess self-ingroup similarity, we used the absolute difference between self- and ingroup ratings on status-relevant and irrelevant characteristics. To select these characteristics, we conducted a pilot study similar to that of Study 1b, except that participants were asked to imagine “a person who is an expert in the arts”. Participants were thus presented with 12 characteristics, and guessed the extent to which this person possesses each of the characteristics (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *completely*). Analysis of these judgments produced three characteristics that were relevant to the status hierarchy (*creativity*, $M = 6.65$, *imagination*, $M = 6.40$, and *instinct*, $M = 6.20$) and three characteristics that were irrelevant (*friendliness*, $M = 3.70$, *pragmatism*, $M = 3.50$, and *logical mind*, $M = 3.15$). A paired-samples t-test analysis showed that the absolute difference to the scale mid-point was greater for the relevant characteristics than for the irrelevant characteristics ($M_s = 2.42$ and 0.75 , respectively), $t(19) = 8.90$, $p < .001$, $d = 4.08$.

Results

We performed a linear regression analysis on the score of self-ingroup similarity with status (coded -1 for high status, and 1 for low status), hierarchy pervasiveness (coded -1 for pervasiveness, and 1 non-pervasiveness), identification (centered continuous variable), and their interactions as predictors. The analysis first showed a positive impact of ingroup identification, $B = 0.14$, $t(228) = 5.34$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.70$, 95% CI = $[0.09; 0.19]$, which was qualified by the expected Status $\times$ Hierarchy Pervasiveness $\times$ Identification interaction, $B = -0.07$, $t(228) = -2.87$, $p = .005$, $d = 0.38$, 95% CI = $[-0.12; -0.02]$. Simple effects showed that, in the pervasiveness condition, the Status $\times$ Identification interaction was significant, $B = 0.08$, $t(228) = 2.30$, $p = .02$, $d = 0.30$, 95% CI = $[0.01; 0.15]$ (see Figure 2, left panel). In the low-status condition, we observed a positive relationship between self-ingroup similarity and identification, $B = 0.22$, $t(228) = 4.59$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.61$, 95% CI = $[0.13; 0.31]$, whereas this relationship was unreliable in the high-status condition, $B = 0.06$, $t(228) = 1.18$, $p = .24$, $d = 0.16$, 95% CI = $[-.04; 0.16]$. Moreover, a marginally significant Status $\times$ Identification interaction emerged in the non-pervasiveness condition (Figure 2, right panel), $B = -0.07$, $t(228) = -1.78$, $p = .08$, $d = -0.24$, 95% CI = $[-0.14; 0.01]$. A positive identification-similarity relationship was now observed in the high-status condition, $B = 0.20$, $t(228) = 3.50$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.46$, 95% CI = $[0.09;$

Figure 2. Self-ingroup similarity according to ingroup identification, ingroup status, and hierarchy pervasiveness (Study 3). Error bars represent standard errors.

0.32], and not in the low-status condition, $B = 0.07$, $t(72) = 1.37$, $p = .17$, $d = 0.18$, 95% CI = [-0.03; 0.16].

Further inspection of the simple effects revealed a Pervasiveness $\times$ Identification interaction in the low-status condition, $B = -0.08$, $t(228) = -2.22$, $p = .03$, $d = -0.29$, 95% CI = [-0.14; -0.01]. The identification-similarity relationship was stronger in the pervasiveness than in the non-pervasiveness condition. In the high-status condition, this interaction was marginally significant, $B = 0.07$, $t(228) = 1.86$, $p = .06$, $d = 0.01$, 95% CI = [0.00; 0.14]. The identification-similarity relationship was stronger in the non-pervasiveness condition than in the pervasiveness condition.

As in the preceding studies, a linear regression analysis on the score of difference between relevant and irrelevant characteristics with status, ingroup identification, and their interaction as predictors showed that this global pattern of means was unaffected by the characteristics' relevance, $B = -0.03$, $t(228) = -1.17$, $p = .25$, $d = 0.15$, 95% CI = [-0.08; 0.02]. Moreover, in the present study characteristics' relevance did not impact on overall self-ingroup similarity, $B = 0.04$, $t(228) = 0.69$, $p = .49$, $d = 0.09$, 95% CI = [-0.07; 0.15].

Discussion

The findings from Study 3 were consistent with the assumption that the identification-similarity relationship stems from low and high identifiers' different strategies to enhance the social identity's value. Consistent with H2, this relationship was reduced when participants were given the opportunity to either preserve (in the high-status group) or gain (in the low-status group) a favorable comparison with the outgroup. We reasoned that when the hierarchy was reversed on the alternative dimension of comparison, members of the low-status group could enhance the ingroup's value, and thus alleviate the identity threat. In conformity with expectations, the positive identification-similarity relationship in the low-status group was only observed when the unfavorable hierarchy persisted on the alternative

dimension of comparison. Among members of the high-status group, no identification-similarity relationship was observed when the hierarchy was maintained, but emerged when the hierarchy was reversed, where the alternative dimension of comparison with the outgroup challenged their status superiority. In this latter condition, we could have expected no identification-similarity relationship because members of the high-status group could rely on the original dimension of comparison to feel satisfied with their social identity's value. The fact that we observed a positive relationship could suggest that they focused on the new and unfavorable dimension. Indeed, this dimension could be felt as being more relevant since participants anticipated performing a task on which their group globally fared worse than the outgroup. All together, these findings provide support to our rationale: The tendency for low identifiers to distance from the ingroup and the tendency for high identifiers to assimilate to the ingroup emerge as general strategies to enhance the social identity's value.

Study 4

Study 4 tested H3a and H3b by looking at the mechanism underlying the status moderation of the identification-similarity relationship. More specifically, it is unclear at this point whether this moderation is driven by the secure position of the high-status group (as predicted by an identity motive perspective), or by the explicit threat experienced by members of the low-status group (as predicted by the identity threat perspective). To disentangle these explanations, the present study added a status-unspecified condition to the conditions that created a status structure.

Method

Participants

Similar to Study 3, Study 4 was conducted as part of a workshop about experimental methods in social psychology at the University of Geneva. During a one-month period, emails were sent to a sample of French-speaking people. Participants were asked to take part in an online questionnaire about people's artistic abilities. At the end of the recruitment period, 159 participants (120 women, 38 men and 1 sex-unspecified; $M_{\text{age}} = 25.41$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 7.44$) took part to the study. One hundred and thirty-nine of them were living in Switzerland, 16 in France, 1 in Spain, 1 in Mexico, and 1 in Canada (1 participant did not mention this information). A sensitivity power analysis using G*Power suggested that this sample size provided 80% power to detect effect sizes of $d = 0.10$ or greater. As Studies 2 and 3, Study 4 looked well-powered.

Procedure

Participants performed an aesthetic task and were assigned to the high-status group, to the low-status group, or to a status-unspecified group. They then indicated their level of identification with the ingroup and answered the self-ingroup similarity measure. At the end of the questionnaire, participants provided their demographics and were fully debriefed.

Ingroup status

Ingroup status was created using the aesthetic performance task from Study 3. In addition, to create status-unspecified groups, some participants were not informed about differences between the quality of the paintings, and were simply asked to indicate, in each pair, their most preferred painting. They were eventually assigned to the group Dusek or Tausig, allegedly according to these preferences.

Ingroup identification

As in Study 3, we used the pictorial measure of ingroup identification ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.94$).

Self-ingroup similarity

Self-ingroup similarity was assessed using a 6-point pyramid-shaped scale on the same status-relevant and irrelevant characteristics used in Study 3 ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.94$, $\alpha = .77$).

Results

To test H3a and H3b, we first computed two orthogonal contrasts with the status variable. The first contrast (C1) opposed the high-status condition (coded -2) to the other two conditions (each coded 1). The second contrast (C2) opposed the low-status condition (coded -1) to the status-unspecified condition (coded 1), with the high-status condition being coded 0 . H3a would be supported by a $C1 \times \text{Identification}$ interaction showing a weaker identification-similarity relationship in the high-status condition than in both the low-status and the status-unspecified conditions. H3b would be supported by a $C2 \times \text{Identification}$ interaction showing a weaker identification-similarity relationship in the status-unspecified condition than in the low-status condition. Significance of both interactions would suggest a linear relationship, such that the identification-similarity would be the weakest in the high-status condition, moderate in the status-unspecified condition, and the strongest in the low-status condition.

We performed a linear regression analysis on the score of self-ingroup similarity with the two contrasts (C1 and C2), identification (centered continuous variable), and the two interactions between each contrast and identification. The analysis produced a $C1 \times \text{Identification}$ interaction, $B = 0.08$, $t(153) = 3.17$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.51$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [0.03; 0.14]$ (see Figure 3). Consistent with H3a, in the modality combining the low-status and the status-unspecified conditions, the score of self-ingroup similarity was greater among high identifiers ($+1 \text{ SD}$) than among low identifiers (-1 SD) ($M_s = 3.74$ and 3.20 , respectively), $B = 0.14$, $t(153) = 2.91$, $p = .004$, $d = 0.47$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [0.05; 0.24]$. In the high-status condition, self-ingroup similarity was marginally smaller among high identifiers than among low identifiers ($M_s = 3.32$ and 3.76 , respectively), $B = -0.11$, $t(153) = -1.77$, $p = .08$, $d = -0.29$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.24; 0.01]$. The $C2 \times \text{Identification}$ interaction did not reach significance, $B = -0.03$, $t(153) = -0.54$, $p = .59$, $d = 0.09$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.12; 0.07]$, and thus provided no support for H3b.

A linear regression analysis on the score of difference between relevant and irrelevant characteristics with status, ingroup identification, and their interaction as predictors showed

Figure 3. Self-ingroup similarity according to ingroup identification and ingroup status (Study 4). Error bars represent standard errors.

that, although self-similarity was, overall, greater on status-relevant than on status-irrelevant characteristics ($M_s = 3.60$ and 3.39 , respectively), $B = 0.21$, $t(153) = 2.39$, $p = .02$, $d = 0.39$, 95% CI = $[0.04; 0.39]$, neither the C1 x Identification interaction, $B = 0.02$, $t(153) = 0.54$, $p = .09$, $d = 0.09$, 95% CI = $[-0.04; 0.08]$, nor the C2 x Identification interaction, $B = -0.08$, $t(153) = -1.41$, $p = .16$, $d = -0.23$, 95% CI = $[-0.19; 0.03]$, varied according to characteristics' relevance.

Discussion

Study 4 supported H3a, but not H3b. The positive identification-similarity relationship appeared stronger in both the low-status and the status-unspecified conditions than in the high-status condition (in which there was a trend toward a negative relationship). These findings speak in favor of the identity motive explanation, and do not support the identity threat explanation. They indeed suggest that low and high identifiers' opposed strategies are triggered when the value of social identity is not secure, that is, when this value is either explicitly threatened (in the low-status group) or uncertain (in the status-unspecified group). Thus, the identification-similarity relationship is only eased when the group members are assured about the positive value of their social identity (in the high-status group). In such a situation, high and low identifiers have no need of using strategies to enhance their social identity's value.

General discussion

The present research investigated ingroup identification and self-ingroup similarity in naturalistic and minimal status hierarchies. We hypothesized that a positive identification-similarity relationship would mirror low and high identifiers' differential strategies to enhance the social identity's value. The findings showed that low identifiers from the disadvantaged group in the status hierarchy distance themselves from the ingroup, and

that high identifiers assimilate to the ingroup. Corroborating the assumption that these strategies are of no use to members of the high-status group, the findings from Studies 1a-1b showed that the identification-similarity relationship was null in the high-status group, and was of noticeable magnitude in the low-status group. These findings replicate the results of Spears et al. (1997) and extend them by revealing the status moderation on two measures of self-ingroup similarity (the pyramid-shaped and the absolute difference measures).

Studies 2–3 investigated boundary conditions of the status moderation of the identification-similarity relationship. Assuming that this relationship stems from differential strategies that low and high identifiers use to improve feelings of self-worth, we hypothesized that it would fade away when the disadvantaged could achieve a positive social identity in alternative ways. We thus allowed participants for the enactment of two distinct social creativity strategies, that is, of strategies that would boost the social value of their group without challenging the groups' hierarchy. The identification-similarity relationship vanished among members of the low-status group when they focused on positive attributes of the ingroup (Study 2), and when the status hierarchy was reversed, turning to their advantage on an alternative dimension of comparison (Study 3). Moreover, this latter study showed that, when members of the high-status group were put in an unfavorable position on this alternative dimension of comparison, they themselves displayed a comparably strong positive identification-similarity relationship. Together, these findings suggest that the high identifiers' tendency to assimilate to the ingroup and the low identifiers' tendency to distance from the ingroup can be eased by transient parameters that sustain self-worth even when the hierarchy remains unfavorable to the ingroup.

Study 4 provided further insight about the mechanism underlying the status asymmetry of the identification-similarity relationship. The findings supported the identity motive explanation by revealing that this relationship emerges when the motive for achieving a positive social identity is unsatisfied, that is, when the social identity's value is explicitly negative or unspecified. In the high-status group, high and low identifiers' enactment of coping strategies are indeed eased as a consequence of the granted positive social identity. However, the findings did not support the identity threat perspective, which predicted that explicit threat to the social identity's value is a necessary cause of the bolstering of the identification-similarity relationship. It does indeed not seem necessary to experience a direct threat to be inclined to use assimilation (for high identifiers) or distancing (for low identifiers) strategies. The mere uncertainty about the valence of the social identity drives these opposed tendencies. These findings echo past research (i.e., Iacoviello & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2018), but further studies are needed to better understand the identity dynamics underlying the status discrepancy.

Consistent with the literature on self-stereotyping (Biernat et al., 1996; Latrofa et al., 2010) and on ingroup bias (Bettencourt et al., 2001), the present research also showed that self-ingroup similarity was most often more pronounced on relevant than on irrelevant characteristics to the status structure. However, it did not provide evidence that characteristics' relevance impacts the status moderation of the identification-similarity relationship. We tentatively suggest that this null finding reveals that the hypothesized status moderation of the identification-similarity relationship is of such overwhelming importance as to override the impact of characteristics' relevance. Thus,

the emergence of the same findings on hierarchy-relevant and irrelevant characteristics suggests a more general status dynamics.

Self-ingroup similarity as a means to achieve self-worth

Understanding when and why people perceive themselves as similar to their ingroup prototype is an important step toward predicting their behavior. The present research focused on the boundary conditions that lead high and low identifiers to assimilate to the ingroup prototype and to distance themselves from it. Social-cognitive perspectives on intergroup relations contend that ingroup identification is conducive to the perception of increased similarity between self and ingroup (e.g., Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). This statement has been supported by a large body of research (e.g., Kelly, 1993; Postmes & Spears, 1998; Verkuyten & Nekuee, 1999). However, our work refines the conditions under which this process occurs by suggesting that group status is a moderator of the relationship between ingroup identification and self-ingroup similarity. This relationship is driven by people's attempts to achieve a positive social identity. Low identifiers distance themselves from the unsatisfying group, whereas high identifiers assimilate to the ingroup. Such strategies are indeed useful in the attempt to gain self-worth (e.g., Bakouri & Staerklé, 2015; Frable et al., 1998). Ingroup assimilation possesses potential for social change, as it provides the group members with feelings of collective efficacy (e.g. Wombacher & Felfe, 2012), and establishes the foundations of collective action (Kelly, 1993). Consistent with this latter interpretation, Derks, Scheepers, van Laar, and Ellemers (2011) examined low- and high-identified women's physiological responses to their low-status membership. Contrary to the low identifiers, the high identifiers' physiological pattern suggested that they turned the unsatisfactory social identity into a challenge. Thus, high identifiers seemed to express confidence about their group's ability to cope with the identity threat.

In sum, the present research suggests that the identification-similarity relationship is far from being a universal outcome of intergroup relations. This relationship surfaces when people strive for improving the social identity's value of their membership group. But differences between low and high identifiers' reactions to the disadvantaged position of the ingroup in the social hierarchy (i.e., exit vs. assimilation, respectively) can still be eluded by providing the group members with the possibility to enhance self-worth with the use of social creativity strategies.

Limitations and directions for future research

It is noteworthy to mention that our findings might be peculiar to a particular structure of the hierarchy. In all likelihood, the group hierarchies created in the present research were perceived as rather stable and legitimate, so that they could not be evaded or openly challenged. In the universities setting (Studies 1a, 1b, and 2), as well as in the minimal groups setting (Studies 3–4), participants had no reasons to think that the hierarchy was likely to change in the course of time. Moreover, the legitimacy of these hierarchies could hardly be challenged, since they were based on the judgment of experts in their respective fields (the ranking of universities in the naturalistic setting, and art experts in the minimal setting). We may thus wonder what would happen to members of a low-status group when the hierarchy is perceived as unstable and/or

illegitimate. Would the identification-similarity relationship be of a similar shape, and would it remain of the same magnitude? The analogous question applies to the high-status group. Our findings suggest that the high status do not show an identification-similarity relationship because the ingroup's position in the social hierarchy is secure. Alternatively, the instability and/or illegitimacy of the social system could instigate feelings of threat to the high status (see Scheepers, 2009; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2009). We could then predict an increase of the identification-similarity relationship among members of the high-status group. Preliminary support for this conjecture is provided in Study 3, in which members of the high-status group showed a reliable identification-similarity relationship when their ingroup status was challenged on an alternative dimension of comparison with the low-status group. Even though these results were observed in a situation in which the hierarchy was not plainly unstable (the hierarchy on the first dimension of comparison remained favorable the high-status group), we may expect a similar dynamic when the hierarchy would be presented as explicitly unstable.

We must further acknowledge that the groups used in the present set of studies (i.e., university students and minimal groups) are not the most significant ones. Social categories such as gender, social class or ethnicity are undoubtedly more salient and relevant for people's self-concept. Indeed, the literature consistently shows that members of low-status groups (i.e., women, lower social classes, and minorities) perceive the self as congruent with the ingroup prototype, and act in a more collectivistic way than their higher-status counterparts (i.e., men, higher social classes, and majorities; see Cadinu, Latrofa, & Carnaghi, 2013; Grier & Deshpandé, 2001; Guimond, Chatard, Martinot, Crisp, & Redersdorff, 2006; Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, 2012; McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978; Snibbe & Markus, 2005). However, according to the social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the groups' positioning in salient social hierarchies and the ensuing intergroup comparisons shape the group members' social identities. Thus, the predictions from the present research should generalize to more significant group settings. Future research testing our hypotheses in this kinds of groups could also be interesting because it should be able to examine whether the identification-similarity relationship becomes stronger as the ingroup status decreases (i.e., being stronger in extremely low-status groups than in moderately low-status groups).

Our research highlights conditions in which people assimilate to the ingroup. However, there is no evidence about the cognitive process under which people estimate their similarity with the ingroup prototype. The literature distinguishes between two processes: self-stereotyping and self-anchoring. The former is a top-down process, where people first appraise the ingroup prototype and then estimate how the self fits with this prototype. The latter is a bottom-up process, where people first focus on their idiosyncrasies and then appraise how they apply to the ingroup prototype (see van Veelen, Otten, Cadinu, & Hansen, 2016). Ingroup status impacts on the magnitude of self-ingroup similarity (i.e., self-ingroup similarity being more pronounced among members of low- than high-status groups). But research on gender groups suggests that it can also influence the process under which members of low-status groups and members of high-status groups appraise self-ingroup similarity (Latrofa et al., 2010). Indeed, members of the low-status group mostly rely on a self-stereotyping process, while members of high-status groups mostly rely on a self-anchoring process. Future research should

examine the interactive impact of ingroup identification and status on the cognitive process underlying self-ingroup similarity.

Conclusion

Since perception of similarity between self and ingroup is crucial to most intergroup behaviors, the findings from the present experiments have the potential to shed light on a number of real-world phenomena that have been documented in social psychology. For instance, they point at conditions where individuals initiate social mobility or focus on the improvement of their ingroup (see Ellemers, 2001; Hirschman, 1970; Tajfel, 1976). They indicate that the relationship between ingroup identification and self-ingroup similarity stems from differential strategies that low and high identifiers engage to achieve a positive social identity. This contributes to the understanding of the theoretical foundations of social identity. Socio-cognitive models (e.g., Turner et al., 1987) are more likely to be accurate in predicting behaviors of people aiming at achieving a positive social identity (e.g., members of low-status groups and of status-unspecified groups), than in predicting behaviors of people having ascertained their positive social identity (e.g., members of high-status groups in a secure hierarchy, and members of low-status groups who engage in social creativity strategies).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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