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The path of most resistance

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A cautionary note:
A boundary condition
for resistance
to implicit identity threat



Abstract

This chapter attempts to replicate findings of Chapter 5 in the context of regional identity in the Netherlands. We recruited students who are originally from the province of Groningen, and focused on the intergroup comparison between the inhabitants of the province of Groningen, compared to the inhabitants of the metropolitan area (“de Randstad”). We exposed participants to implicit stereotypes that legitimise in-group disadvantage, or a control condition. Results showed no evidence for implicit resistance to implicit identity threat. Instead, participants went along with the manipulation. However, once the threat to the in-group was made explicit, high identifiers indicated more support for radical collective action. This suggests they were motivated to resist, but were unable to do so at the implicit level. In considering reasons for this, we suggest that participants were perhaps not familiar enough with the threatening context for implicit resistance to arise. That is, chronic exposure to a threat may be needed for group members to build up resilience at the implicit level. The data presented in this chapter, then, suggest that there are circumstances in which resistance to implicit stereotypes does *not* occur. Such null findings are relevant in providing an indication of the boundary conditions of the effect being studied, and as such contribute to a fuller understanding of resistance to implicit identity threat.

Chapter 5 demonstrated that resistance to implicit stereotypes is triggered by their legitimising function. The “legitimising function” of implicit stereotypes is potentially more threatening to group identity than the negative content or valence of the stereotype alone (see also Spears, Greenwood, de Lemus, & Sweetman, 2010), because it suggests that the in-group is responsible for the disadvantage they face (Reyna et al., 2006). Thus, it is clear from previous research that people are sensitive to the implications of legitimising information, even when it is presented at the implicit level (see Chapter 5), and that this, in turn, affects the experience of implicit social identity threat. In the current study, we turn to the context of regional identity in the Netherlands to replicate this finding.

This study was conducted amongst students who are originally from the province of Groningen, and focused on the intergroup comparison between the inhabitants of the province of Groningen, compared to the inhabitants of the metropolitan area (“de Randstad”). We use a simplified version of the design used in Chapter 5, exposing participants to implicit stereotypes that legitimise in-group disadvantage, or a non-threatening control condition. Stereotypes of people from the province of Groningen versus those from the Randstad are similar to urban-rural stereotypes in other contexts. People from remote rural backgrounds (Groningen) are stereotyped as old-fashioned, backwards, traditional, introverted, and uneducated, while those from urban (Randstad) backgrounds are seen as modern, flexible, outgoing, and arrogant (e.g. Thompson, 2013). In addition to these stereotypes, the province of Groningen faces considerable economic disadvantage compared to the rest of the Netherlands. Historically the province had a lot of heavy industry, and a large agricultural sector, but these sectors are in decline, and there are now few job opportunities in the province. In addition to this, in recent years the province has experienced earthquakes induced by the exploitation of a large natural gas field, causing damage to properties and house prices to fall. In sum, the province currently faces considerable disadvantage compared to the rest of the country.

We believe this context of regional identity provides a suitable context to attempt to replicate the findings of Chapter 5, because, like in Chapter 5, stereotypes of the in-group are not necessarily linked to in-group disadvantage (or vice versa). That is, implicit stereotypes of the group do not automatically bring to mind the disadvantage the group faces, and as such this link can be manipulated in such a way that implicit stereotypes are more or less threat-

ening to identity. Specifically, we create implicit identity threat by exposing participants to implicit associations that legitimise the disadvantage faced by people from Groningen with reference to stereotypes of group members. More specifically, in the legitimising condition stereotypes of the in-group as backwards and uneducated are used to justify the disadvantage faced by in-group members. Implicit exposure to these “legitimising stereotypes” is expected to trigger resistance in the form of implicit in-group bias.

Method

Participants. Sixty-eight undergraduates from the University of Groningen completed the study. Those who reported seeing the primes were excluded from the sample ($N=2$). Participants who had high error rates during the manipulation phase ($N=3$), and those who did not comply with instructions ($N=1$) were also excluded. This left a total of 62 participants divided over 2 conditions (18 males; 29%) in the final sample. The average age was 20.54 years old, ranging from 18 to 35 years old.

The stopping rule used during data collection was a practical one: the number of participants that could be recruited within a 2-week period. With this sample we are able to detect small-to-medium effect sizes ($d\approx 0.16$) at a power of $1-\beta=0.8$ (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007).

Design. During the manipulation phase participants were exposed to implicit associations that were either threatening to identity, or non-threatening. Identification with the in-group (Groningen) was included as a covariate. After exposure to in-group associations according to condition, participants completed an evaluative decision task as a measure of implicit in-group bias. In the evaluative decision task, participants were presented with in-group and out-group primes followed by positive and negative targets. Thus, within-participant factors were prime type (in-group vs. outgroup) and target type (positive, negative), creating 4 different trial types.

Threat manipulation. Implicit social identity threat was manipulated in a priming paradigm, in such a way that neither the prime nor the target were threatening in isolation, but rather the repeated combination of certain primes with certain target words created social identity threat. Participants were exposed to either a legitimising condition, or a control condition. The legitimising condition was designed to create implicit identity threat: participants were exposed to implicit associations that legitimise in-group disadvantage with reference to in-group stereotypes, in the same way as in Chapter

5. The subliminal in-group prime “Groningen” was paired with negative in-group stereotypes (e.g. Groningen-backward) and in-group disadvantage (e.g. Groningen-poor). The subliminal out-group prime “Randstad” was paired with positive stereotypes and out-group advantage (e.g. Randstad-modern; Randstad-wealthy). That is, the legitimising condition implicitly exposed participants to negative in-group stereotypes and in-group disadvantage, while the out-group was associated with positive group stereotypes and *advantage*. In the non-threatening control condition, we exposed participants to the reverse of the associations described above. Importantly, this control condition was as complex as the threatening condition in terms of the number of targets seen and classifications made, except that the prime associated with each target was reversed.

The threat manipulation task consisted of 120 trials. Each trial consisted of a prime word, “Groningen” or “Randstad”. The prime was presented sub-optimally for 50 ms, with a supraliminal forward and backward mask (a random letter string) presented for 100 ms. Following the masked prime, the target appeared, remaining on screen until the response is given. Participants’ task was to classify the word as being positive or negative. In the legitimising condition, social identity threat was created by pairing Groningen primes with negative targets and Randstad primes with positive targets in 95% of trials, while the control condition associated Groningen primes with positive words, and Randstad primes with negative words in 95% of trials.

Stereotype targets consisted of 10 negative trait words, which a pilot study confirmed as being stereotypically associated with people from Groningen (e.g., backward, dumb, old-fashioned), and 10 positive traits that are stereotypically associated with people from the Randstad area (e.g., modern, innovative, creative). The targets relating to in-group disadvantage were 10 positive and 10 negative words related to economic topics, such as “unemployment”, and “decline” and positive words included “growth” and “wealth”.

Dependent measures. Following the threat manipulation, the dependent measures were administered in the order presented below.

Implicit measure.

Evaluative decision task. The evaluative decision task (Fazio et al., 1995) measured implicit in-group bias. This task, consisting of 120 trials, used the same subliminal prime (“Groningen” or “Randstad”) as the threat manipulation. The prime was followed by a supraliminal target: positive or negative words such as ‘love’ or ‘peace’. Participants were asked to classify targets

as positive (N=10) or negative (N=10). In this task, the facilitation of Groningen-positive pairs following identity threat would be indicative of an implicit evaluative in-group bias (de Lemus et al., 2016; Fazio et al., 1995).

Explicit measures.

Math task. The math task was designed to measure persistence and performance following implicit identity threat, and consisted of 8 math problems in increasing order of difficulty. Participants were asked to choose the correct answer from 4 options. The final item was unsolvable, that is, the correct answer was not amongst the options. In addition to the four choice options, participants could choose “skip this question” if they did not know the answer. Resistance might be evident from the observation that, after exposure to implicit identity threat, participants spend more time on the task, specifically on the unsolvable item. Alternatively, resistance might be evident from improved performance following implicit identity threat.

Mood measure. A mood scale was created from a combination of the dejection/agitation scale (Higgins, 2001), and the PANAS (Tellegen, Watson, & Clark, 1988), resulting in a 10-item scale asking about positive (N=4; $\alpha=0.83$) and negative (N=6; $\alpha=0.84$) mood. Participants indicated the extent to which they experienced each of the 10 emotions on a 9-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “very much”.

In-group identification. Before completing the measures that referred directly to the intergroup context (such as the collective action measure), participants reported their identification with people from Groningen by completing the Multidimensional Identification measure (Leach et al., 2008; $\alpha=0.95$) using a 9-point Likert scale.

Legitimacy & Responsibility. Following the identification measure, participants were asked to indicate their agreement with 5 statements ($\alpha=0.73$) about the current situation in the province, such as “I feel the current situation in the province of Groningen is unfair”. These questions were designed to measure perceptions of responsibility, as we hypothesised that the legitimising condition would suggest to participants that the in-group (through their stereotypical traits) is partially responsible for the disadvantage the group faces. This suggestion could be resisted by rating the in-group less blame-worthy.

Collective Action. Participants’ support for collective action on behalf of the group was measured with a 16-item scale referring to both normative (N=10, $\alpha=0.92$) and non-normative (N=6, $\alpha=0.76$) collective action, from protesting (normative) to arson (non-normative). Participants rated each of the

actions in terms of how much they would support this type of action, on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 9 (very much).

Procedure. Upon arrival to the lab, participants read the study information and provided informed consent. The cover story for the experiment explained that the study was concerned with “decision-making in a variety of contexts”. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions and completed the threat manipulation followed by the dependent measures: the evaluative decision task, the math task, and the mood measure. They then indicated their identification with people from Groningen, before completing the dependent measures which explicitly referred to the intergroup context: the responsibility questions and the collective action measure. At the end of the study, participants completed a funnelled debriefing, in which they were asked to guess at the hypotheses. None of the participants correctly guessed the nature of the experiment. Finally, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and were thanked for their participation.

Preliminary analyses. The mean of regional identification was slightly below the midpoint of the scale ($M= 4.83$, $SD=1.61$). Importantly, in-group identification was not affected by the manipulation ($F<1$), justifying its use as a covariate in the analyses presented below. We further examined whether participants were aware of the primes. None of the participants reported awareness of the subliminal primes. The reaction time data was cleaned using a predetermined cut-off. Reaction times falling $3SD$ outside the mean were excluded (6.5% of data points). This yielded a normal distribution (Kurtosis = 0.48, $SE=0.06$, $p<0.631$). The models presented below include a random Subjects factor, reflecting similarities between trials derived from the same participant.

Results

Evaluative decision task. Results showed a main effect of the type of target ($F(1,6667) = 9.51$, $p=0.003$), such that positive targets produced faster responses than negative targets ($M_{diff} = 11.10$ ms). There was no evidence for a 3-way interaction between exposure condition, type of target and type of prime ($F<1$). However, when including in-group identification in the model, the 4-way interaction reached significance ($F(1,6665) = 6.98$, $p=0.008$). Breakdown of this interaction showed that amongst high identifiers, the expected 3-way interaction of exposure condition, target type and prime type reached significance ($F(1,6664) = 5.23$, $p=0.022$). Further breakdown showed that for

high identifiers in the legitimising condition, type of target and type of prime interacted ($F(1,6664)=7.99, p=0.005$). However, the simple effect was not in the expected direction. Amongst high identifiers in the legitimising condition, in-group-negative pairs were facilitated compared to out-group negative pairs ($M_{\text{diff}}=18.00$ ms, $F(1,6666)=5.97, p=0.015, d=0.18$). That is, high identifiers associated negative words more readily with the in-group than the out-group after exposure to the legitimising condition. Thus, instead of resisting the legitimising condition through in-group favouritism, high identifiers showed *in-group derogation* after exposure to implicit legitimising stereotypes. No other simple effects reached significance. The results are represented in Figure 6a.

Math task. Participants correctly completed 3.7 items out of 7 on average ($SD=1.60$) Performance was affected neither the exposure condition, nor in-group identification (all $F_s < 1, p_s > 0.634$). Persistence in the math task was affected by a marginal interaction between exposure condition and identification ($F(1,61)=2.81, p=0.099$). Breakdown of the interaction showed that low identifiers are quicker to give up after exposure to the legitimising condition than after exposure to the control condition ($F(1,61)=3.22, p=0.078$). This suggests that the legitimising condition demotivates the low identifiers.

Mood. Results on the mood measure showed only a main effect of identification on positive mood: high identifiers reported experiencing more positive mood than low identifiers ($F(1,61)=9.43, p=0.003, d=0.43$). There were no effects of exposure condition ($F_s < 1.36, p_s > 0.24$).

Legitimacy & Responsibility. Following the implicit measures, participants were asked explicitly to what extent they believed that the in-group was responsible for the disadvantage they faced. Results showed a main effect of exposure condition: those who were exposed to the legitimising condition saw the in-group as more responsible than those who were exposed to the control condition ($F(1,61)=6.60, p=0.013, d=0.34$). These findings show that participants interpreted the legitimising condition as implying that the in-group, through their stereotypical traits, is (partially) responsible for the disadvantage they face.

Collective action. Finally, participants were asked explicitly which measures they considered appropriate to combat in-group disadvantage. Moderate collective action tendencies showed a main effect of identification ($F(1,61)=12.91, p < 0.001, d=0.47$), such that high identifiers indicated more support for moderate collective action than low identifiers. A marginal in-

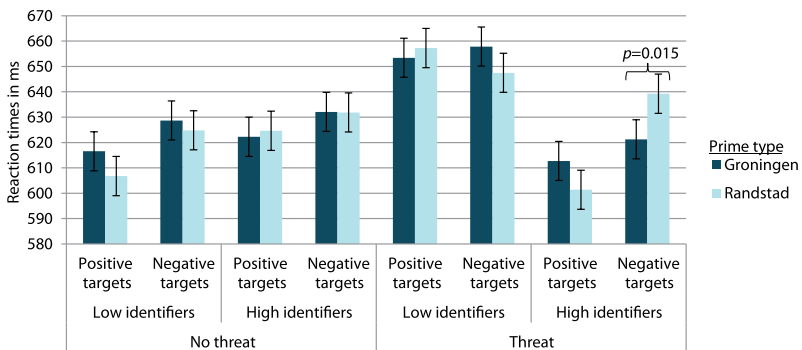
teraction between identification and exposure condition showed that this difference between high and low identifiers was particularly strong in the legitimising condition ($F(1,61)= 2.98, p=0.090$).

Radical collective action tendencies showed an interaction between identification and exposure condition ($F(1,61)=11.66, p<0.001$), such that high identifiers in the legitimising condition indicated more support for radical collective action relative to high identifiers in the control condition ($F(1,61)=8.72, p=0.005, d=0.39$), and relative to low identifiers in the legitimising condition ($F(1,61)=5.27, p=0.025, d=0.30$). Conversely, in the control condition, low identifiers were more supportive of radical collective action than high identifiers ($F(1,61)=9.82, p=0.003, d=0.41$). These findings are represented in Figure 6b and Figure 6c.

Taken together, these findings suggest that, relative to low identifiers, high identifiers are more likely to support moderate collective action, and after they have been exposed to implicit identity threat they are also more likely to support *radical* collective action.

Summary. In conclusion, there was no evidence for implicit resistance following implicit identity threat. Once the issue of in-group disadvantage was made explicit to participants, however, collective action responses were stronger amongst high identifiers who were exposed to implicit identity threat during the manipulation phase.

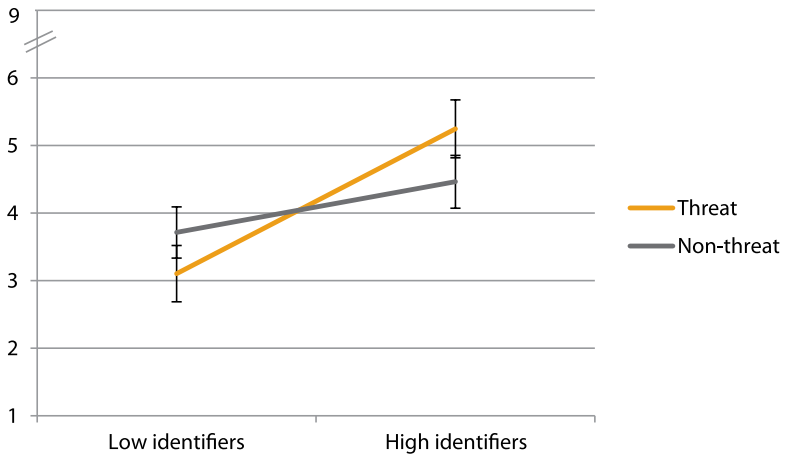
Figure 6a: Responses to the evaluative decision task.



NB: Error bars represent 1 standard error. High and low identification with the in-group are plotted at ± 1 standard deviation from the mean.

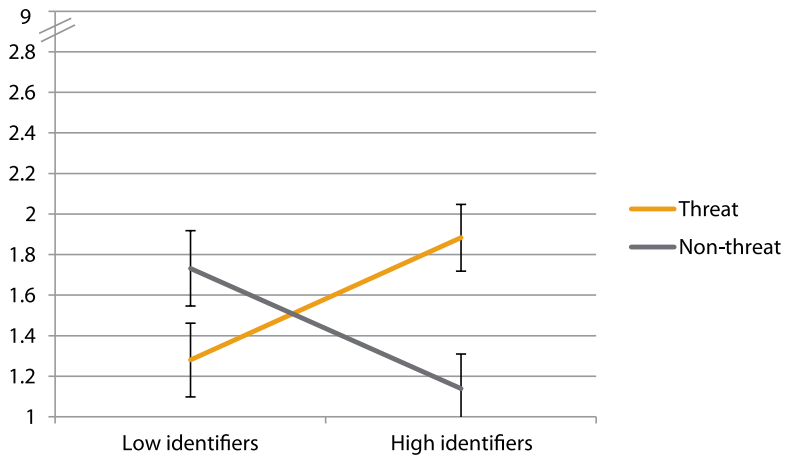


Figure 6b: Moderate collective action tendencies.



NB: Error bars represent 1 standard error.

Figure 6c: Radical collective action tendencies.



NB: Error bars represent 1 standard error.

Discussion

Findings from this study show no evidence for implicit resistance to implicit identity threat. Instead, participants *went along with* the manipulation. Those who were exposed to the legitimising condition perceived the in-group as more responsible for the disadvantage they face. Moreover, high identifiers showed implicit in-group derogation after exposure to the legitimising condition: they associated negative targets with the in-group more readily than with the out-group. That is, there was no evidence for resistance to implicit social identity threat. However, once the threat to the in-group was made explicit, there was evidence that people want to counteract this: high identifiers who had been exposed to threatening in-group associations during the manipulation phase indicated more support for radical collective action. That is, high identifiers exposed to implicit identity threat, became more willing to act against in-group disadvantage *once the issue was made explicit*. This suggests they were motivated to resist, but were unable to do so at the implicit level (Barreto et al., 2010; Kray et al., 2001). In other words, resistance to implicit legitimising stereotypes was absent, even though participants did pick up on the threatening implications of the implicit information with which they were presented, as evidenced by the effects of the manipulation on perceived in-group responsibility and (amongst high identifiers) in-group derogation.

Though this study showed no evidence of implicit resistance to implicit social identity threat, we do believe that these findings are of interest, precisely because they differ from findings of previous studies. On the one hand, the absence of resistance to implicit identity threat may be due to the fact that, in this chapter, the in-group is made responsible for their own disadvantage. That is, responsibility for disadvantage is a within-group issue. Conversely, in Chapter 5, the Spanish were made responsible for an economic crisis which has affected all of Europe, and arguably, therefore, they are made responsible at an intergroup level. These different “levels” of responsibility could have led to a less intense threat experience in the current study compared to Chapter 5. Secondly, it could be that resistance is absent because participants have internalized and accepted the negative view of their in-group. However, the findings regarding radical collective action, suggest that at least for high identifiers this is not the case. Alternatively, resistance may be absent because threat to regional identity is less familiar, and therefore less salient, to participants than threat to gender identity (Chapters 3 and 4) or national identity (Chapter 5). Perhaps chronic salience of a threat is needed for group

members to build up resilience, allowing them to resist implicit forms of that threat (Kaiser, et al., 2006). In the context of the current study, this implies that participants pick up on the implicit information, and experience implicit social identity threat, but because they are not chronically exposed to this type of threat, they are less able to resist. Though speculative, this explanation suggests that coping resources develop or build up over time as a result of chronic exposure to identity threat, ultimately allowing people to resist *implicit* occurrences of identity threat.

In sum, the data presented in this chapter show that there are circumstances in which resistance to implicit stereotypes does *not* occur. Such null findings are relevant in providing an indication of the boundary conditions of the effect being studied, and as such contribute to a fuller understanding of resistance to implicit identity threat.

A boundary condition

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