

Intergroup Threat Theory

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We live in a world polarized by religion, nationality, political ideology, race, ethnicity, sex, social class, and so many more divisions they are too numerous to mention. These social groups shape our identities and our lives. All of these social groups are characterized by membership criteria and boundaries – they include some people and exclude others. Although it is not logically necessary for these boundaries to imply any tension between groups, in practice relations between groups are far more likely to be antagonistic than complementary. Social identity theorists argue that one reason for intergroup antagonism is the psychological benefits conferred on group members, particularly those associated with identification with ingroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). These benefits include acceptance, belonging, and social support, as well as a system of roles, rules, norms, values, and beliefs to guide behavior. Groups also provide our lives with meaning by boosting our self-esteem (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990), increasing our sense of distinctiveness from others (Turner, 1987), and making us more certain of the social world and our place within it (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Because of the needs they fill, groups are as dear to us as life itself, and we fear their destruction almost as much as we fear our own. As a result, we tend to favor our own group and exhibit hostility toward other groups, especially during dangerous or contentious times (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Similarly, the philosopher Barbara Ward (1959) contends that since the dawn of time, humans have been fundamentally “tribal” in nature. Membership in these “tribal” social groups provides people with traditions, customs, myths, religion, and common language, as well as access to basic subsistence (see also Brewer, 1997; Brewer & Caporael, 1990). A corollary of the

unified system of meaning provided by people's own "tribes" is the existence of "tribes" of strangers beyond the ingroup's boundaries. Because their own "tribes" are so important to them, people often regard these other groups "tribes" as a threat (see also Alexander, 1974; Dunbar, 1988). Specifically, "Tribes" that possess the power to harm or destroy the ingroup are a threat to the very existence of the ingroup, while "tribes" that possess different values are a threat to the unified meaning system of the ingroup. One outcome of the tribal psychology mindset is that people may be inclined to perceive threats where none exist, a tendency consistent with the more general bias people display toward avoiding costly errors (Haselton & Buss, 2003). Perceiving threats when none exist may be a less costly error than not perceiving threats when in fact they do exist. Thus, by default people may be predisposed to perceive threats from outgroups.

In the context of intergroup threat theory, an intergroup threat is experienced when members of one group perceive that another group is in a position to cause them harm. We refer to a concern about physical harm or a loss of resources as realistic threat, and to a concern about the integrity or validity of the ingroup's meaning system as symbolic threat. The primary reason intergroup threats are important is because their effects on intergroup relations are largely destructive. Even when a threat from an outgroup leads to non-hostile behavioral responses (e.g., negotiation, compromise, deterrence), the cognitive and affective responses to threat are likely to be negative.

In the remainder of this chapter, we explore the nature of the intergroup threats people experience, why and when people feel threatened by other groups, and how they respond to them. We will also review some of the research that has been done to test this and related theories of threat, as well as formulate some hypotheses to stimulate future research.

Intergroup Threat Theory

In the original version of intergroup threat theory, labeled integrated threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), four types of threat were included, but this number has since been reduced to two basic types – realistic and symbolic threats (Renfro & Stephan, 2002). Negative stereotypes, which were initially considered to be a separate type of threat, now seem to us to be a cause of threat involving characteristics of the outgroup that could have a negative impact on the ingroup (e.g., aggressiveness, deviousness, immorality). Indeed, negative stereotypes have been found to be a significant predictor of both realistic and symbolic threats (Stephan, Boniecki, Ybarra, Bettencourt, Ervin, Jackson, McNatt, & Renfro, 2002). Intergroup anxiety, which involves the anticipation of negative outcomes from intergroup interaction, was also initially considered to be a separate threat but now seems to us to be a subtype of threat centering on apprehensions about interacting with outgroup members. These apprehensions arise from a number of different sources, including concerns that the outgroup will exploit the ingroup, concerns that the outgroup will perceive the ingroup as prejudiced, and concerns that the outgroup will challenge the ingroup's values (Stephan & Stephan, 1985).

In addition to focusing on realistic and symbolic threats, the first revision of the theory (Stephan & Renfro, 2002) made a distinction between threats to the ingroup as a whole and threats to individual members, in which individuals experience threat as a function of their membership in a particular ingroup. For example, a European American male with a good job might believe affirmative action threatens his group, but feel no individual threat. Conversely, an African American on the streets of a European American neighborhood may feel his own welfare is threatened, but at that moment may not be concerned about the threats that European Americans pose to African Americans more generally.

In the revised theory, realistic *group* threats are threats to a group's power, resources, and

general welfare. Symbolic *group* threats are threats to a group's religion, values, belief system, ideology, philosophy, morality, or worldview. Realistic *individual* threats concern actual physical or material harm to an individual group member such as pain, torture, or death, as well as economic loss, deprivation of valued resources, and threats to health or personal security. Symbolic *individual* threats concern loss of face or honor and the undermining of an individual's self-identity or self-esteem.

The conflict between the Israelis and Arabs provides a stark illustration of the various types of threat. For both groups, realistic group threats are omnipresent in the form of the possibility of open warfare. This is a struggle involving land, economics, power, and blood where each group threatens the very existence of the other. Symbolic group threats are nearly as obvious. The two groups differ in religion and culture and speak different languages. Each group is perceived to pose a fundamental threat to the cultural worldview and way of life of the other. Threats also exist at the individual level. Realistic individual threats exist in the form of terrorism for the Israelis. For the Arabs, such threats are present as targeted assassinations in which civilians are often casualties. Individual symbolic threats occur when individuals feel they are being dishonored, disrespected, or dehumanized by members of the other group.

Our conceptualization of threat is related to that of social identity theorists, who posit that the actions of outgroups often lead ingroups to feel as though their group's status is threatened (Branscombe et al., 1999). However, the social identity definition of "status threat" involves both tangible resources (e.g., bleak prospects on the job market; see Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002) and group esteem (e.g., believing that other group views the ingroup negatively; see Branscombe, Spears, Ellemers, & Doosje, 2002; Cameron, Duck, Terry, & Lalonde, 2005). From our perspective, threats to tangible resources can be considered realistic, whereas threats to group

esteem can be considered symbolic.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the antecedents and consequences of threat, we would like to comment on an important issue with respect to the type of threats of concern to us. Intergroup threat theory is a social psychological theory in that it is primarily concerned with *perceptions* of threat. Perceived threats have real consequences, regardless of whether or not the perceptions of threat are accurate. Thus, intergroup threat theory is not as concerned with the actual threat posed by outgroups (e.g., rising rates of unemployment or immigration) as it is the degree to which threats to the ingroup are perceived to exist. To illustrate this point, consider a survey study on attitudes toward immigrants in Germany, conducted by Semyonov, Raijman, Tov, and Schmidt (2004). This study examined four variables: 1) the actual proportion of immigrants in counties across Germany, 2) the respondents' perceptions of the proportion of immigrants in their counties, 3) the respondents' perceptions of the threats posed by immigrants, and 4) the respondents' exclusionary attitudes toward immigrants. It was found that the actual proportion of immigrants in the respondents' localities did not predict exclusionary attitudes toward immigrants. Instead, the perceived proportion of immigrants predicted both perceived threats and exclusionary attitudes. In addition, the relationship between perceived proportion of immigrants and exclusionary attitudes was mediated by perceived threats.

Antecedents of Threat

In the first revision of integrated threat theory, it was argued that the degree to which people perceive threats from another group depends on prior relations between the groups, the cultural values of the group members, the situations in which the groups interact with one another, and individual difference variables. In the next section, we will mention the variables included in earlier versions of the theory, but we will also discuss additional variables that now

seem important to us. We will review the antecedents of threat in the manner that Allport (1954) might have chosen, based on his lens model of the causes of prejudice. He argued that there are four basic categories of antecedents of prejudice, ranging from more distal factors (e.g., historical and sociocultural antecedents) to more proximal factors (e.g., situational and personality antecedents). Likewise, we will begin by discussing the distal intergroup and cultural antecedents of threat, followed by the more proximal situational and individual-level antecedents.

Intergroup Relations. One factor that affects the perception of intergroup threats is the relative power of the groups. In the original theory, it was argued that both high and low power groups are susceptible to perceiving they are under threat. We now believe that, in general, low power groups are more likely than high power groups to *experience* threats, but that high power groups (to the extent that they actually perceive they are threatened) will react more strongly to threat. Low power groups are highly susceptible to perceiving threats because they are at the mercy of more powerful groups. Consistent with this idea, Stephan and colleagues have demonstrated that low power racial and ethnic groups (e.g., Black Americans, Native Canadians) perceive higher levels of threat from high power groups (e.g., European Americans, Anglo Canadians) than high power groups perceive from low power groups (Corenblum & Stephan, 2001; Stephan et al., 2002). High power groups react strongly to feeling threatened because they have a great deal to lose and, unlike low power groups, they possess the resources to respond to the threats. This idea finds support in research showing that the relationship between threat and intergroup attitudes (e.g., prejudice) is stronger for high power groups than for low power groups (Johnson, Terry, & Louis, 2005; Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006).

Under some conditions, perceptions of threat may also be high when the ingroup and

outgroup are believed to be relatively equal in power. When equal power groups are in open conflict or are competing with one another for valued resources, their equal power makes them evenly matched as opponents (Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001). In a study providing suggestive evidence in support of this idea, members of a high power group (European Americans) who assessed the *similarities* between their ingroup and a lower power outgroup (Mexican Americans) on work-related traits reported higher levels of threat than did those who assessed the *differences* between their ingroup and the outgroup on these traits. Presumably, thinking about work-related similarities (e.g., “They are just as hard-working as we are”) caused ingroup members to view the outgroup as more equal in power and hence able to compete effectively with the ingroup for resources such as jobs (Zarate, Garcia, Garza, & Hitlan, 2004). Similarly, research on social comparison processes indicates that more closely ranked groups behave more competitively with one another and thus pose greater threats to one another than do less closely ranked groups (Garcia, Tor, & Gonzalez, 2006).

Two other antecedents of intergroup threat are a history of group conflict and group size. The groups that are most prone to perceiving intergroup threats are those that believe the groups have a long history of conflict (Shamir & Sagiv-Schifter, 2006; Stephan et al., 2002), as well as those that are small in size relative to the outgroup (Campbell, 2006; Corneille, Yzerbyt, Rogier, & Buidin, 2001; McLaren, 2003; Quillian, 1995; Schaller & Abeyasinghe, 2006). The results of an experiment examining threats by political parties illustrate the latter condition. This study demonstrated that members of a particular political party felt more threatened by an opposing party if they believed that the opposing party constituted forty percent (relative to four percent) of the population in their voting district (Corneille et al., 2001).

Israeli-Palestinian relations serve as an example of the influence of group size and

intergroup conflict on perceived threat. Perceptions of the size of the ingroup may lead both Israelis and Palestinians to feel threatened by one another, but for somewhat different reasons. Specifically, the Palestinians may feel threatened by the Israelis because the Palestinians are the smaller group numerically. The Israelis, however, may feel threatened by the Palestinians because the Israelis see themselves as a minority in an otherwise predominantly Muslim region of the world (that is, they employ different reference groups to arrive at similar conclusions). Prior relations between the groups have been characterized by intense conflict, which may trigger high levels of threat in both groups. In a study supporting this reasoning, Israelis reported higher levels of perceived threat from Palestinians after a violent confrontation between the two groups (the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000) than before the confrontation (Shamir & Sagiv-Schifter, 2006).

In general, we would expect issues of group power, prior conflict, and relative group size to elicit realistic threats to a greater degree than symbolic threats. The reason is that these factors are more closely related to the groups' abilities to harm one another or control valued resources than they are to differences in values and beliefs. Similarly, because these factors are all associated with the ability of the outgroup to inflict harm on the ingroup as a whole, they would be more likely to elicit group threats than individual threats.

It is also likely that historically created cultural value differences predict perceptions of threat. For example, according to the concordance model of acculturation (Piontkowski, Rohman, & Florack, 2002; Rohman, Florack, & Piontkowski, in press; Rohman, Piontkowski, & van Randenborgh, 2006), groups are especially likely to perceive one another as threatening when they believe their cultural values and characteristics differ from those of the outgroup (see also Zarate et al., 2004). A host culture may prefer that an immigrant group give up its culture

and assimilate to the host culture, but worry that the immigrant group wants to maintain its culture. The immigrant group's desire to maintain its own culture would constitute a threat to the values of the host culture. Conversely, immigrant groups often feel threatened by the prospect of having to assume the values of the host culture, which may conflict with their own values (Crisp, Stone, & Hall, 2006).

We would expect value differences to be better predictors of symbolic threats than realistic threats, and to be better predictors of group threats than individual threats. For example, in a recent experiment, German participants read about a fictitious immigrant group whose values were depicted as either similar to or different from those of the ingroup (Rohman et al., 2006, Study 2). The authors found that reading about the group with different values increased participants' perceptions of symbolic threat, but it did not affect their perceptions of realistic threat.

Although prior *relations* between two groups can create threats, it is also important to keep in mind that different *types* of social groups may pose different types of threats. For instance, economically competitive outgroups (e.g., for European Americans this might be Asian Americans) may pose realistic threats related to potential losses of resources (see Maddux, Polifroni, & Galinsky, 2006). Outgroups that carry diseases (e.g., people with AIDS), in contrast, may pose realistic threats related to fear of contamination (Berrenberg, Finlay, Stephan, & Stephan, 2002; Faulkner, Schaller, Park, & Duncan, 2004; Navarrete & Fessler, 2006). Other groups, for example those that are perceived as socially deviant (e.g., cults), may more easily elicit symbolic threats (see also Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005 for a related discussion).

Cultural Dimensions. The revised threat theory argued that certain constellations of cultural values can influence the perception of threats. Among the cultural dimensions included

in the revised theory, which we elaborate on presently, were individualism-collectivism (Triandis, 1995), power distance (Hofstede, 1980), and uncertainty avoidance (Gudykunst, 1995; Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 1991). Individualism refers to cultures in which the self is defined in terms of each individual's unique and distinct characteristics, whereas collectivism refers to cultures in which the self is defined in terms of affiliations with particular groups (Triandis, 1995). Members of collectivistic cultures, given their emphasis on group memberships, may be especially prone to experiencing threats from outgroups. Power distance refers to cultures in which there is an expectation that some individuals will be more powerful than others (Hofstede, 1980). Because cultures with high power distance are characterized by higher rates of conflict and violence than cultures with low power distance (Hofstede, 2001), we would expect the former to be more susceptible to perceiving threats than the latter. We would also expect threat to be more prevalent in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, as such cultures are likely to value the reduction of uncertainty and the preservation of social order (Hofstede, 1980).

It is also possible that cultural tightness versus looseness (Triandis, 1989), the need for security (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987; see also Rickett, 2006), and having a benevolent world view (Schwartz, 1985; 2005) would affect perceptions of threat from outgroups. "Tight" cultures emphasize the importance of conformity to group norms and values, whereas "loose" cultures are relatively tolerant of deviations from social norms (Triandis, 1989). Thus, generally speaking, "tight" cultures are likely to experience higher levels of threat than "loose" cultures because non-conformity threatens their values. Cultures that are characterized by a high need for security (i.e., whose members have a strong desire to avoid threats to their physical safety), or by a belief that the world is an unsafe and dangerous place (i.e., not benevolent, Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987), should also be particularly vulnerable to experiencing intergroup threats.

Another cultural-level dimension that may relate to threat is low versus high context communication style (Hall, 1955). Cultures with low context communication styles stress direct communication where the message is in the words spoken. High context communication involves deciphering the meaning behind the spoken or unspoken words and requires extensive knowledge of cultural rules, roles, norms, history, and context. Because there is a greater potential for conflict and misunderstanding when people from high context cultures communicate with people from other cultures, they may be apprehensive about interacting with cultural outgroups. These apprehensions concern core symbolic elements of their culture, their use of words, images, metaphors, allusions, and their unique cultural myths in everyday communication. Concerns about being able to communicate effectively may cause them to feel more threatened by cultural outgroups than people from cultures favoring more direct communication styles.

In the case of cultural dimensions, the underlying premise is that some cultures may predispose people to feel threatened by outgroups, particularly those cultures that emphasize close ingroup ties (a specific aspect of collectivism), rules and hierarchy which may be jeopardized by outgroups (uncertainty avoidance, tightness, power distance, and mistrust (security/low benevolence)). To test these predictions in the context of cultural differences, it would be necessary to have samples consisting of a large number of cultures that vary along these dimensions. However, many of these cultural dimensions can be measured as individual difference variables and in this form are conceptually similar to the personality variables that we describe below. We will provide more detail on these similarities in the individual differences section.

Because the cultural dimensions refer primarily to values, standards, rules, norms, and

beliefs of social groups, they should be more closely related to symbolic than realistic threats, as the following example illustrates. For the last two generations one group, militant Muslim fundamentalists, has been responsible for more international terrorism than any other. There are many reasons for this, including historical, geo-political, and economic issues, but one basic reason is that they feel threatened by Western culture. Intergroup threat theory can shed some light on why they feel so threatened. Muslim culture is collectivistic, high in power distance, high on cultural tightness and uncertainty avoidance, emphasizes high context communication, and is characterized by mistrust of other groups. These aspects of Muslim culture may make fundamentalist Muslims particularly prone to feeling threatened by other cultures, especially Western culture because it is so dramatically different. Fundamentalist Muslims are deeply concerned about the continued existence of their culture in its traditional form. Although the threats posed by Western culture are primarily symbolic, realistic threats are present as well, due in part to the acts of terrorism that militant Muslim fundamentalists have employed to defend their way of life. These acts of terrorism have led the West to engage in violent attacks against Muslims (e.g., in Afghanistan and Iraq), causing Muslims to fear that their safety and well-being, as well as their way of life, are in jeopardy.

Situational Factors. The revised threat theory drew on contact theory (Pettigrew, 1998, 2001; Stephan, 1985) to specify a number of variables that would be expected to influence perceptions of threat, including the setting in which the intergroup interaction occurs, how structured the interaction is, the degree to which norms exist for intergroup relations, the ratio of ingroup and outgroup members in this context, the goals of the interaction, the relative power of ingroup and outgroup members in this context, the degree of support for the interaction from relevant authority figures, and the cooperative or competitive nature of the interaction. The

actual power to do harm that the other group possesses in the specific context under consideration should also be taken into account – as well, of course, as any actual threats they have made to the ingroup. These situational variables are specific to interpersonal contexts in which members of two groups interact with one another (e.g., schools and work settings). Thus, they can be distinguished from the intergroup variables discussed above, which concern historical relations between the groups as a whole (e.g., past religious and political conflicts).

The situations most likely to create perceptions of threat are those in which people are uncertain how to behave, are in unfamiliar settings, believe they are outnumbered and “outgunned” (have lower power than the other group), feel unsupported by authority figures, and are competing against an outgroup that can harm them or has threatened to do so. For example, minority group members who work in a factory owned and dominated by the majority group would be likely to feel threatened because the situational factors put them at such a disadvantage. They are at a disadvantage both numerically and in terms of power, they are competing with majority group members for advancement, they are unlikely to feel supported by the majority group management, and they may face harassment or even physical violence on the job.

Because situational factors refer primarily to conditions affecting immediate tangible outcomes of intergroup interaction, we would expect them to be more closely related to realistic than symbolic threats. Furthermore, because these factors are more likely to elicit concerns about the outcomes of individual group members (e.g., whether a worker will lose his or her job) than they are to elicit concerns about the group’s outcomes as a whole (e.g., whether the trade union to which the worker belongs will lose power), they should be more closely related to realistic individual than realistic group threats.

It is clear that these situational factors vary over time and across contexts to a greater

extent than the other types of antecedent variables. These fluctuations make the experience of threat highly dynamic, as members of the same two groups may feel very threatened in some contexts but not in others. The extent to which the two groups experience threat in different contexts has important implications for how they respond to and interact with one another, a point we will revisit in the section on consequences of threat.

Individual Difference Variables. The original version of threat theory included strength of ingroup identity, amount and type of contact, and outgroup knowledge as individual difference variables. Highly-identified group members, like members of collectivist cultures (Triandis, 1995), consider the ingroup important to their self-definition. As a result, they should be more likely than less-identified group members to both perceive and react to threats from an outgroup (Riek et al., 2006; Stephan et al., 2002). In addition, group members who have had less personal contact with outgroups are more inclined to experience threat than those who have had more personal contact with the outgroup (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2000; Voci & Hewstone, 2003), though personal contact with the outgroup in negative settings can heighten perceptions of threat (see Plant & Devine, 2003; Stephan et al. 2002). Similarly, group members who are relatively unfamiliar with the outgroup tend to be more susceptible to threat than those who have extensive knowledge of the outgroup (Chasteen, 2005; Corenblum & Stephan, 2001).

The revised theory added social dominance orientation (SDO), a measure of support for group-based inequality (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), a measure of desire for social order (Altemeyer, 1981), as antecedents of threat. Both SDO and RWA bear some resemblance to the hierarchy-related cultural dimensions described above, such as power distance (Hofstede, 1980) and “tightness” (Triandis, 1989). Previous research has shown that while SDO predicts beliefs that outgroups are a source

of competition to the ingroup (Duckitt, 2006; Esses et al., 2001), RWA predicts beliefs that outgroups threaten the ingroup's way of life (Duckitt, 2006). Thus, SDO may be an antecedent of realistic threat, whereas RWA may be an antecedent of symbolic threat.

It is also likely that both individual self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965) and collective self-esteem (Crocker & Schwartz, 1985; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) are related to predispositions to perceive threats, but in opposite ways. Low individual self-esteem makes people susceptible to experiencing threats from outgroups because people with low self-esteem, relative to people with high self-esteem, are likely to be less confident that they can deal with threats (McFarlin & Blascovich, 1981). We should note, however, that the actual experience of threat may be particularly aversive to people high in individual self-esteem, who have a strong need to maintain their positive self-image (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). With regard to collective self-esteem, or people's feelings of attachment to the ingroup (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990), high collective self-esteem should lead to the greatest perceptions of threat because it is these individuals who care most about what happens to their group and its members.

It is possible that chronic mortality salience (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997) and paranoid world views (Kramer, 1998; Ybarra, 2002; Ybarra & Stephan, 1996; Ybarra, Stephan, & Schaberg, 2000) also predict perceptions of threat. The reasoning behind this prediction is that both of these constructs, like low individual self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965) and the cultural dimension of low benevolence (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987), involve a lack of personal security and a feeling of being vulnerable to harm.

Thus, the people who are most susceptible to feeling threatened by outgroups are those who are insecure, suspicious, fear death, are inexperienced with outgroups, are strongly drawn to their ingroups, desire an ordered society, and support social inequality. Using these criteria,

lower echelon members of the all-volunteer American military who are sent abroad might be expected to experience high levels of threat. They usually lack experience with and knowledge of other cultures, they have a commitment to hierarchical military command structures, they have been trained to be wary, they have reason to fear for their lives, and they typically have a strong esprit de corps.

Those individual difference variables tied to a concern for the self, including individual self-esteem, fear of death, suspiciousness, and lack of experience with the outgroup, would be expected to be more closely related to the perception of individual than group threats. In contrast, the individual difference variables that are linked to the group as an entity, including collective self-esteem and valuing social order, would be expected to be more closely related to group than individual threat.

To summarize briefly, it appears that across these domains of antecedents, there are five recurring conditions that foster perceived intergroup threat. First, the ingroup is highly valued. Second, the ingroup has low power or control viz. a viz. the outgroup (in the past or the present). Third, relations with the outgroup have been negative. Fourth, ingroup members mistrust or are suspicious of the outgroup. Fifth, rules, order, and social hierarchies are valued by ingroup members. We turn next to the consequences of perceiving intergroup threats.

Consequences of Threat

Although the original version of threat theory focused primarily on changes in attitudes toward the outgroup (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), it is apparent that there are a number of other cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes of threat.

Cognitive responses. Cognitive responses to intergroup threat include changes in perceptions of the outgroup such as changes in stereotypes (Quist & Resendez, 2003);

ethnocentrism, intolerance, hatred, and dehumanization of the outgroup (Shamir & Sagiv-Schifter, 2006; Skitka, Bauman, & Mullen, 2004); changes in attributions for the outgroup's behavior (Costarelli, 2005); perceived outgroup homogeneity (Rothgerber, 1997); and an increased likelihood of perceiving threat-related emotions (e.g., anger) in others (Maner, Kenrick, Becker, Robertson, Hofer, Neuberg, Delton, Butner, & Schaller, 2005).

Cognitive biases in intergroup perceptions should also be triggered or amplified by threat. For example, threat may increase the occurrence of the ultimate attribution error (Pettigrew, 1979; Stephan, 1977), in which negative acts of the outgroup (and positive ingroup acts) are explained in terms of member characteristics, whereas positive outgroup acts (and negative ingroup acts) are attributed to the situation. Related to this effect are communicative and memory biases that are likely to be amplified by threat, such that people provide more abstract descriptions of negative outgroup than ingroup behavior (e.g., Maass, Ceccarelli, & Rudin, 1996) and are more likely to make misanthropic memory errors (Ybarra et al., 2000). That is, they will be especially likely to remember negative behaviors perpetrated by outgroup members when those behaviors have been attributed to their dispositional qualities, and positive outgroup behaviors when these behaviors have been attributed to situational factors (Ybarra et al., 2000). Threat may also contribute to an increase in the stereotype disconfirmation bias, in which outgroup stereotypes are thought to be more difficult to disconfirm than ingroup stereotypes (Ybarra, Stephan, Schaberg, & Lawrence, 2003), and the overestimation bias, in which the size of the outgroup is judged to be bigger than it really is (Gallagher, 2003).

In addition, people may respond to threats by opposing policies that favor the outgroup (Renfro, Duran, Stephan, & Clason, 2006; Sawires & Peacock, 2000), as well as by condoning extreme behaviors that they would not ordinarily condone (e.g., the use of torture against

prospective terrorists). Attitudes toward the *ingroup* may become more favorable, and ingroup cohesiveness – for example, as indicated by perceptions of similarity among ingroup members (Karasawa, Karasawa, & Hirose, 2004; Rothgerber, 1997; Wilder, 1984) – would be expected to increase in the face of threat.). One common consequence shared by all of these cognitive biases is that they make violence against the outgroup more likely and easier to justify.

Finally, it should be noted that perceiving grave threats is potentially so disruptive to group life that members of threatened groups may at times also try to minimize or deny the existence of threats from outgroups. For example, a recent study found that when members of low status groups made judgments about their ingroup and an outgroup, they acknowledged the lower status of the ingroup on status-defining traits, yet they buttressed their evaluations of the ingroup on status-irrelevant traits (Karasawa et al., 2004). By affirming themselves and the ingroup in this way, people may be able to downplay the reasons for the status differences and the actual threat that such differences may pose (see also Brewer, Manzi, & Shaw, 1993; Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1991

Emotional responses. The emotional reactions to threat are likely to be negative. They include fear, anxiety, anger, and resentment (Davis & Stephan, 2006; Renfro et al., 2006); contempt and disgust (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000); vulnerability (MacLeod & Hagan, 1992); collective guilt (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998); and in all likelihood other emotions such as rage, hatred, humiliation, dread, helplessness, despair, righteous indignation, and panic. Also, threat may undermine emotional empathy for outgroup members and increase emotional empathy for ingroup members. The relationship between threat and (lack of) empathy for outgroups is corroborated by a set of studies showing that threats to a group's status lead group members to feel *schadenfreude*, or pleasure at the suffering of an outgroup (Leach, Spears,

Branscombe, & Doosje, 2003).

Threats directed at individual group members would be expected to evoke emotions tied to a concern for the self (e.g., for one's personal security or self-image), such as fear and vulnerability. Threats directed at the group as a whole, by contrast, would be expected to evoke emotions tied to a concern for the welfare of the group (e.g., for the group's resources and reputation), such as anger, resentment, and collective guilt. Supporting this idea, research has shown that different types of threat trigger different types of emotions. For instance, perceived threats to the ingroup's property and economic resources (a realistic group threat) induce self-reported anger, whereas perceived threats to physical safety (a form of realistic individual threat) induce self-reported fear (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). In another study, facial electromyography was used to measure emotions (Davis & Stephan, 2006). This study found that individual threats led to greater activation of facial muscles associated with fear (relative to anger), whereas group threats led to greater activation of facial muscles associated with anger (relative to fear). The authors argue that the basic reason for the different patterns of responses is that when individuals are feeling threatened by an outgroup, it is generally more adaptive to respond with fear than anger because fear is more likely to lead to avoidance. In contrast, when the entire ingroup has been threatened, anger is likely to be a more adaptive response than fear because it may mobilize the ingroup to respond to the threat (see Smith, 1993).

In addition, different types of outgroups may elicit different emotional reactions. For example, gay men elicit disgust among heterosexuals, while African Americans and Mexican Americans elicit fear as well as anger among European Americans (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; see also Rickett, 2006). A possible reason for these differences is that gay men are a source of symbolic threat, but both African Americans and Mexican Americans are sources of realistic threat (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). Thus, the constellation of emotions that different outgroups elicit may be a function of the characteristics of the outgroup and whether it is perceived to pose

individual or group threats.

Intergroup threats also may increase the tendency to infra-humanize outgroups (Leyens et al. 2001). Infra-humanization involves an unwillingness to attribute the capacity to experience the same types of subtle human emotions felt by the ingroup (e.g., nostalgia, guilt) to members of the outgroup. Instead, the outgroup is thought to be capable of experiencing only the same basic emotions as animals (e.g., anger, pleasure).

Behavioral responses. Behavioral responses to threat range from withdrawal, submission, and negotiation to aggression (direct or displaced), discrimination, lying, cheating, stealing, harassment, retaliation, sabotage, protests, strikes, warfare, and other forms of open intergroup conflict. In some cases, threat leads to direct hostility against the outgroup that is closely related to the source of the threat. For instance, research has shown that men who experienced a threat to their gender identity are especially likely to sexually harass a female confederate (Maass, Cadinu, Guarnieri, & Grasselli, 2003). However, in other cases, threat may lead to displaced hostility against an outgroup that is unrelated to the source of the threat. In an experiment illustrating this point, psychology students whose status was threatened by an outgroup (medical students) subsequently discriminated against another, lower-status outgroup (social work students) (Cadinu & Reggiori, 2002).

Although threats usually induce hostile behavior (be it direct or displaced) toward outgroup members, threats sometimes trigger seemingly positive behaviors toward outgroup members. Positive behaviors are particularly likely to emerge when people are motivated to appear non-prejudiced and hence maintain a positive image of themselves or their ingroup (see Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). In one study, for example, heterosexual male participants were told that they would converse with a gay male

about either dating (threat condition) or life on campus (control condition). Participants in the threat condition sat closer to their conversation partner than did those in the control condition, apparently because the former were more concerned than the latter that their partner would perceive them as prejudiced (Bromgard & Stephan, in press).

Behavioral responses also include negative reactions to the stress created by threat. For example, the academic performance of stigmatized group members (e.g., African Americans) suffers when they believe that others view their ingroup negatively (Cohen & Garcia, 2005), or when they believe that they themselves might confirm the negative stereotype associated with their ingroup (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999; Steele & Aronson, 1995). We would argue that these beliefs are forms of symbolic group threat and symbolic individual threat, respectively. In addition, the potential threats posed by interracial interactions have been found to impair both the problem-solving skills (Mendes, Blascovich, Lickel, & Hunter, 2002) and executive functioning (e.g., performance on the Stroop color-naming task; Richeson & Trawalter, 2005) of European Americans, presumably due to a fear of seeming racist (see Shelton, 2000). Such intergroup anxieties can lead to increases in threat-related physiological responses as well (Littleford, Wright, & Sayoc-Parial, 2005; Matheson & Cole, 2004; Mendes et al., 2002).

Intergroup threats may also have consequences for group dynamics. For instance, threats from outgroups may lead to more negative reactions to defectors or deviants within the ingroup, as well as a greater policing of intergroup boundaries (e.g., defining criteria for membership in the group, drawing sharper distinctions between the ingroup and outgroup, and rejecting prospective members who do not fully meet the membership criteria). Indeed, threats to the ingroup's status (Marques, Abrams, & Serodio, 2001) and core values (Eidelman, Silvia, & Biernat, 2006) have both been found to trigger derogation of deviant ingroup members.

However, in some cases (e.g., when the outgroup is larger, more powerful, and more desirable than the ingroup), threats may lead to disaffiliation with the ingroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The ability of minorities within the ingroup to influence the majority should generally decrease under threat, while groupthink should increase. In fact, groupthink may be at its strongest during times of threat, as Janis (1982) advanced in his original theory. At a more general level, it is not difficult to envision situations in which a threat from an outgroup throws the ingroup into disarray, greatly reducing its capacity to function effectively.

Overall, the nature of the cognitive, emotional and behavioral responses to threat may depend on whether the perceived threats are symbolic or realistic in nature. Symbolic threats would seem to be more likely than realistic threats to lead to dehumanization, delegitimation, moral exclusion of the outgroup, and reduced empathy for the outgroup. In addition, symbolic threats should be particularly likely to result in increased conformity to the ingroup's norms and values (see Jetten et al., 2002; Vaes & Wicklund, 2002). It is also possible that symbolic threats lead to the most vicious behavioral responses to outgroups such as genocide, torture, and mutilation. In the context of immigration policy, symbolic threats would be expected to be linked to a preference for the assimilation of outgroups.

Realistic threats would be expected to lead to more pragmatic responses to the outgroup – that is, behaviors designed to cope with the threat. These behaviors might include withdrawal, avoidance, and aggression. Realistic threats are also more likely to lead to negotiation than symbolic threats because most groups strongly resist changing their core values (Azar, 1986). In the context of immigration policy, realistic threats may lead to a preference for separatism. Responses to realistic threats are probably influenced more by the relative power of the outgroup than are responses to symbolic threats.

Responses to threat should also be affected by whether the threat is perceived to be directed at the group or at individual members of the group. Group threats may be more likely than individual threats to be related to increases in group cohesion, groupthink, expressions of anger and aggression, reductions in collective guilt (if there was any to begin with), and collective responses to the other group such as strikes, boycotts, and warfare. Individual threats may be more likely than group threats to be related to cognitive biases, fear, helplessness, avoidance, appeasement, ingratiation, decrements in performance, disaffiliation with the ingroup, and identification with the aggressor. For example, in a recent study of Israeli Jews' attitudes toward Israeli/Palestinian relations, Maoz and McCauley (2005) found that zero-sum perceptions of realistic group threat (i.e., beliefs that more power for the Palestinians signified less power for the Israelis) were associated with negative attitudes toward compromise with the Palestinians, but perceptions of realistic individual threat (i.e., fears that the Palestinians would inflict personal harm on participants and their families) were not. That is, group threat was linked to attitudes toward compromise with Palestinians as a group, but individual threat was not.

In sum, people react to threat in a wide variety of ways. Their cognitive responses will most likely make it difficult for them to think clearly, carefully or accurately about the outgroup and how to respond to it. Their internal emotional reactions are likely to be negative which may also interfere with responding to the threats that exist. Their behavioral reactions to the other groups are likely to be oriented toward approach (e.g., aggression) or avoidance (e.g., withdrawal, appeasement), but it is also possible that threat will immobilize the ingroup, hence leading to inaction. Threats can also provoke the full range of stress reactions. In most cases, threat is not responsible in and of itself for creating these responses; rather, it serves to amplify them. For instance, a large body of research indicates that merely categorizing people into groups

elicits intergroup biases (see Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002), but we would anticipate that adding threat to the categorization process would magnify these biases (Branscombe et al., 1999).

Although this picture of the outcomes of threats is almost exclusively negative, it may be well to bear in mind that threats can sometimes have positive consequences. Threats may serve to improve sub-group relations within a larger group. For instance, threats to a superordinate group (e.g., Americans) can reduce prejudice toward those who are ordinarily seen as outgroup members (e.g., perceptions of African Americans by European Americans and vice versa), thus leading all members of the superordinate category to unite in the face of a common threat (Dovidio, ten Vergert, Stewart, Gaertner, Johnson, Esses, Riek, & Pearson, 2004). Moreover, with great threats come opportunities for great courage. Courage does not always take the form of aggression toward the other group, but may consist of leadership toward more equitable relations. Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King are good examples of leaders who successfully employed non-aggression in the face of potentially lethal threat.

Concluding Comments

In this chapter we have reviewed research that has been inspired by, is related to, or can be understood from the perspective of intergroup threat theory. We have also expanded the purview of the theory, put forth new hypotheses, and made many suggestions for future research. In its newest version, the theory considers two main types of threats that ingroups experience from outgroups. These are realistic threats, which refer to the physical welfare or resources of the ingroup, and symbolic threats, which refer to the ingroup's system of meaning. These two types of threats can be experienced at the group level or individual level. We have reviewed many antecedents of threat, which funnel down from distal factors (e.g., the history of the relations

between groups, cultural characteristics) to more specific factors (e.g., characteristics of the group members themselves, the situations in which group members find themselves). The latest version of the theory is also more explicit in terms of people's responses to perceived threat from outgroups. These responses can occur at the individual level (e.g., cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses), but can also include responses that influence the dynamics and relations between the ingroup and the outgroup (e.g., hostility and aggression).

It is important to keep in mind that threats occur in the ongoing relations between groups. Therefore, their antecedents and consequences are interactive and recursive. That is, the behavior of each group affects the responses and perceptions of the other group. For instance, if people respond to threats by acting aggressively toward the outgroup, the outgroup will be forced to respond. If the outgroup responds with counter-aggression, this will change the ingroup's perceptions of the level of conflict between the groups and increase their perceptions of threat. Similarly, the responses of the outgroup can affect other variables considered to be antecedents of threat in the theory. Recent research, for example, has shown that threats can lead to increases in group identification (Moskalenko, McCauley, & Rozin, 2006), authoritarianism (Duckitt & Fisher, 2003), social dominance orientation (Morrison & Ybarra, 2006), and power distance (Olivas-Lujan, Harzing, & McCoy, 2004). Thus, threats to an ingroup can influence attitudes, beliefs, and ideologies that are typically thought to remain invariant over time and across situations. Moreover, the *ingroup's* own responses to threat will feed back into its perceptions of the outgroup, usually augmenting them (when their reactions lead them to perceive the outgroup as more threatening), although sometimes attenuating them (when their reactions lead to reduced perceptions of threat).

As the research we have cited indicates, much is now known about the causes and consequences

of intergroup threat. And, yet, there is much to learn. In addition to exploring some of the new possibilities we have suggested for both the antecedents and consequences of threat, there are other aspects of threat that are worthy of investigation. We have little information, for instance, about the time course of intergroup threats. When does the experience of threat escalate, and what causes it to do so? Does the perception of threat typically decrease over time as people adapt to it? Do people respond differently to acute versus chronic threats? To what degree are threats consciously appraised, and to what degree do they affect people in the absence of conscious awareness? What is the subjective experience of threat, beyond the emotions we have suggested? Are there societal conditions that consistently lead to the perception of threat, such as high unemployment, the existence of neighboring states with different ideologies, or the imminence of terrorist attacks? What actions on the part of outgroups cause the greatest perceptions of threat? Do the responses to threat vary as a function of whether the threat is posed by a single outgroup member or the outgroup as a whole? Are there individual differences in responses to threat that parallel or are different from those that influence the perception of threat? Do different elements of realistic or symbolic threat have different consequences (e.g., do threats to physical well-being have different consequences than economic or political threats)? How are threats affected by multiple cross-cutting identities (e.g., would the outcomes differ for an Asian American woman who feels threatened by European American woman or another Asian American woman) or hierarchical identities (e.g., how would the outcomes differ for an American, Republican, woman if a similar type of threat was directed at only one of her identity groups)?

If the foregoing discussion seems terribly depressing with respect to the possibility of improving intergroup relations, we can only say that understanding the nature of the problems

created by threat is a step forward in searching for solutions to deal with these problems. We believe we have identified threat as a cause of problems in intergroup relations that has not received the attention it deserves, at least not until quite recently. We are hopeful that as the field continues to strive for a more complete understanding of the problems created by threat, we will all be in a better position to devise ways of reducing threats and their negative consequences.

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