



“They are all the same”: Low perceived typicality and outgroup disapproval as buffers of intergroup threat in mass media[☆]

Loes Meeussen^{a,*}, Karen Phalet^a, Joke Meeus^b, Kaat Van Acker^a, Annie Montreuil^c, Richard Bourhis^c

^a University of Leuven, Belgium

^b Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

^c Université de Québec à Montréal, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 November 2011

Received in revised form 21 May 2012

Accepted 29 May 2012

Keywords:

Intergroup contact

Threat

Media

Typicality

Prejudice

ABSTRACT

Three studies examined whether the perceived typicality of a threatening outgroup actor in media messages alters threat effects on attitudes toward the entire outgroup; and whether outgroup (dis)approval of the actor influences perceived typicality. Study 1 measured Dutch majority attitudes toward Moroccans before and after the Van Gogh murder by a Moroccan-Dutch Muslim. Low perceived typicality of the murderer mitigated less favorable attitudes toward Moroccans after the murder. Study 2 used a newspaper report involving a Moroccan perpetrator to manipulate (dis)approval by other Moroccans. Controlling for prior attitudes toward Moroccans, outgroup disapproval effectively reduced the perceived typicality of the perpetrator as a Moroccan. Study 3 manipulated threat to Psychology students' identity by an Economy student's insulting behavior and (dis)approval by other Economy students in a campus magazine interview. Outgroup disapproval reduced the perceived typicality of the insulting student and buffered threat effects on Psychology students' attitudes toward Economy students. We conclude that outgroup disapproval buffers threat effects of negative outgroup behavior in mass media on outgroup attitudes through reducing perceived typicality.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Media routinely highlight minority group membership in relation to negative events, such as crime and social problems. In Flemish-Belgian newspapers, for instance, immigrant minorities are commonly represented as threatening the culture, welfare, and safety of the majority group (Van Acker, Mesquita, Vanbeselaere, & Phalet, in preparation). Similarly, Dutch newspapers most often associate ethnic minorities with negative themes such as crime and societal problems, and less often with positive or neutral themes such as culture, employment, and education (Lubbers, Scheepers, & Wester, 1998). Intergroup threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) states that when particular outgroups are perceived as a source of threat to one's own group, people will develop negative psychological and behavioral reactions toward this threatening group. Accordingly, negative attitudes toward devalued groups in society, such as immigrant, ethnic, or religious minorities,

[☆] The contribution of the 4th author was supported by a Ph.D. fellowship of the Research Foundation- Flanders (FWO).

* Corresponding author at: Center for Social and Cultural Psychology, Department of Psychology, Tiensestraat 102, bus 3727, B-3000 Leuven, Belgium. Tel.: +32 16325886; fax: +32 16325923.

E-mail address: loes.meeussen@psy.kuleuven.be (L. Meeussen).

are often informed by threatening media messages about crime, violence, or social problems involving members of these groups (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Vergeer, Lubbers, & Scheepers, 2000).

A recent example of the role of media in intergroup threat is the Amsterdam street murder of Van Gogh, a controversial Dutch journalist who was accused of blasphemy and stabbed to death by a Moroccan-Dutch Muslim. The murder attracted much national and international media attention and caused further strain on the already tenuous intercultural relations between majority and Muslim minority populations in the Netherlands (d'Haenens & Bink, 2007; Roggeband & Vliegenthart, 2007). Importantly, Dutch media presented different views of the murder and its repercussions on both sides of the Dutch-Muslim divide (d'Haenens & Bink, 2007; Hulshof et al., 2008). In the months following the murder, a predominant frame of the murder as a clash of Muslim and Dutch values was challenged by alternative frames of the murder as an extremist act and a violation of religious values.

Media debates in the aftermath of the Van Gogh murder inspired our main research question: when do people go along with threatening media messages, generalizing the wrongful doings of an individual actor to the outgroup as a whole, and when do they resist threat? Since previous research on media and public attitudes does not address the latter question, our first research aim is to explore what makes some people less susceptible to threat in mass media. Drawing on intergroup contact research, we propose the perceived typicality of an outgroup actor as a crucial moderator of generalized attitudes (Hewstone & Brown, 1986). In the context of threat in mass media, our focus is on the perceived typicality of outgroup perpetrators. If a perpetrator is seen as a typical outgroup member, his offensive act is defined as normative outgroup behavior. As a consequence, threat perceptions and negative evaluations can be expected to generalize to other outgroup members. So far, empirical support for the role of perceived typicality is restricted to research on positive intergroup contact, in which it has been shown that positive contact experiences with a more typical outgroup member more readily generalize to other outgroup members (see Brown & Hewstone, 2005 for a review). Extending these findings to negative contexts, we argue that generalized threat effects of negative media messages will depend on the perceived typicality of the perpetrator as an outgroup member. Thus, we expect that people will be less susceptible to threat and hence endorse less negative attitudes when they see an outgroup actor as a less typical outgroup member. Conversely, high perceived typicality is expected to reinforce threat and to result in more negative attitudes toward the group as a whole: "They are all the same" (*Hypothesis 1*).

An additional research aim is to show that perceived typicality can be situationally influenced by presenting other outgroup members who approve versus disapprove of an outgroup perpetrator's behavior. When disapproving outgroup members portray the actor as an anti-normative or deviant member, we expect that perceived typicality will be reduced. In contrast, outgroup approval of the negative behavior will enhance perceived typicality and hence the generalization of negative feelings from the actor to the outgroup as a whole. Specifically, we expect that outgroup members who disapprove of an aggressive actor effectively reduce perceived typicality (*Hypothesis 2*) – and hence intergroup threat (*Hypothesis 3*). Importantly, this expectation challenges an alternate view of perceived typicality as predetermined by prior intergroup attitudes, so that typicality would only represent part in a self-reinforcing process in which prejudice produces more prejudice.

1.1. Threat in mass media

Realistic group conflict theory argues that threat to ingroup resources or economic interests gives rise to negative outgroup attitudes (Levine & Campbell, 1972). Social identity theory adds that people are motivated to achieve and protect a positive social identity, so that negative attitudes may also arise from perceived threat at the symbolic level of ingroup values or identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Incorporating realistic group conflict theory and social identity theory, intergroup threat theory argues that more negative attitudes will ensue when people perceive an outgroup as posing a threat to ingroup resources or values (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). The negative impact of situationally induced or perceived group threat on intergroup attitudes is well established (e.g., Meeus, Duriez, Vanbeselaere, Phalet, & Kuppens, 2009; Stephan & Renfro, 2002; Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Stephan, Renfro, Esses, Stephan, & Martin, 2005). Perceived threat to the national identity predicted more hostile majority attitudes toward Muslim minorities (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Prior, 2004; Van Acker & Vanbeselaere, 2011). In another study it was found that perceived economic competition with foreign workers increased the support of economic discrimination by native Israeli citizens (Semyonov, Rajman, & Yom-Tov, 2002). Our research extends attitudinal effects of group threat (for a meta-analysis: Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006) to threat in media messages.

Ethnic minority organizations have repeatedly voiced their concern that biased media portrayals of their communities reinforce negative public attitudes toward minorities (d'Haenens & Bink, 2007; Lubbers et al., 1998). The role of media in intergroup relations has been understudied from an intergroup relations perspective due to a predominant research focus on *direct* and *positive* interpersonal contact with outgroup members (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). More recently, the attitudinal impact of positive intergroup contact has been extended to indirect contact with devalued outgroup members (e.g., Crisp & Turner, 2009; Pettigrew, Christ, Wagner, & Stellmacher, 2007; Stathi & Crisp, 2008; Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997). Along those lines, mass media can be seen as an influential source of indirect contact, as they communicate intergroup events to minority and majority audiences on a daily basis (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005; Wright et al., 1997). Importantly, as media messages involving members of minority groups are biased toward negative events or problems, mass media constitute a chronic source of intergroup threat (e.g., Van Acker et al., in preparation; Lubbers et al., 1998). For instance, more frequent exposure to ethnic crime reports in newspapers was longitudinally related to readers' increased perception of threat by ethnic minorities (Vergeer et al., 2000). Similarly, the extent of news coverage of immigration-related

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/947088>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/947088>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)