
In-Group Favoritism and Perceived Similarity: A Look at Russians' Perceptions in the Post-Soviet Era

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Using social identity theory, belief congruence theory, and optimal distinctiveness theory as frameworks, the authors examined whether perceived threat would moderate the relationship between perceived out-group similarity and group evaluations. Russian undergraduates evaluated Russians, Ukrainians, Moldavians, and Georgians on a number of dimensions. It was expected that when an out-group was seen as a severe threat, perceived similarity would result in in-group bias. However, when an out-group was viewed as nonthreatening, perceived similarity was expected to be negatively related to in-group bias. As hypothesized, although perceived similarity and in-group bias were negatively related for those who felt unthreatened by Georgians, a nonsignificant positive relationship existed for those feeling threatened.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the separation of its numerous republics into autonomous or semi-autonomous states, there has been an increase in the expression of nationalistic attitudes in the various republics. The consequences of such nationalistic orientations can readily be observed in the conflicts within Georgia and Azerbaijan and the political turmoil in the Ukraine, Russia, and, most recently, Chechnya. Such conflicts underscore the need to understand the attitudes and beliefs the people of these countries hold of those within and outside of their borders and the need to further understand the nature of intergroup dynamics. The goal of the current study was to examine Russians' percep-

tions of some of the countries that once formed the Soviet Union. Specifically, we were interested in whether the relationship between perceived similarity and group evaluations would be moderated by how threatening various ethnic groups were perceived to be.

Perceived Similarity and Out-Group Evaluations

Russians' evaluations of Ukrainians, Moldavians, and Georgians should be partially determined by perceptions of each group's similarity to Russians. Research in the areas of both interpersonal (Lydon, Jamieson, & Zanna, 1988; Newcombe, 1961) and intergroup relations (Rokeach & Mezei, 1966) has found that perceived similarity tends to result in more positive evaluations of others. According to belief congruence theory, people's feelings about others will be a function of the perceived discrepancy between the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the individual and those of the relevant other (Rokeach, 1960; Rokeach & Mezei, 1966). The more similar to a perceiver an individual or a group is perceived as being, the more positive will be the perceiver's view of the target. Subsequent research in the area of intergroup relations, however, has found mixed support for belief

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congruence theory. In short, belief congruence effects seem to be more likely to occur for assessments that are less influenced by social pressures to conform (i.e., liking and general evaluations) rather than for judgments highly susceptible to such pressures (i.e., acceptance of intergroup dating and marriage) (Insko, Nacoste, & Moe, 1983). Given such findings, one might expect that on general evaluative measures, as perceived out-group similarity increases, Russians should express less in-group favoritism.

Yet, perceived similarity has also been shown to increase in-group bias (Moghaddam & Stringer, 1988). Social identity theorists (Tajfel, 1978) have argued that increased similarity between an in-group and an out-group is seen as threatening. It is argued that individuals form positive social identities from their various group memberships and are motivated to perceive their in-groups as unique and positive. Similar out-groups are seen as threatening this uniqueness and, therefore, the individual's positive social identity. Empirical research, however, has produced inconsistent findings. Although some researchers have found that perceived similarity with an out-group is related to in-group favoritism (Diehl, 1988; Turner, 1978), there is also evidence indicating that out-group similarity is unrelated to intergroup discrimination (Allen & Wilder, 1975). Still others have shown that similarity produces in-group bias primarily when the in-group's status is threatened (Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984). In the present study, if social identity theorists' contention that perceived similarity is inversely related to out-group evaluations is accurate, we should find that as Russians' perceptions of an out-group's similarity increase, there should be a corresponding decrease in their positive evaluations of the out-group.

Researchers examining the role of perceived similarity in intergroup relations have primarily focused on people's behavior toward individual out-group members rather than evaluations of the larger out-group (Diehl, 1988; Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984; Turner, 1978; Wetzel & Insko, 1982). More recently, however, researchers have begun to examine the effects of perceived similarity on group-level evaluations. Struch and Schwartz (1989) found that perceived value dissimilarity was strongly related to perceived levels of intergroup conflict only for those individuals who were strongly identified with the in-group. This finding suggests that, under certain circumstances, group identification will moderate the effects of perceived similarity on intergroup relations. Such findings also support the contention of social identity and self-categorization theorists that individual social identity is tied to the fortunes of the in-group (Brown & Abrams, 1986; Tajfel, 1978, 1982; Turner, 1978).

Brown (1984) proposed that the inconsistency between social identity theory and belief congruence theory could be partially resolved by understanding the role that threat plays in intergroup relations. Brown argued that, although perceived similarity will generally lead to positive impressions of an out-group, if the out-group is perceived as threatening to the in-group's status or uniqueness, perceptions of similarity will result in more negative evaluations of the out-group. Research has shown that when an in-group's status (Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984) or uniqueness (Roccas & Schwartz, 1993) has been brought into question, group members will exhibit increased in-group bias. In two studies, Brown (1984; Brown & Abrams, 1986) found that out-group similarity led to greater liking for those subjects who scored low on a measure of competitiveness. In contrast, subjects high in competitiveness exhibited less liking of a similar out-group. These results were post hoc in nature and should be viewed with caution; however, they suggest that people who perceive an out-group as a threat will be more likely to exhibit in-group favoritism as out-group similarity increases.

More recently, self-categorization theories such as Brewer's (1991) model of optimal distinctiveness and Turner's (1987) self-categorization theory have brought additional insight to the relationship between perceived threat and in-group bias. For example, Brewer proposed that a person's sense of self is partially derived from the individual's need to view the self and others as members of a particular social category while simultaneously seeing the self as unique. She argued that low levels of inclusiveness are accompanied by a low need for differentiation and a high need for assimilation. In this state, the individual may experience a sense of isolation and be motivated to feel as though she or he is part of a group. In comparison, high levels of inclusiveness are associated with a high need for differentiation and a low desire for assimilation. In such situations, the person experiences a deep sense of depersonalization that can accompany being an undifferentiated member of a group. This lack of differentiation enhances the desire to be viewed, and to view oneself, as an individual. Optimal distinctiveness occurs at the point at which an individual experiences moderate levels of both assimilation and differentiation.

When an out-group is perceived as a threat, the need for differentiation from the in-group should decrease, and the desire for assimilation with the in-group should increase. Such circumstances should lead to greater levels of in-group bias and out-group differentiation, because the self is highly associated with the in-group. The bias should be enhanced as the perception of similarity between the in-group and the out-group increases because of the desire to differentiate the in-group from the

out-group. If an out-group is perceived as nonthreatening, people's need to express in-group favoritism will be reduced because the need for inclusion is lowered and differentiation is enhanced. Consequently, as perceived similarity increases, less in-group favoritism should be exhibited because the need for assimilation with the in-group decreases.

OVERVIEW

In the current study, Russian students evaluated Ukrainians, Moldavians, and Georgians, as well as Russians, on a number of trait dimensions. They also assessed how similar each group was to Russians and how threatening each group was to Russia and Russians. Historically, each of the groups has had very different relations with Russia. Because an in-depth historical review is beyond the scope of this article, the reader is referred to Kremenjuk (1994) and Goldenberg (1994). However, given their common Slavic ancestry, religion, and culture and the number of ethnic Russians in the Ukraine, Ukrainians should be perceived as similar to Russians. Furthermore, compared with the other two groups, Russians' perceptions of Ukrainians should be relatively positive given the relative lack of internal conflict that has occurred in the republic since its independence. Also, until the Ukrainian government called for the division of the Black Sea Fleet after the 1991 independence referendum passed, relations between the two nation states could generally be described as amicable. Even this conflict was resolved peacefully and by diplomatic means. Consequently, Ukrainians should be perceived in a relatively positive manner and as fairly similar to Russians.

Historically, there has been very little conflict between Russia and Georgia (Kremenjuk, 1994). In fact, Georgia and, in particular, its capital of Tbilisi have been viewed as a center of intellectual activity and architectural excellence, and its people have been perceived as friendly and open. However, the political conflicts that have engulfed the republic, and that have involved the Russian military, since its independence in 1990 have resulted in considerable tension between the two republics.

The conflict that arose in Moldavia, after it proclaimed its independence in the summer of 1990, received considerable attention in Russia because it involved both ethnic Russians who had settled in Moldavia and military units who were dispatched from Russia to protect the ethnic Russian and Ukrainian populations. Although, at times, the conflict in Moldavia was as intense as that in Georgia, for our purposes it differed in at least one major way. Specifically, whereas the Georgian conflict continued until early 1994, the Moldavian conflict had, for the most part, been resolved by the end of the summer of 1992. Consequently, at the time the

present data were collected, the Moldavian conflict was in a period of diplomatic resolution. By comparison, the Russian government was still engaged in both military and political conflict in Georgia. Thus, whereas Moldavia, and ethnic Moldavians, had ceased to be a major issue or concern to most Russians, the crisis in Georgia was ongoing, making Georgians a greater potential threat to Russians.

Thus, we expected that participants' evaluations of Russians, the in-group, would be positive, whereas their evaluations of Georgians would be the least positive and most negative, given the recent conflicts between these two nations. We also expected that perceptions of out-group threat would moderate the relationship between perceived out-group similarity and in-group favoritism. For those who felt unthreatened by an out-group, perceived similarity would result in less in-group favoritism and less out-group derogation. In contrast, those who felt threatened by the out-group were expected to exhibit more in-group favoritism and out-group derogation as the out-group's perceived similarity to the in-group increased.

METHOD

Subjects

Participants were 214 undergraduates at the University of St. Petersburg (80% women and 20% men), who volunteered to participate in the study. The data were collected in the fall of 1993, approximately 2½ years after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Materials

Participants completed a questionnaire that included items assessing group-level evaluations, group similarity, and identification with Russians, Georgians, Moldavians, and Ukrainians. They also completed a set of items that examined the impact that each group had on various aspects of life in Russia.

Group-Level Perceptions

Participants assessed the relationship between each of the four ethnic groups and the following traits: hostile, friendly, motivated, intelligent, greedy, and wealthy. The assessments were made on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all related*) to 9 (*extremely related*).

Perceived Similarity

Similarity was assessed using a 7-point scale (ranging from 1 = *not at all similar* to 7 = *very similar*) on which subjects rated how similar each group was to their own nationality.

Group Identification

Group identification was assessed by having participants rate how identified they were with being Russian on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all identified*) to 5 (*very identified*). Because the majority of participants were highly identified as Russian, the sample was divided into two groups—those who were low to moderate in identification (scores ranging from 1 to 3, $n = 22$) and those high in identification (scores of either 4 or 5, $n = 182$).

Perceived Threat

Participants assessed which of the groups were a threat to the existence of Russia (external threat) and which groups were major contributors to delinquency and violence in Russia (internal threat). For each item, if a group was not mentioned, it was given a score of 0; if mentioned, it was given a score of 1. This measure was adapted from the Euro-Barometer 30 survey (Reif & Melich, 1991).

RESULTS

As can be seen in Table 1, Russians generally viewed Moldavians and Ukrainians as nonthreatening. In comparison, Georgians were perceived as being both an internal and an external threat to Russia.

Perceived Similarity

Table 2 presents the means for perceived similarity as a function of group identity. A 2 (group identity) \times 3 (ethnicity: Moldavian vs. Georgian vs. Ukrainian) mixed-factors ANOVA was conducted, with group identity as a between-groups factor and perceived similarity treated as a within-subjects factor. The analysis revealed a significant main effect for nationality, $F(2, 418) = 28.80, p < .0001$. Newman-Keuls analyses ($p < .05$) indicated that Ukrainians were perceived as significantly more similar to Russians than were Moldavians or Georgians. As expected, Georgians were perceived as the least similar to Russians. The main effect for ethnicity was qualified by a significant Group Identity \times Ethnicity interaction, $F(2, 418) = 9.62, p < .0005$. As is shown in Table 2, those low in in-group identification did not perceive any one out-group to be more or less similar to Russians than the other groups. In comparison, highly identified Russians viewed Ukrainians as significantly more similar to Russians than either Moldavians or Georgians (Newman-Keuls, $p < .05$). These participants also perceived Moldavians, in comparison with Georgians, to be significantly more similar to Russians. Simple effects analyses also revealed that highly identified participants perceived Ukrainians as more similar to Russians than did those low in in-group identification, $t(210) = 3.15, p <$

TABLE 1: Percentage of Russians Perceiving Each Ethnic Group as a Threat to Russia

Ethnicity	Type of Threat			
	NI/NE	I/NE	NI/E	I/E
Moldavians	72.4	13.6	5.6	8.4
Ukrainians	75.7	5.6	15.0	3.7
Georgians	22.0	41.6	5.6	30.8

NOTE: NI = not an internal threat; NE = not an external threat; I = internal threat; E = external threat.

TABLE 2: Perceived Similarity as a Function of Group Ethnicity and Russian Group Identification

Group Identification	Ethnicity		
	Ukrainians	Moldavians	Georgians
Low ($n = 22$)	3.27 _a	2.68 _a	2.41 _a
High ($n = 182$)	5.14 _a	3.44 _b	1.90 _c

NOTE: Mean ratings could range from 1 to 7; higher numbers indicate greater perceived similarity. Means with differing subscripts across the rows differ at or below $p < .05$.

TABLE 3: Mean Trait Ratings as a Function of Group Ethnicity

Trait	Ethnicity			
	Russians	Ukrainians	Moldavians	Georgians
Hostile	2.90	4.28	4.65	5.91
Greedy	2.90	5.51	4.79	5.32
Wealthy	3.64	5.11	5.07	7.21
Intelligent	7.26	5.82	5.52	5.12
Friendly	7.47	5.97	5.55	4.73

NOTE: Mean ratings could range from 1 to 9; higher numbers indicate a greater perceived relationship.

.005. No significant differences were found between low and highly identified Russians' perceptions of Moldavians' and Georgians' similarity. Given the disproportionate cell sizes, any differences between highly identified and low to moderately identified groups should be interpreted with caution.

Group Identification and In-Group Favoritism

Table 3 presents the participants' mean assessments of the relationship between each of the five traits for each national group. To reduce the number of analyses conducted, the traits for each group were submitted to separate factor analyses with varimax rotations. As can be seen in Table 4, for Russians, Ukrainians, and Moldavians, the analyses yielded a Positive factor consisting of the traits intelligent and friendly and a Negative factor composed of the traits greedy, hostile, and wealthy, although for Georgians, the analysis revealed only a

TABLE 4: Factor Scores for Trait Ratings as a Function of Group Ethnicity

Trait	Ethnicity						
	Russians		Ukrainians		Moldavians		Georgians
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1
Hostile	.71		.47		.72		.78
Greedy	.59		.76		.72		.48
Wealthy	.71		.81		.73		.55
Intelligent		.82		.81		.70	-.60
Friendly		.69		.82		.76	-.77

single factor. Consequently, the two-factor model was used for data reduction because it seemed to best describe the relationship among the variables for three out of the four groups. Mean indices for the Positive and Negative factors were then computed for each of the four ethnic groups. Alpha coefficients for the two indices across the four groups ranged from .34 (Moldavians-Positive) to .66 (Ukrainians-Positive).¹

If, as social identity theorists argue, those who are highly identified with their in-group feel threatened by similar out-groups, we should find that highly identified Russians view Ukrainians more negatively, or at least less positively, than those who are only moderately identified as Russian. To examine this hypothesis, we conducted a 2 (group identity) × 4 (ethnicity: Russian vs. Ukrainian vs. Moldavian vs. Georgian) × 2 (rating: positive vs. negative) mixed-factors ANOVA, with the first factor being between groups and the latter two being treated as within-subjects factors. The analysis yielded significant main effects for nationality, $F(3, 624) = 2.43, p < .07$, and rating, $F(1, 208) = 47.11, p < .0001$. Contrary to what social identity theory would predict, the Group Identity × Ethnicity interaction was nonsignificant, $F(3, 624) = .67, ns$. The main effects for rating and nationality were qualified by a significant Ethnicity × Rating interaction, $F(3, 624) = 75.05, p < .0001$. Simple effects analyses revealed significant main effects for nationality for each of the two indices, Positive $F(3, 624) = 41.53, p < .0001$, Negative $F(3, 624) = 66.88, p < .0001$. As can be seen in Table 5, Newman-Keuls analyses indicated Russians were perceived as significantly more positive than the remaining groups. Most important, Ukrainians were viewed more positively than either Moldavians or Georgians. Moldavians, in turn, were perceived more positively than Georgians. In contrast, Georgians were perceived more negatively than the remaining groups, and Russians were viewed in the least negative manner.

The results support the contention that, at least with general measures of evaluation, perceived similarity results in more positive out-group evaluations (Insko et al., 1983).

TABLE 5: Mean Trait Evaluation Indexes as a Function of Group Ethnicity

Trait Indexes	Ethnicity			
	Russians	Ukrainians	Moldavians	Georgians
Positive	7.36 _a	5.88 _b	5.52 _c	4.91 _d
Negative	3.15 _a	4.96 _b	4.84 _b	6.13 _c

NOTE: Means with different subscripts across the rows differ at or below $p < .05$.

High In-Group Identification and the Relationship Between Out-Group Evaluation, In-Group Favoritism, and Similarity

Looking at only those participants who were highly identified as Russian, we conducted correlational analyses examining the relationship between perceived similarity and out-group evaluations. Low-identification participants were not included in the analyses because of their small number. We did not see the exclusion of low-identification participants as problematic because previous research has found that highly identified in-group members drive the interaction between group evaluations and perceived out-group similarity. Table 6 presents the correlations between participants' perceptions of each group's similarity and their evaluations of each group. As can be seen, perceived similarity was positively correlated with positive evaluations for each of the three groups, and it was negatively correlated with negative evaluations for all groups except Moldavians.

In-group favoritism was assessed by forming a series of in-group favoritism scores.² In creating the scores, participants' positive evaluation score for each out-group was subtracted from their positive evaluation score for Russians. Thus, positive scores reflect in-group favoritism, whereas negative scores reflect out-group favoritism. The same procedure was used to create out-group derogation indexes using participants' negative evaluation scores, with positive scores reflecting in-group derogation and negative scores reflecting out-group derogation. As can be seen in Table 7, perceived out-

TABLE 6: Correlations Between Perceived Similarity of Out-Group and Trait Indexes as a Function of Group Ethnicity

Trait Indexes	Ethnicity		
	Ukrainians	Moldavians	Georgians
Positive	.36**	.24**	.27**
Negative	-.24**	.03	-.21*

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.**TABLE 7: Correlations Between In-Group Favoritism, Out-Group Derogation, and Perceived Similarity of Out-Group as a Function of Group Ethnicity**

	Ethnicity		
	Ukrainians	Moldavians	Georgians
In-group favoritism	-.29**	-.19*	-.27**
Out-group derogation	.21*	.06	.23**

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

group similarity was negatively related to in-group favoritism and positively related to out-group derogation. These findings indicate that even for highly identified group members, perceived similarity does not necessarily lead to in-group favoritism or out-group derogation.

Predicting Out-Group Evaluations as a Function of Perceived Threat and Out-Group Similarity

To examine the hypothesis that perceived threat would moderate the relationship between perceived out-group similarity and group favoritism, we conducted a series of multiple regression analyses using only those highly identified Russians who either perceived Georgians as both an internal and an external threat to Russia ($n = 57$) or perceived Georgians as no threat to Russia ($n = 43$).³ Those who stated that Georgians were a threat on one of the items but not the other were not included in the analysis, because there were no means by which to assess the relative importance, or significance, of each threat.

In the first set of regression analyses, positive and negative evaluations of Georgians were regressed on perceived threat ($-1 = \text{no threat}$, $1 = \text{threat}$), perceived similarity, and the interaction of these two variables. In conducting each analysis, similarity and threat were entered into the equation first, followed by the Similarity \times Threat interaction term. Both perceived threat ($\beta = -.41$, $p < .05$) and perceived similarity ($\beta = .31$, $p < .08$) predicted positive evaluations of Georgians. Thus, Russians who felt threatened by Georgians evaluated them less positively than those who did not feel threatened. Also, as similarity increased, so did participants' positive evaluations. The addition of the interaction term did not

result in a significant change in percentage of variance explained (R^2 change = .01, $p > .10$).

Perceived threat also predicted negative evaluations of Georgians ($\beta = .41$, $p < .01$). Perceived similarity, however, was unrelated to negative evaluations ($\beta = -.15$, $p > .10$). The addition of the Similarity \times Threat interaction term resulted in a marginally significant increase in the explained variance (R^2 change = .03, $p < .06$). Simple effects analyses revealed that, for those who felt unthreatened, perceived similarity led to less negative evaluations of Georgians ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .08$). In comparison, for those who saw Georgians as a threat, there was a nonsignificant positive relationship between similarity and negative out-group evaluations ($\beta = .51$, $p > .10$). The interaction was further examined by bifurcating similarity at its median. For participants who did not view Georgians as similar, perceived threat did not influence negative evaluations of Georgians. In comparison, those participants who viewed Georgians as somewhat similar and as a threat evaluated the group more negatively than did those perceiving Georgians as nonthreatening.

Positive in-group favoritism was then examined by regressing the positive in-group bias index on similarity, threat, and the Similarity \times Threat interaction term. As expected, perceived threat was a positive predictor of in-group bias ($\beta = .52$, $p < .05$), with low-threat participants exhibiting less in-group favoritism than high-threat participants. Perceived similarity was also a significant predictor of in-group bias, $\beta = -.45$, $p < .05$, with an increase in similarity resulting in less in-group favoritism. These main effects were qualified by a marginally significant Similarity \times Threat interaction, R^2 change = .03, $p < .08$. Simple effects analyses revealed that for low-threat participants, an increase in perceived similarity resulted in a significant decrease in in-group favoritism, $\beta = -.59$, $p < .005$. For high-threat participants, a nonsignificant positive relationship was found between similarity and in-group favoritism, $\beta = .56$, $p > .10$. Again, the interaction was further examined by bifurcating similarity at its median. For participants who did not view Georgians as similar, perceived threat did not influence in-group bias. In comparison, participants who viewed Georgians as somewhat similar and as a threat exhibited greater in-group bias than did those perceiving the group as nonthreatening.

The use of the out-group derogation index allowed us to determine whether the out-group was evaluated more negatively than the in-group rather than simply less positively. The hierarchical regression analysis revealed a significant main effect for threat, $\beta = -.42$, $p < .05$. Those who viewed Georgians as a threat were more likely to derogate the group than were participants who did not view Georgians as threatening. The main effect for threat was qualified by a marginally significant Similar-

ity \times Threat interaction, R^2 change = .03, $p < .07$. Simple effects analyses indicated that those viewing Georgians as nonthreatening evaluated Georgians less negatively, relative to Russians, as perceived similarity increased, $\beta = .39$, $p < .05$. For threatened participants, although the relationship was nonsignificant, Georgians were seen more negatively, relative to Russians, as perceived similarity increased, $\beta = -.54$, $p > .10$. Subsequent analyses indicated that when Georgians were viewed as dissimilar, out-group derogation did not vary as a function of perceived threat. In comparison, among participants who viewed Georgians as somewhat similar, those viewing Georgians as threatening were more likely to derogate Georgians than were those unthreatened by the group.

The regression analyses show some support for the perceived threat hypothesis. Whereas participants who felt unthreatened by Georgians exhibited more in-group favoritism and out-group derogation as perceived similarity decreased, those who felt threatened exhibited a tendency toward in-group favoritism and out-group derogation as similarity increased. The nonsignificant trends for high-threat participants are most likely due to the fact that the majority of high-threat participants expressed a general lack of similarity with Georgians, whereas low-threat participants were more varied in their perceptions. Significance may have been reached had there been more variance in perceptions of similarity.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between perceived threat, perceived similarity, and intergroup evaluations in a nonlaboratory setting. The findings indicated that perceived similarity generally resulted in positive out-group evaluations. As important, there was no evidence that perceived similarity was positively related to either out-group derogation or in-group favoritism for highly identified in-group members. In fact, the exact opposite was found; highly identified Russians perceived the out-groups more positively as perceived similarity increased. Perceived out-group similarity was also negatively related to in-group favoritism. Most important, perceived threat was shown to moderate the relationship between perceived similarity and group evaluations. Specifically, for nonthreatened participants, perceived out-group similarity was positively associated to positive impressions of Georgians. In contrast, threatened participants exhibited more negative impressions of Georgians as perceived similarity increased.

Social identity theorists have argued that the perception of intergroup similarity jeopardizes group distinctiveness and, therefore, leads to in-group bias. Our results bring this assumption into question because in this study, perceived similarity generally resulted in more

positive evaluations of out-groups. Given the nonexperimental nature of the study, it might be argued that the current results were due to participants' group membership not being made salient. Social identity theorists, as well as others, have proposed that the self-concept consists of various self-images that fall along a continuum ranging from individual-specific characteristics to social-categorical characteristics (Abrams, 1992; Fiske & Neuberg, 1988; Turner, 1982). It could be that participants were taking more of an individual, as opposed to group, orientation in evaluating each group and that such an orientation might lead to the current results. However, a number of studies have found in-group bias when group membership was not made salient (Ng, 1986; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1985), and others have shown perceived similarity to be negatively related to in-group bias using the minimal group paradigm (Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984). Thus, the current findings are more in line with belief congruency theory.

Given the small number of participants who were low on group identification, the group identification results should be interpreted with caution. With this in mind, however, the finding that increased in-group identification did not predict in-group bias was also inconsistent with social identity theory. Instead, the lack of a significant difference in in-group bias between high- and low-identified participants is consistent with Hinkle and Brown's (1990) assertion that group identification is, for the most part, uncorrelated with in-group favoritism.

Although the results mentioned thus far are consistent with belief congruency theory, the findings indicating that perceived threat moderates the relationship between perceived similarity and group evaluations raise questions about the adequacy of belief congruency theory to account for intergroup evaluations. Such findings, however, are in line with current models of self-categorization, such as optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991). As optimal distinctiveness theory suggests, if an out-group is seen as threatening to one's group, this should result in a heightened need for affiliation and, hence, favoritism toward and more positive evaluations of the in-group. In the present study, when Georgians were seen as a threat, the perception of out-group similarity resulted in in-group favoritism and out-group derogation. These findings are also in line with previous research indicating that when an in-group's existence or supremacy is threatened, greater in-group bias is exhibited (Roccas & Schwartz, 1993; Turner, 1978). As important, they demonstrate that the relationship between similarity and intergroup evaluations is fairly complex (Brown, 1984; Brown & Abrams, 1986).

The finding that participants were as likely to derogate Georgians as they were to exhibit in-group favoritism is inconsistent with much of the previous work in

intergroup evaluations. Generally, it has been found that in-group members exhibit in-group favoritism rather than out-group derogation. Such findings have led to a general assumption that group bias is manifested primarily through in-group favoritism. A considerable amount of past work, however, has used either the minimal group paradigm or a derivation of the paradigm—although in a field study, Jaspars and Warnaen (1982) reached a similar conclusion. Because people are generally hesitant to derogate individuals or groups of which they know little, one might expect disproportionate displays of in-group favoritism rather than out-group derogation. But members of intact groups who are in conflict or who have a history of conflict should express not only in-group favoritism but also out-group derogation. The classic work of Levine and Campbell (1972) provided some evidence of this (see also Bronfenbrenner, 1961; Salazar & Marin, 1977). More recently, Struch and Schwartz (1989) found a small but significant positive correlation between perceived conflict and what they called “out-group negativity bias.” Our findings clearly indicate people’s willingness to exhibit out-group derogation. The question of when out-group derogation will be expressed must be further explored in subsequent research. It may be that such an expression primarily occurs during or preceding periods of intense intergroup conflict. Thus, the preponderance of research revealing in-group favoritism rather than out-group derogation may be an outgrowth of the old adage “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.” However, feelings of discomfort with expressing negative feelings may dissipate as intergroup conflict intensifies.

According to realistic group conflict theory (Campbell, 1965), conflict between groups is a consequence of actual conflicts in group interests. Thus, given the findings that Russians tended to view Georgians as more of a threat than Moldavians or Ukrainians, it would follow that they would also perceive Georgians negatively. It might be expected, then, that those who felt as though Georgians were neither an internal nor an external threat would evaluate them in the same manner as Moldavians and Ukrainians. Subsequent analyses indicated that although this was indeed the case for the positive index, Georgians were still viewed more negatively than either Moldavians or Ukrainians regardless of whether they were viewed as a threat. Thus, positive, but not negative, impressions seem to be a function of the perception of internal and external threat. As mentioned in the overview, it is possible that the negative impression of Georgians was a result of observing the internal conflict occurring within Georgia at the time of the survey. Research examining interracial behavior and perceptions has found that simply observing or hearing about the hostile actions of an out-group mem-

ber will result in increased stereotyping and the expression of negative affect toward the out-group as a whole (Henderson-King, 1995; Henderson-King & Nisbett, 1996).

CONCLUSION

To summarize, the findings of this study clearly indicate that as perceived similarity increases, in-group members will exhibit less in-group favoritism. Perceived threat, however, at least for highly identified in-group members, moderates the relationship between out-group similarity and in-group favoritism. We view such findings as important, first, because they lend further support, albeit indirectly, to multiple process models of intergroup relations such as the theory of optimal distinctiveness. Second, the findings are important because they show that the complex relationship between perceived similarity and group evaluations exists outside the laboratory and, in particular, in current international relations.

NOTES

1. Although the reliability coefficients are somewhat low, Thorndike, Cunningham, Thorndike, and Hagen (1991) have shown that with relatively large sample sizes ($N > 100$), measures with low reliabilities will still be accurate in drawing conclusions.

2. Although a considerable body of research has shown that in-group bias is most frequently characterized by in-group favoritism rather than out-group derogation (Brewer, 1979; Platow, McClintock, & Liebrand, 1990), the majority of the work has used a minimal group paradigm rather than intact groups. Intact groups, particularly those having some history of conflict, may be as likely to display out-group derogation as well as in-group favoritism. Furthermore, we examined in-group favoritism and out-group derogation in addition to out-group evaluations because perceiving an out-group in either a positive or a negative manner does not necessarily mean that an individual will exhibit in-group favoritism or derogate the out-group relative to the in-group.

3. The analyses were conducted only on participants’ evaluations of Georgians because so few participants viewed Ukrainians or Moldavians as either internal or external threats.

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