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**The Role of Leadership Responsibility and Social Identity on
Intra- and Intergroup Leadership Favorability Ratings**

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Abstract

Building on recent work using Social Identity Theory as a conceptual framework for analyzing leadership dynamics (Hogg, 2001; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2003; Haslam & Platow, 2001; Lord & Hall, 2003; Kramer, 2003), we conducted two studies to examine how information about leaders' responsibility for a negative world event and group members' social identification affect leader favorability ratings. In contrast to traditional leadership research, which often focuses on intragroup leadership, we adopted an intergroup leadership dynamics perspective—which studies leadership in a multi-group context (Pittinsky, 2004)—and examined favorability ratings for both domestic and foreign leaders. In Study 1, conducted in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, we hypothesized that participants would be more favorable toward their own leadership when another nation's leaders were largely responsible for a negative event. Data did not support this hypothesis, likely due to contextual political factors. A second hypothesis – that outgroup leaders would be rated significantly less favorably when responsible for the negative event—was supported. Study 2 replicated the first study in the United States, but this time strength of participants' national identification was measured. Study 2 found that participants who strongly identify with their nation feel significantly more favorable towards their leaders when another nation's leadership is responsible for a negative event. Participants who weakly identify do not show this effect. As predicted, regardless of strength of identification, participants view outgroup leadership more negatively when it is responsible for the negative event. Implications of these findings for leadership studies through the lens of self and identity are discussed.

The Role of Leadership Responsibility and Social Identity on Intra- and Intergroup Leadership Favorability Ratings

How does domestic leaders' responsibility for negative events shape the public's favorability ratings of them? Are the patterns the same when the public evaluates foreign leaders? How does the strength of social identification with the national collective influence these patterns?

These questions are critical to the examination of the self, identity, and leadership. They are also of critical importance to politicians endeavoring to understand the needs and desires of their constituents; to the media, as they attempt to predict the outcomes of national elections and the impact of current events on followers; and to ordinary citizens comparing their own views to the views of those around them. In the United States, for example, an array of research programs map fluctuations in the favorability ratings of the national leadership (e.g., Newport, 2003, October 28). Political pundits and commentators, elected officials, and campaign managers of aspiring leaders monitor the results of favorability polls closely. Commentators often go behind the numbers, attributing increases and decreases in the favorability ratings of an incumbent national leader to his or her actions on the international stage (e.g., Lizza, 2004, April 23).

Nevertheless, experimental research on the effects of leader responsibility for international events on leader favorability ratings is fairly new. Recent research in the laboratory has begun providing critical insights into how members of groups process information and perceive their leaders by drawing from the study of social identity groups and the study of leadership (Hogg, 2001; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2003; Haslam & Platow, 2001; Lord & Hall, 2003; Kramer, 2003). A series of programmatic research studies have used social

identity and self-categorization theories to understand the relationship between leaders and followers (see Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003).

These studies have shed valuable light on what may be termed *intragroup* leadership, the dynamics that occur between a single leader and a single set of followers (e.g., Haslam & Platow, 2001; Hogg, Hains, & Mason, 1998). But understanding leadership dynamics in international settings, where there are multiple leaders leading or affecting multiple groups, requires an additional *intergroup* perspective (Pittinsky, 2004). The relative scarcity of research on intergroup leadership dynamics is notable because cross-group interactions often occur solely between the leaders of different groups, with other group members having little or no contact with one another. Nowhere is this more true than in the realm of national identity groups and international relations. Citizens of countries that are isolated from each other by geographical, social, and/or political barriers are unlikely to have direct contact with one another. Yet, through global media, citizens of one country will often be exposed to the leaders of other countries.

In the current studies we examine how national leaders' responsibility for a world event, and the strength of citizens' identification with their nation, influence citizens' favorability ratings of both their own leaders and those of other nations. We hypothesize, consistent with the tenets of Social Identity Theory, that as visible and symbolic members of the ingroup, leaders will benefit from self- and group-enhancement biases that have been shown to operate at the individual and small-group levels of analysis. In contrast, we expect that favorability ratings for the leaders of other nations will fluctuate according to the perceived impact of their actions. Thus, when a negative event is tied to the actions of leaders, favorability of one's own nation's leadership, but not that of foreign leadership, will be maintained through protective social information processing. Because social identity enhancement motives are the key mechanisms

hypothesized to account for differential perceptions of ingroup and outgroup leaders, this pattern is expected to be observed most clearly among citizens who strongly identify with their national identity group.

Self- and Group-Enhancement Biases

One motive that has been put forth to explain the formation of psychological ties to social groups is the motive to maintain positive self-esteem. Comparing one's group positively to another heightens one's self esteem, and therefore inspires a number of behavioral and perceptual processes to ensure that these comparisons are indeed favorable (Brewer & Brown, 1998). Events are interpreted in ways that bolster the view of one's ingroup relative to that of the outgroup. One such mechanism has been termed the ultimate attribution error. This bias is expressed when people attribute positive events to stable, dispositional factors of ingroup members but attribute negative events to external factors. In contrast, when making attributions regarding outgroup members, positive events are generally attributed to external factors, while negative events are viewed as indicative of the dispositions of outgroup members (Hewstone, 1990; Pettigrew, 1979). This results in different evaluations of behaviors and events depending on who is being evaluated. While responsibility for an event may reflect poorly on a member of an outgroup, responsibility for the same event may have no such effect on one's evaluations of an ingroup member.

There is evidence that this perspective can be profitably used to account for perceptions of group leaders. Platow and colleagues conducted a set of studies that examined the conditions regulating endorsements of group leaders (Platow, Hoar, Reid, Harley, & Morrison, 1997). They found that ingroup leaders were most strongly endorsed when they favored members of the ingroup, while outgroup leaders were viewed most positively when they made decisions that

adhered to the principles of fairness. Thus, outgroup leaders suffered when they sacrificed fairness in order to favor their group members, while ingroup members suffered when they chose fairness over favoritism. Extending this work, Platow and van Knippenberg (2001) showed that prototypical leaders—those who followers feel are most “like us”—are cloaked by group members’ proclivity to view their leadership in positive ways. Regardless of whom such leaders favor—ingroup or outgroup members—or how fairly they make their decisions, prototypical leaders are more strongly endorsed than leaders who are viewed as more closely aligned with an outgroup (Hains, Hogg, & Duck, 1997; Hogg, Hains, & Mason, 1998). People are willing to endorse prototypical leaders even when they act against the best interests of the group (Duck & Fielding, 2003).

These findings have strong implications for our examination of leadership responsibility, social identification, and favorability ratings of domestic and foreign leaders. Members of national identity groups (i.e., citizens) often identify strongly with their leaders. Leaders represent the traits, attributes, and qualities of their group to the outside world. In effect, the leader becomes the ultimate group member and is therefore likely to be protected by citizens’ desire to view him or her favorably. Thus, information about world events in general, and the responsibility of an ingroup leader for negative events in particular, is likely to be interpreted in ways that cast a positive light on one’s own national leadership.

The leaders of outgroup nations are not protected by such group-enhancement motives. The negative actions of foreign leaders may actually have a positive impact on citizens’ views of their *own* leadership. One way that the members of identity groups have been found to maintain positive self-esteem is through the use of positive social comparisons with outgroups. Thus,

domestic leaders may benefit from the contrast between themselves and foreign leaders who have engaged in negative actions.

Study 1

Our first study was designed to examine favorability ratings of domestic and foreign leadership by adopting a social identity framework. We described to participants a negative international situation: hunger and malnutrition in another nation. We examined how individuals would use this information to shape their favorability ratings of ingroup and outgroup leadership. Our presentation of the responsibility for the negative event was manipulated. In one condition, the leadership of the participants' own nation was identified as responsible. In a second condition, the leadership of the nation whose citizens are suffering was identified as responsible. Finally, in a control condition, neither ingroup nor outgroup leadership was identified as responsible. Instead, a natural event—a drought—was identified as responsible. Our outcome of interest in this study was the *favorability rating* of leadership. We chose favorability rating as the dependent measure because it is an attitude that is frequently measured in political polls and is commonly used to benchmark one leader against another, make predictions about the likely outcomes of elections, and assess the impact of world events on public perception of leaders (Newport, 2003, October 28).

Based on Social Identity Theory, and the emerging work on social categorization effects in intragroup leadership dynamics, we predicted that participants would maintain favorable views of their leaders even when those leaders were described as responsible for negative events. We also predicted that when the leadership of another nation was described as responsible, a group-serving social comparison would be made and favorable attitudes towards ingroup leadership would increase. These predictions led to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Participants will express similar favorability towards their leadership whether it is described as largely responsible for a negative event or nature is described as responsible.

Hypothesis 2: Participants will express greater favorability for ingroup leadership when another nation's leadership is largely responsible for a negative event than when nature is responsible.

There is, of course, very little incentive for participants to form and maintain positive views of other nations' leadership. Therefore, favorability ratings of outgroup leadership will depend principally on the role that outgroup leadership played in bringing about the negative event.

Hypothesis 3: Participants will express less favorability for outgroup leadership when that leadership is largely responsible for a negative event than when nature is responsible.

Method

Participants and Design

The People's Republic of China was selected for our first study of social identity, leader responsibility, and intra- and intergroup favorability ratings for two reasons. As a first study in a new area, we sought to conduct the research in a setting in which national identification is strong. Psychologists have found evidence of strong social identification and group identity in China. Research has shown that people in China score high in collectivism and interdependence, and that a strong sense of group identity is integrated into their sense of self (Triandis, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Further, China was selected because we wished to examine these dynamics in a place where political support for leadership would be more uniform than would likely be the case in a multi-party political system.

Several research sites in China were approached. Cooperation was secured from a university in Hong Kong. Students were solicited for participation in an online study through one of two methods. Emails were sent to all university campus residents through the Student Office, inviting them to participate in a “social studies” survey. Flyers were posted on campus, which contained the same information that was in the email.

Fifty-eight people participated in the study: 31 undergraduates, eight graduate students, one secondary school student, 17 part-time students, and one individual employed full-time. All participants were asked to indicate their nationality in an open-ended question at the end of the study. Because this study focused on the perceptions of national leadership, we excluded from analysis all expatriates. The final sample included 55 individuals, 39 of whom were female. The median age was 21, and most participants were full-time graduate or undergraduate students (69%). Based on the recommendation of a Hong Kong researcher, the survey was administered in English over the Internet.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: the leadership of participants’ nation responsible for a negative event, the leadership of an outgroup responsible, or nature responsible (i.e., a drought). Each experimental condition contained between 17 and 21 respondents.

Procedure

Upon entering the experiment website, participants were presented a description of the African country of Lesotho, which received its independence in 1966. Lesotho was chosen because pretest data revealed that it was an African country about which participants would have little prior detailed knowledge. Participants were reminded that there are 54 different countries in Africa, to eliminate the chance they would not believe Lesotho was an actual nation.

The description of Lesotho which we provided was a composite of data available from the World Food Program for its reference group: developing nations in Africa. Lesotho was said to be one of the world's 49 Least Developed Countries, which means that it has a per capita GDP under US \$900, low levels of human capital development, and economic vulnerability (all criteria were briefly described). Additional information included the population of the country (2,207,954), land area (30,255 square miles), population density (72 people/square mile), and average life expectancy (49 years).

After reading the general information about Lesotho, participants were exposed to the experimental manipulation and completed a brief questionnaire through which all dependent measures were collected. After completion, participants were directed to another website with debriefing information. Finally, participants were contacted by the researcher for a personal debriefing. Participants were compensated (approximately US \$5).

Independent Variable

Responsibility for negative event. Following the general information about Lesotho, with which all participants were provided, participants read a paragraph describing the reason why that nation is experiencing difficulties. Participants in the *own leader responsible* condition read:

Lesotho is a country that has suffered largely due to the actions of your nation's leaders. Lesotho has virtually run out of food, yet they have received little formal help from your nation. Largely as a result of the leadership of your country, the people of Lesotho will continue to live each day hungry and weakened by lack of nutrition.

Participants in the *other leader responsible* condition read:

Lesotho is a country that has suffered largely due to the actions of its own leaders. Although the international community has responded with food and monetary supply, the leadership of Lesotho has diverted the aid inappropriately and irresponsibly. As a result, the population has not been receiving the aid that was allocated to them. Largely as a result of the irresponsible and inappropriate

diversion of aid by the leadership of Lesotho, the people of Lesotho will continue to live each day hungry and weakened by the lack of nutrition.

Participants in the control condition, *nature responsible*, read:

Lesotho is a country that has suffered largely due to chronic drought. Recently Lesotho experienced its longest dry spell in 20 years, and its fifth worst drought in a century. The drought has devastated the food production in Lesotho. Many cannot remember the last time it rained. Largely as a result of the drought, the people of Lesotho will continue to live each day hungry and weakened by the lack of nutrition.

Because world events are complex and have multiple causes, our manipulation was a subtle one of relative responsibility of leadership, i.e. “largely responsible,” rather than absolute responsibility of leadership for the negative event.

Dependent Measures

Two dependent measures were collected in this study. The first, “How favorable do you feel towards the *leadership of your country?*” was used to test Hypotheses 1 and 2, and the second, “How favorable do you feel towards the *leadership of Lesotho?*” was used to test Hypothesis 3. Participants used a seven-point response scale for each item, with one being strongly unfavorable and seven being strongly favorable. The measure of favorability was designed to mirror techniques currently used in the United States to assess how Americans rate a president (1).

Results

Since all of our predictions were based on comparing individual cells to a specified control condition (i.e., *nature responsible*), we used planned contrasts to test our hypotheses. Univariate ANOVA is an omnibus test designed to look for overall main effects and interactions, and therefore is not as appropriate as planned contrasts for testing explicit hypotheses

(Rosenthal, Rosnow, & Rubin, 2000). Means, standard deviations, and cell sizes are provided in Table 1.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Favorability Toward Own Leader

In order to test hypothesis one, a contrast was conducted between the other leader responsible condition and nature responsible condition. Contrary to our expectations that there would be no difference in favorability between these conditions, we found that participants rated their leadership less favorably when it was responsible for the negative event than when nature was responsible. This difference was only marginally significant, $t(52) = 1.73, p = .09$, however it bears mentioning because it runs opposite from our expectations. A second contrast was conducted to test hypothesis two, but this prediction was not supported by the data either. Contrary to expectations, participants' leadership was not viewed more favorably when another nation's leadership was responsible for a negative event: $t(52) = .47$.

Favorability Toward Other Leader

Two contrasts were conducted to test hypothesis 3. They confirmed that participants who believed that an outgroup nation's leadership was responsible for the negative event were less favorable towards that leadership than when nature was responsible, $t(52) = 2.65, p < .05$. In contrast, there was no differences in favorability ratings between those who believed their own nation was responsible and those believing that nature was responsible, $t(52) = -.177$.

Discussion

In Study 1, there was little empirical support for the application of social-identification processes to favorability ratings of one's national leadership. In contrast to the literature

demonstrating that group members are often cloaked by the positive interpretation of information, this did not happen for the participants' own national leaders. Even when another nation's leadership was responsible for a negative event, and the conditions for group-enhancing comparison were set, favorability ratings were consistent with ratings collected when nature was responsible.

One explanation for these null findings resides in the level of identification of the Hong Kong sample with its national leadership. We had presumed that study participants would have a Chinese national identity, and therefore would view the leadership of China as part of their national identity group. Examination of our control question—an open-ended question, “The nation to which I belong is...”—revealed it was not the case for many study participants. Twenty-six participants said their nation was China/People's Republic of China, 10 said Hong Kong/HKSAR (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China), and 19 said both. One possible interpretation of this variability is that it is of marginal consequence, and that these labels all express the same identification. However, a more plausible interpretation is that residents of Hong Kong have very different notions of their national identity group and very different notions of who their leadership is. Thus, there was probably tremendous variation in the strength of our participants' identification with their national group and the “leadership of your nation” referred to in the study materials. Such variation is a plausible and likely explanation for the lack of support of Hypotheses 1 and 2 (2). In hindsight, using national identity as the salient social group may not be an effective test of social identity and leader favorability ratings in Hong Kong.

The prediction about the favorability of another nation's leader was verified. Participants were significantly less favorable toward foreign leadership that was responsible for the suffering

of its people. These findings indicate that regardless of how Hong Kong students in our study defined their national group membership, the processes through which they evaluated an outgroup were similar. That is, outgroup leadership is not protected by the positive interpretation of international events and instead is held accountable for its actions. The empirical support for Hypothesis 3 is compelling because, independent of the participants' different ingroup definitions of national identity, they all considered Lesotho a clear and unequivocal national identity outgroup. And the data are consistent with the expectations one would have, based on social identity hypotheses, for outgroup leader responsibility and outgroup favorability ratings.

Study 2

In Study 2, we chose to re-test our hypotheses in the United States. In addition to replicating Study 1 in a second country context, we explicitly measured the strength of participants' identification with their nation to strengthen our ability to interpret the empirical results.

Social identity strength has consistently emerged as a robust moderator of group-level phenomena. Those with strong social identifications are more likely than those with weak social identifications to consider their group members as extensions of themselves (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). Individuals with strong identification with an identity group are more likely to be attracted to, and be more cohesive with, other members of that identity group (Hogg & Hains, 1996; Lea, Spears, & de Groot, 2001). Leadership research has also shown that identity strength moderates group members' perceptions of, and relationships with, their leaders. The more strongly people identify with their group, the more positively they react to leaders who are "like them" (i.e., prototypical; Hogg, et al., 1998), and the more strongly attuned they are to leaders who are

committed to the group and treat its members fairly (De Cremer & Van Vugt, 2002). Taken together, these findings indicate that social identity effects are stronger for those who identify strongly with identity groups than for those who identify weakly. The implications are clear for the current study: the impact of a negative event should have differential impact on leader favorability ratings depending on the extent to which participants identify with their national identity group. Those who identify strongly will be more likely to engage in positive social comparisons and leader-serving attributions than those who identify weakly, which should be reflected in the effects of ingroup and outgroup leadership responsibility for negative world events on favorability ratings. In contrast, the favorability ratings from weak-identifiers are likely to be negatively affected by the association of their leadership with negative world events. In essence, the patterns of favorability ratings of weak-identifiers for ingroup leadership should mirror patterns for outgroup leadership.

Evaluations of the outgroup leadership, however, are not likely to be affected by the strength of participants' identification with their own national group. No matter how one feels about one's own nation, one is highly unlikely to identify with the leadership of another country that has little interaction with one's own. Therefore, we predict that, regardless of national identification, favorability ratings of outgroup leadership will be negatively impacted by their association with negative events.

Hypothesis 1: Those who strongly identify with their national identity group, but not those who weakly identify, will rate their leaders more favorably when another nation's leaders are responsible for a negative event than when nature is responsible.

Hypothesis 2: Those who are weakly identified with their national identity group, but not those who are strongly identified, will rate their leaders less favorably when they are largely responsible for a negative event than when nature is responsible.

Hypothesis 3: Both strongly identified and weakly identified individuals will perceive another nation's leaders more negatively when they are largely responsible for a negative event within that nation than when nature is responsible.

Method

Participants and Design

Individuals were solicited to participate in this experiment through recruitment posters in various locations on the campus of a large, private northeastern university. Potential participants were told that this was a Web-based social studies experiment in which they would read a passage and answer several questions. Participants received \$5 compensation.

One hundred thirteen individuals agreed to participate, 111 of whom were undergraduate students, one a graduate student, and one employed full-time. All participants who were not U.S. citizens were removed from the sample, leaving a final sample of 105 individuals, 57 women and 48 men.

Participants were randomly assigned into one of three experimental conditions: the leadership of participants' nation responsible, the leadership of the outgroup nation responsible, or nature responsible. Additionally, participants were split into high and low national-identification conditions based on their scores on a national social identity scale. This yielded a 2 X 3 between-subjects design.

Procedure

This study proceeded in the same way as Study 1. Participants were given a description of Lesotho, then exposed to the experimental manipulation. Finally, they completed a brief questionnaire through which all dependent measures were collected. After completion, they were directed to another website with debriefing information. Participants were later debriefed directly by the experimenter, thanked, and paid for their participation.

Independent Variables

Responsibility for negative event. The manipulations used in Study 1 were identical to those used in Study 2.

National identification. Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) "importance to identity" sub-scale of the collective self-esteem instrument was used to measure the strength of participants' national identity. This sub-scale has been shown to reflect the centrality of an identity to one's sense of self, and therefore serves as a measure of social identity strength (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). We used all four items of the importance to identity sub-scale, modifying the language where necessary to refer to participants' national identity. Sample items include: "In general, belonging to my nationality is an important part of my self-image" and "My nationality is unimportant to my sense of what kind of a person I am" (reverse scored). Responses were made on a seven-point agree/disagree scale. Lower scores represent weaker national identification while higher scores indicate stronger national identification. The items exhibited appropriately psychometric properties (Cronbach's alpha = .79). The average score on this scale was 4.26, with a standard deviation of 1.19. The median score was 4.50.

In order to verify the appropriateness of including strength of identity as an independent variable, we looked to ensure that it was not affected by our experimental manipulation of

responsibility. A univariate ANOVA indicated that the responsibility manipulation did not have an affect on how strongly participants identified with their nation, $F(2,102) = .36$. Thus, subjects above the median were separated from those below to form two relatively equal-sized groups of weak identifiers ($n=49$) and strong identifiers ($n=57$). There were only slight differences in demographic characteristics between the two samples. The mean age of weak identifiers was 20.4 years and the mean age of strong identifiers was 20.5. 98% of both groups were undergraduate students. Women comprised 52% of the sample overall, 57% of the sample of strong identifiers and 38% of the sample of weak identifiers.

Dependent Measures

The same dependent measures used in Study 1 were used in this study: “How favorable do you feel towards the *leadership of your country?*” and “How favorable do you feel towards the *leadership of Lesotho?*”

Results

As in study 1, all of our predictions were based on comparing individual cells to a specified control condition (i.e., nature responsible). We therefore used planned contrasts to test our hypotheses. Means, standard deviations, and cell sizes are presented in Table 2.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Favorability Toward Own Leader

The first set of contrasts tested Hypothesis 1 (3); the results support the hypothesis. Weak-identifiers in the other-leader-responsible condition did not have significantly different favorability ratings than weak-identifiers in the nature-responsible condition, $t(99) = -.02$. Strong-identifiers, however, rated their leadership much more favorably when Lesotho’s

leadership was represented as being responsible for their people's suffering, $t(99) = -2.22$, $p < .05$.

There was only weak support for Hypothesis 2. While an examination of the means reveals that weak-identifiers rated their leaders less favorably when they had been informed that those leaders were responsible than when nature was responsible, this effect was only marginally significant, $t(99) = 1.84$, $p = .08$. As expected, strong-identifiers who were told that their nation's leadership was responsible for Lesotho's condition were as favorable toward their leadership as those who had been informed that nature was responsible, $t(99) = -.25$. This offers some indication that those with weak ties to a social identity group are more likely than those with strong ties to change their favorability ratings of their leaders when confronted with information about those leaders' responsibility for negative events.

Favorability Toward Other Leader

The final set of contrasts were conducted to test Hypothesis 3. Results are consistent with the notion that outgroup leaders are evaluated negatively when they are deemed responsible for negative events. Results are also consistent with the finding in Study 1 that ingroup identification is not critical for outgroup effects to occur. Both weak- and strong-identifiers who had been informed that Lesotho's leadership was responsible for its people's suffering rated that leadership less favorably than did participants who had been informed that a drought was responsible ($t(99) = 14.26$ and $t(99) = 15.45$ respectively, both with $p < .01$).

Discussion

The results of Study 2 shed light on the null findings obtained in Study 1 and provide additional insights into the role social identification may play in the effect of leadership responsibility for a negative event on favorability ratings of domestic and foreign leadership.

Members of national identity groups who strongly identify with their country have more favorable views of their own leadership when the leaders of *another* country are responsible for a negative event, while those who weakly identify with their country do not.

The data also reveal a trend, albeit one that is only marginally significant, that weakly identified members of a nation are less favorable toward their leadership when it is responsible for negative events than when nature is responsible. The ratings of the weakly identified group members resembled the ratings participants formed for outgroup leadership: when Lesotho's leadership was presented as being responsible for its people's hunger and malnutrition, it was viewed less favorably than when nature was presented as being responsible.

These findings support the notion that a nation's leaders benefit from group-enhancing information processing. Leaders suffer no decline in favorability when they are responsible for a negative event, and are even more favored when another nation's leadership is responsible for a negative event. The fact that these enhancements are only made by highly-identified group members indicates that social identity motives are in operation. That is, citizens who identify with their nation are motivated to see their leadership in ways that reflect positively on their group. Such a positive interpretation likely maintains the self-esteem such citizens derive from membership in their national identity group. But information on the leadership of an outgroup is processed quite differently because there is no inherent benefit to one's self, or to the group, in interpreting negative events in a favorable way. Thus, outgroup leaders are viewed less favorably when they are believed responsible for negative events, as are ingroup leaders if one's sense of self does not include a strong national identity.

General Discussion

In these studies we extended a fertile area of leadership research—the application of Social Identity Theory to leadership—in a new direction by examining leadership responsibility, social identification, and intra- and intergroup leadership favorability ratings. As a first set of studies on a set of questions, there are several limitations to the present investigation which should be recognized here and addressed in future work. First, our studies relied on student samples. But although students may not be entirely representative of the overall national population of any given country, our sample mirrors the research samples typically used in social identity research, thereby allowing comparability across studies. Second, we measured national identity rather than manipulating it. Any time a research program relies on measurement rather than manipulation, issues of ultimate causation are raised. There may be a driver underlying national identification that awaits articulation and investigation. We take some comfort in the fact that laboratory studies in which group identification is manipulated often find results very similar to our own. For example, one study, in which social identification was directly manipulated, found that highly-identified group members endorsed their leaders more strongly than low-identifiers across most experimental conditions (Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001).

Despite these limitations, our data makes valuable contributions to the understanding of intra- and intergroup leadership dynamics. We found that social identification with a national identity group plays an important role in determining how followers respond to the responsibility of domestic and foreign leaders for negative events. Study 2 found that citizens who strongly identify with their nation have more favorable views of their own leadership when the leader of another country is responsible for a negative event, while weak-identifiers do not. In fact, trends in the data suggest that weak-identifiers may respond to their own leaders in the same way they respond to foreign leaders: lower favorability ratings when the leader is responsible.

Our study also makes important contributions to the development of theories of leadership in general, and social identity and intergroup leadership dynamics in particular. First, in our results, leaders appear to benefit from the group-enhancing information processing central to Social Identity Theory. Second, our data demonstrate that strength of social identification is an important moderator for theories of social identity and leadership. Third, we push the study of social identity theory and leadership to include the study of naturally occurring identity groups, such as national identity groups, rather than identity groups created in the laboratory.

Finally, the findings provide empirical support for the development of theories of intergroup leadership dynamics (Pittinsky, 2004), which seek to conceptualize leadership in a multi-group context and to examine, among other aspects, reflexive leadership processes such as those evidenced in the data sets collected in these studies. In these data we see that to understand why a leader is viewed favorably or unfavorably, researchers may need to look beyond the leader, his or her followers, and their interactions and relations, and examine how these intragroup leadership dynamics are influenced by other groups—that is, to examine intergroup leadership dynamics. The subfield of intergroup relations within psychology has profitably addressed intergroup dynamics in organizational, national, and multinational settings. Yet it has not paid sufficient attention to leader effects, despite the fact that a seminal study of intergroup relations (Sherif et al., 1961) identified leadership as a critical factor in intergroup relations. In this study, Sherif and colleagues observed that functional relations between groups can alter the pattern relations within a group, including leadership. Yet there has been little follow-up on this critical insight. A body of work is beginning to apply Social Identity Theory to leadership (Hogg, 2001; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2003; Haslam & Platow, 2001; Lord & Hall, 2003). In this work, Social Identity Theory, a lynchpin construct of intergroup relations research, is

often applied to intragroup dynamics, which are critical foci for research and theory development. The emerging body of work applying Social Identity Theory to leadership can be extended to examine intergroup leadership dynamics.

Our findings have further important implications for understanding leader favorability. First, we see that events in the world are, in fact, reflected in domestic leader favorability ratings. This connection is commonly talked about in the media, but has not been directly studied. Because the data collected by pollsters is survey data, it is prey to a series of critiques that experimental examination of leadership responsibility and favorability ratings can avoid.

Our findings suggest that the conventional wisdom is, in fact, wise. If citizens identify strongly with their country, they maintain favorable views of their leaders even when they do bad things. For example, in the parlance of current U.S. political debates, a president who is a “uniter” and who promotes strong national identity will, all things being equal, fare better in favorability ratings than a “divider.”

The data also suggest that domestic and foreign leaders will be viewed differently, even when taking identical actions. As our theories become more sophisticated, they may help account for public support, or lack of support, for policy positions that require assessments of foreign leaders—for example, policies calling for regime changes in other nations.

Our findings also prompt researchers of leadership, and leaders themselves, to recognize the outside forces, such as the actions of other world leaders that may affect their favorability ratings. In this study, the actions of a foreign leader led to significantly increased favorability ratings for a domestic leader. In other conditions, a similar effect may operate, but in the opposite direction. The larger point, however, will hold: swings in favorability ratings for domestic leaders may be created by the actions of foreign leaders. While this might suggest that

many of the events impacting leaders' favorability ratings are outside their control, such a conclusion would be premature. Leaders can, for example, selectively amplify the domestic attention paid to other leaders and thus, our data suggest, manipulate their own favorability ratings.

Finally, the data examines social identity and intra- and intergroup leadership dynamics in two cultures. Thus, the research offers a perspective on leadership in cultural contexts. We ran similar studies in two countries, but got two different results. One of the most compelling reasons to conduct leadership research using naturally occurring groups is to examine how national context can moderate social identification, which in turn moderates key leadership effects. We find that the political condition in Hong Kong complicates identification with a national identity group. But, as our data further reveal, the underlying processes that feed into leader evaluations appear to remain the same across the cultures studied. Thus the cross-cultural study of leadership, although in its very early stages, may find distinct manifestations of underlying core processes, the distinct manifestations reflecting contextual factors.

Since the present data provide an initial, rather than an exhaustive, examination of leadership responsibility, social identity, and leadership favorability ratings, we conclude with an examination of some of the most compelling and intriguing directions for future research.

The current study ascribed responsibility for a negative event. A logical next step is to examine cases in which leaders are responsible for positive events. Straightforward predictions from Social Identity Theory—that the observed effects would reverse direction—await empirical confirmation.

A second important direction for future research relates to the measurement of political affiliation as a moderator in multi-party political systems. The present studies retained an

experimental approach, but took the study of social identity and leadership outside of the minimal group paradigm. The study of preexisting national identity groups (see, for example, Platow et al., 1997) adds ecological richness, but necessarily sacrifices some measure of experimental control. For example, some of the variance in our Study 2 data may have been influenced by political affiliation. Although participants answered for a generalized national leadership, it is possible they may have contextualized the general scenario into present political leadership. Directly measuring political affiliation—feasible in the largely two-party U.S. system, more difficult in other political settings—would likely strengthen the statistical significance of observed effects for national identification. Future research that explicitly looks at the potential moderating effects of political affiliation will likely provide a more nuanced view of how political affiliation and social identification with the national collective may interact. It is noteworthy, however, that we find an effect for social identification with the national collective without needing to control for party affiliation.

Such future studies will build on the present work on intergroup leadership dynamics, which in turn builds on the work under way to bridge social identity and leadership. In this way, the combined research efforts will further illuminate the intriguing role that the self and identity play in leadership dynamics.

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Footnotes

- (1) For example, one of two measures The Gallup Poll uses most frequently asks Americans to "Please tell me if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the current president."
- (2) This interpretation of the data is consistent with current observations about the people of Hong Kong. Hong Kong came under Chinese rule in 1997 and has had an uneasy relationship with its new government. Issues of governance and economic and social policy have led to unrest and civil action from many citizens of Hong Kong ("Trouble on the fringes," 2003, December 2). Furthermore, the Chinese policy of "one country, two systems" officially introduces a bifurcated identity; one with China as a country and the other with Hong Kong as a semi-autonomous region.
- (3) The control group consists of the ratings of all participants in the nature-responsible condition. There was no significant difference between strong and weak identifiers in this condition.

Table 1

Study 1: Means and standard deviations of dependent measures by responsibility for negative event

	favorability toward own leadership	favorability toward other leadership
Responsibility Condition		
Own Leader Responsible (n=17)	2.82 (1.38)	2.71 (1.05)
Other Leader Responsible (n=21)	3.48 (1.54)	1.81 (.98)
Nature Responsible (n=17)	3.71 (1.53)	2.65 (.86)

Table 2

Study 2: Means and standard deviations of dependent measures by responsibility for negative event and strength of participants' national identity

	favorability toward own leadership	favorability toward other leadership
Weak-identifiers		
Own Leader Responsible (n=15)	2.93 (1.49)	3.60 (.63)
Other Leader Responsible (n=17)	3.82 (1.55)	2.00 (1.00)
Nature Responsible (n=17)	3.82 (1.59)	3.76 (.56)
Strong-identifiers		
Own Leader Responsible (n=16)	3.94 (1.69)	3.25 (1.24)
Other Leader Responsible (n=19)	4.84 (1.46)	1.84 (.83)
Nature Responsible (n=21)	3.81 (1.94)	3.71 (1.19)