

Increasing Intergroup Distinctiveness: The Benefits of Third Party Helping

Esther van Leeuwen¹ and Fieke Harinck¹

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Abstract

Discrimination is often used to increase public perceptions of group distinctiveness. The current research studied the effectiveness of third party helping as an alternative, more benign strategy to this end. Across four studies, we examined whether helping a third party can position the helping group as more distinct from, or more similar to, a comparison group, depending on the nature of the comparison group's relationship with the third party. Results from three studies showed that third party helping was as effective as discrimination of the comparison group, but third party helping elicited a more positive public image of the group compared with discrimination. Study 4 provided evidence for the spontaneous use of third party helping in response to distinctiveness threat. These findings extend insights from classic balance theories and research on strategic intergroup helping to the domain of intergroup differentiation, and highlight a benign strategy to achieve positive group distinctiveness.

Keywords

third party helping, intergroup distinctiveness, discrimination, outgroup helping, public image

Our perception of social groups is affected not only by what they represent but also by what they do *not* represent—that is, by their distinctiveness from other groups. The need to be seen as distinct from other groups is universally recognized as vital to groups (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; R. Brown & Abrams, 1986; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Jetten & Spears, 2003; Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004; Leonardelli, Pickett, & Brewer, 2010; Tajfel, 1982). Unfortunately, many attempts to fulfill this need involve attitudinal or behavioral discrimination of comparison outgroups (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Jetten & Spears, 2003). Given the fundamental and pervasive need for groups to be perceived as different from other groups, the present research investigated an alternative and more benign strategy to achieve this goal: helping a third party. Combining insights from classic balance theories (Cartwright & Harary, 1956; Heider, 1946) and research on intergroup helping (Nadler, Harpaz-Gorodeisky, & Ben-David, 2009; van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2010), we argue that groups that help a third party will be seen as more distinct from, or more similar to, a comparison outgroup, depending on the nature of the latter's relationship with the third party. Moreover, third party helping will be just as effective in affecting public perceptions of group distinctiveness as direct discrimination, but with the added benefit of boosting the helper's reputation. Three studies are presented in which the effect of third party helping on perceived group distinctiveness was investigated. The active use of third party helping to enhance group distinctiveness was examined in Study 4.

Before advancing our arguments, it is important to specify the subsequent terminology. The group actively engaged in seeking group distinctiveness (either through third party helping or through direct discrimination) will from hereon be referred to as the *actor group* (*a*). The object of differentiation (i.e., the group that the actor group attempts to differentiate from) is referred to as the *comparison group* (*c*). The potential recipient of help will be called the *third party group* (*t*).

Perceived Group Distinctiveness

The need for group distinctiveness is a central tenet of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which describes group distinctiveness as essential to the meaning and identity of a group or organization. As groups exist by virtue of their distinctiveness from other groups, groups that are different from other groups provide a stronger basis for identity and elicit more identification from their members (Postmes, 2003). In fact, distinctiveness is such an important basis for identity that people even prefer to identify with low status but distinct groups rather than with higher status,

¹Leiden University, the Netherlands

Corresponding Author:

Esther van Leeuwen, Department of Social and Organisational Psychology, Leiden University, Wassenaarseweg 52, Leiden, 2333 AK, the Netherlands.

Email: E.A.C.van.Leeuwen@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

non-distinct groups (e.g., Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 2001; Mlicki & Ellemers, 1996).

Group distinctiveness can be sought in various ways, ranging from mostly cognitive (e.g., altered perceptions of ingroup and outgroup homogeneity, Pickett & Brewer, 2001; or ingroup stereotyping, van Rijswijk, Haslam, & Ellemers, 2006), to behavioral (e.g., identity signaling, Berger & Heath, 2008; derogation of deviants, Marques & Paez, 1994; or discrimination, Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). Given the importance of group distinctiveness, it is somewhat surprising that the vast majority of research in this domain has investigated distinctiveness purely from the perspective of ingroup members, studying how threats to group distinctiveness affect group members' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors vis-à-vis the outgroup. One important question that has been left unanswered is how differentiation strategies affect *outsiders'* perception of the groups' relative positions—that is, their public distinctiveness.

In marketing and public relations, it has long been recognized that the attractiveness and reputation of an organization depends on outsiders' beliefs about what is unique or distinct about the organization (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Ghosh & Morita, 2012; Wilkinson & Balmer, 1996). Political parties, for example, may lose their *raison d'être* when their philosophy is not sufficiently distinct from that of other parties (Abrams, 1994), and the same may be true for activist groups and fan groups. As group distinctiveness is central not only to how we see our own group but also to how others view and evaluate our group (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Dutton et al., 1994; van Hoye & Lievens, 2005), it is important to study how attempts at differentiation affect public perceptions of the groups involved, both in terms of how they are positioned relative to each other and in terms of their overall reputation. In the current article, we focused on two such attempts: direct discrimination and third party helping.

Discrimination

A commonly used strategy to achieve group distinctiveness involves some form of intergroup hostility or discrimination of a comparison outgroup (R. Brown & Abrams, 1986; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Jetten et al., 1998; Marques & Paez, 1994). Prejudice, negative stereotyping, discrimination, and derogation all form a subset of strategies that are characterized by fear, anxiety, and destructiveness. As such, discrimination can be a very costly strategy. Victims of discrimination often suffer from stress and decreased mental and physical health (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). Organizational climates of discrimination have also been linked to reduced overall firm performance (Kunze, Boehm, & Bruch, 2011). But the costs of discrimination are not limited to victims. According to the needs-based model of reconciliation (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008), perpetrators of discrimination are (rightfully) concerned that their hostile or discriminatory actions affect their own or their group's moral reputation.

These concerns about the moral reputation of the ingroup are often associated with aversive emotions such as shame and guilt (Mashuri & van Leeuwen, 2016).

Although the consequences of discrimination for outsiders' perceptions of intergroup distinctiveness have never been systematically investigated, research does suggest that discrimination can serve a public presentation function. For example, Noel, Wann, and Branscombe (1995) found that peripheral group members used discrimination to influence ingroup members' perception of their level of inclusion in the group. Given the fact that the need for group distinctiveness is such a vital part of intergroup relations, and that people often seek to fulfill this need through some form of hostility or discrimination, we sought to provide a critical test of the effect of discrimination on perceived group distinctiveness and group reputation. Moreover, we compared the effect of discrimination of a comparison outgroup (the "second party") on public perceptions with that of an alternative strategy to protect and enhance perceived group distinctiveness: third party helping.

Third Party Helping

How can helping a third party group contribute to public differentiation between the actor group and the comparison group? The answer to this question is contingent on the perceived relationship between the comparison group and the third party group. Heider (1946; see also Cartwright & Harary, 1956) argued that people are motivated to have an affectively uniform impression of people. He distinguished between *attitude relations* and *unit relations*. Attitude relations refer to liking or evaluating a person or an object. Unit relations refer to similarity, proximity, or belonging. Both helping the third party group and discriminating or derogating the comparison group can affect the perceived unit relation between the actor group and the comparison group. The act of helping is typically associated with closeness and similarity—for example, people often help ingroup members more than outgroup members (Gabriel & Banse, 2006), and similar others more than dissimilar ones (Stürmer & Snyder, 2010). Thus, when hearing that an actor group has helped a third party group, observers are likely to infer that the actor group and third party group are close. When combining this with the knowledge that the third party group and the comparison group have a severe dislike for each other, pressures toward balance will induce perceivers to conclude that the actor group and the comparison group are distinct—that is, do not share a unit relationship (see Figure 1). Discrimination of the comparison group affects perceived distinctiveness in a more direct way. As Heider (1946) wrote, "in the case of two entities, a balanced state exists if the relation between them is positive (or negative) in all respects" (p. 110). Discrimination implies a negative attitude relationship, and pressures toward balance will lead observers to infer a matching negative unit relationship (see Figure 2).

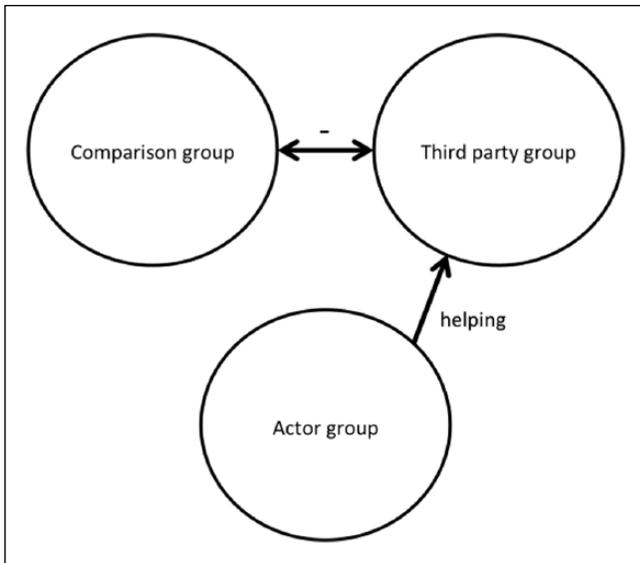


Figure 1. Given a negative relationship between the third party group and the comparison group, the actor group's helping of the third party group will induce perceivers to conclude that the actor group and the comparison group are distinct—that is, do not share a unit relationship.

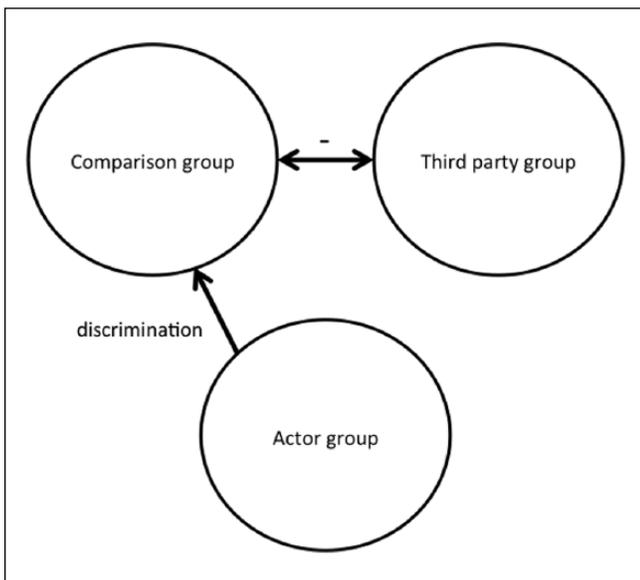


Figure 2. As discrimination implies a negative attitude relationship, the actor group's discrimination of the comparison group will lead perceivers to infer a matching negative unit relationship between the actor group and the comparison group.

Moral Reputation

Overt acts of discrimination or hostility toward outgroups can damage the ingroup's moral reputation (Arvidsson, 2010; Brambilla, Sacchi, Pagliaro, & Ellemers, 2013; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). The consequences of a damaged reputation are

far-reaching, as research has shown that outsiders may be less likely to join, vote for, or buy products from morally tainted groups (Arvidsson, 2010), whereas members of these groups feel less proud of and identified with their group (Dutton et al., 1994; Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007). In sharp contrast, third party helping may be able to boost the actor group's moral reputation. Research on the strategic use of outgroup helping provides ample evidence for the positive effect of outgroup helping on the group's moral reputation. As helping is generally seen as an act of kindness, groups that help other groups are seen as warm and generous by outside observers (Hopkins et al., 2007; van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2012). This suggests that third party helping may have an added benefit: Not only can it increase group distinctiveness, but it may also boost the helping group's moral image.

Overview of Studies and Hypotheses

The aim of the first three studies presented in this article was to investigate how third party helping and discrimination affect public group distinctiveness and perceived moral image. We examined the following three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Both helping the third party group and discriminating the comparison group would increase outsiders' perceptions of the actor group's distinctiveness from the comparison group, as compared with a neutral control condition.

Hypothesis 2a: An actor group helping a third party group would elicit a more favorable attitude compared with a control condition.

Hypothesis 2b: An actor group discriminating a comparison group would elicit a less favorable attitude among observers, compared with a control condition.

In the fourth study, we switched from an outside observers' perspective to an ingroup perspective by investigating the active use of third party helping in response to a threat to group distinctiveness.

Study 1

Participants in Study 1 were presented with a description of three existing ethnic tribes in Mongolia, Asia.¹ Two of these (the comparison group and the third party group) were considered each other's enemies. Upon reading that the actor group had either helped the third party group, discriminated the comparison group, or reading no specific information about the groups' actions (control), the actor group's distinctiveness from the comparison group was assessed, as well as participants' attitude toward and perception of the actor group.

Method

A total of 158 participants (83 women; $M_{age} = 34.27$, $SD = 12.24$), who were recruited through an online crowdsourcing

Table 1. Overview of Means, Study 1.

	Third party helping	Comparison discrimination	Control	$F(2, 155)$ η_p^2
Perceived distinctiveness	5.32 ^a (1.23) [5.00, 5.64]	5.19 ^a (1.30) [4.87, 5.51]	4.55 ^b (1.01) [4.22, 4.88]	$F = 6.15^{**}$ $\eta_p^2 = .07$
Attitude toward actor group	6.13 ^a (0.86) [5.81, 6.45]	3.89 ^b (1.60) [3.57, 4.21]	4.43 ^b (0.94) [4.10, 4.77]	$F = 52.19^{***}$ $\eta_p^2 = .40$
Actor group traits				
Aggressive	-0.59 ^a (0.60) [-0.82, -0.35]	0.63 ^b (1.01) [0.40, 0.87]	-0.05 ^c (0.94) [-0.29, 0.19]	$F = 26.79^{***}$ $\eta_p^2 = .26$
Helpful	0.77 ^a (0.56) [0.55, 0.99]	-0.53 ^b (1.00) [-0.75, -0.31]	-0.26 ^b (0.87) [-0.49, -0.03]	$F = 36.69^{***}$ $\eta_p^2 = .32$

Note. Standard deviations in parentheses. 95% confidence intervals in square brackets. Means with different subscripts within each row differ significantly from each other in SIDAK post hoc tests at $p < .05$.

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

platform, completed a brief online questionnaire in exchange for a small fee. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions (Response: third party helping vs. comparison discrimination vs. control).

Participants first read a brief description of three tribes in Mongolia: The Rouran, the Göturks, and the Xiongnu. These groups will from hereon be referred to as the actor group (the Rouran), the comparison group (the Göturks), and the third party group (the Xiongnu). It was explained that the more traditional comparison group and the more liberal third party group had been enemies for years. Although traditionally leading nomadic lives, most members of the three tribes now resided in the major cities of Mongolia, where they lived in separate housing blocks but in close proximity to each other. Participants in the *third party helping condition* subsequently read that many members of the third party group had recently faced eviction from their homes as their apartment block was scheduled to be demolished. The actor group had offered them temporary housing, saving them from a future of homelessness and poverty. Participants in the *comparison discrimination condition*, instead, read that the actor group had recently launched a campaign in which they actively opposed the comparison group’s culture and religion. The actor group had appealed to the city council to stop funding the comparison group’s schools, and to close their places of worship. Participants in the *control condition* were not given any information regarding the actor group’s actions.

Unless otherwise indicated, all questions in the subsequent questionnaire were preceded by “To what extent do you agree with the following statement?” and responses were assessed on 7-point rating scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Scales were created by averaging the items. *Attitude* toward the actor group was assessed with three items (“I feel positive about . . .,” “I like . . .,” “I have respect for . . .”; $\alpha = .96$). *Perceived*

distinctiveness of the actor group from the comparison group was assessed with five items (e.g., “The actor group and the comparison group are two very different groups,” “The actor group and the comparison group have much in common” [R]; $\alpha = .91$). Participants were subsequently asked to indicate to what extent each of the following traits applied to the actor group: competent, warm, tolerant, aggressive, social, helpful, cold, incompetent, immoral, hostile, intolerant, unsupportive.² PCA with VARIMAX rotation revealed two underlying components which together explained 74% of the variance. The components were saved as separate variables using a regression method. The first component was labeled *aggression* and includes items such as cold, immoral, hostile, aggressive. The second component was labeled *helpful*, including items such as helpful, social, tolerant, and warm. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were thanked, paid, and electronically debriefed.

Results and Conclusion

All variables were analyzed in separate ANOVAs with Response (third party helping vs. comparison discrimination vs. control) as the independent variable. Significant effects were further explored using SIDAK post hoc tests. An overview of results is presented in Table 1.

Supporting Hypothesis 1, participants in the third party helping condition as well as those in the comparison discrimination condition viewed the actor group as more distinct from the comparison group than participants in the control condition. Participants who believed that the actor group had helped the third party group, however, also reported a more positive attitude toward the actor group, and viewed it as more helpful and less aggressive than participants in the control condition. In contrast, participants who believed the actor group had discriminated the comparison group viewed

the actor group as less helpful and more aggressive than participants in the control condition, although they did not differ significantly from the control condition in their overall attitude toward the actor group. These findings support Hypothesis 2a and provide partial support for Hypothesis 2b.

In conclusion, the discriminating group as well as the group that had helped a third party were seen as equally distinct, and both were seen as more distinct from the actor group in the control condition. However, whereas helping the third party group contributed to a more positive evaluation of the actor group and a perception of this group as helpful and not aggressive, discrimination engendered a perception of the actor group as aggressive and unhelpful.

Study 2

Study 2 was aimed at investigating whether the valence of the relationship between the third party group and the comparison group moderates the perceived distance between the actor group and the comparison group when the actor group has helped the third party group. The prediction that third party helping can increase perceptions of the actor group's distinctiveness from the comparison group is based on the notion that the comparison group and the third party group share a negative relationship. The subsequent knowledge that the actor group and third party group are close (as indicated by a helping relationship) leads to the (balanced) inference that the actor group and the comparison group are distinct from each other. It follows that, if the comparison group and third party group share a *positive* relationship, the knowledge that the actor group has helped the third party group should lead to the balanced inference that the actor group and the comparison group are similar or non-distinct. We thus predicted that:

Hypothesis 3: The valence of the relationship between the third party group and the comparison group should moderate the perceived distance between the actor group and the comparison group when the actor group has helped the third party group. As discrimination of the comparison group does not involve the third party group, the relationship between third party and comparison group should not affect the actor group's perceived distinctiveness from the comparison group following discrimination of the comparison group.

Method

A total of 178 participants (95 women; $M_{\text{age}} = 32.69$, $SD = 11.63$), recruited through an online crowdsourcing platform, filled out a brief online questionnaire in exchange for a small fee. Participants were randomly assigned to the cells of a 3 (Response: third party helping vs. comparison discrimination vs. control) by 2 (Relationship comparison group—third party group: enemies vs. friends) between participants experimental design.

The procedure and measures were similar to that of Study 1, with a few exceptions. Participants in the *friends* (*enemies*) condition read that, in addition to being friends (*enemies*), the comparison group and the third party group had always cooperated (competed) with each other in the pursuit of valuable goods, and stood together to fight common enemies (fought each other) during various wars over the past centuries. Participants subsequently read one of three scenarios describing the actor group's actions (third party helping, comparison discrimination, control) which were identical to those used in Study 1.

In the subsequent questionnaire, the actor group's *perceived distinctiveness* from the comparison group ($\alpha = .93$) was measured with the same items as used in Study 1. *Attitude* toward the actor group was also assessed with the same items plus two additional items ("I admire . . .," "the . . . disgust me" [R]; $\alpha = .92$). The perception of *helpful* and *aggressive* traits characterizing the actor group was assessed in the same manner as in Study 1 (PCA with VARIMAX rotation again yielded two underlying factors which explained 80% of the variance and which were saved as separate variables). At the end of the questionnaire, participants were thanked, paid, and electronically debriefed.

Results and Conclusion

Unless otherwise indicated, all variables were analyzed in separate ANOVAs with Response (third party helping vs. comparison discrimination vs. control) and Relationship third party group—comparison group (enemies vs. friends) as independent variables. All significant effects are reported. Significant effects involving Response were further explored using SIDAK post hoc tests.

Perceived distinctiveness. The actor group's perceived distinctiveness from the comparison group was affected by main effects of Relationship, $F(1, 172) = 17.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, and Response, $F(1, 172) = 15.65$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$, which were qualified by the predicted interaction effect, $F(1, 172) = 8.79$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$. The means are presented in Figure 3. In the enemies condition, both the information that the actor group had helped the third party group and the information that the actor group had discriminated against the comparison group resulted in significantly more perceived distinctiveness of the actor group, compared with the control condition ($ps < .05$), but not compared with each other. In the friends condition, third party helping resulted in a marginally lower perceived distinctiveness compared with the control condition ($p = .08$) and significantly lower compared with the comparison discrimination condition ($p < .001$). The comparison discrimination condition also differed significantly from the control condition ($p = .001$). Moreover, the distinctiveness between the actor group and the comparison group after third party helping was significantly higher when the comparison group and the third party were

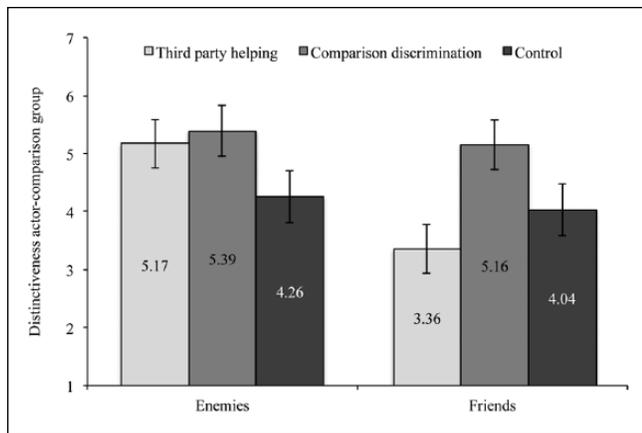


Figure 3. The actor group's perceived distinctiveness from the comparison group, Study 2.

Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

enemies rather than friends ($p < .001$). So helping your enemy's enemy indeed sets you further apart from your enemy in the eyes of observers. Together, these results confirm Hypotheses 1 and 3.

Attitude and perception of actor group. Attitude toward the actor group was affected by Response only, $F(2, 172) = 57.89, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .40$. Participants liked the actor group most when it had helped the third party group ($M = 5.94, SD = 1.08, 95\% \text{ confidence interval [CI]} = [5.64, 6.25]$), and least when it had discriminated the comparison group ($M = 3.58, SD = 1.48, 95\% \text{ CI} = [3.27, 3.89]$). Both conditions differed significantly from the control condition ($M = 4.65, SD = 1.03, 95\% \text{ CI} = [4.33, 4.97]$; $p < .001$), and also from each other, $p < .001$.

The degree to which participants ascribed aggressive traits, $F(2, 172) = 29.76, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .26$, and helpful traits, $F(2, 172) = 40.46, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .32$, to the actor group were both affected by Response. The actor group was seen as more helpful in the third party helping condition ($M = 0.73, SD = 0.82, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.52, 0.94]$) compared with the control condition ($M = -.15, SD = 0.81, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.37, 0.07]$; $p < .001$), and less helpful in the comparison discrimination condition ($M = -0.61, SD = 0.87, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.82, -0.40]$) compared with the control condition ($p = .011$). The actor group was also seen as more aggressive in the comparison discrimination condition ($M = 0.63, SD = 1.02, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.41, 0.84]$) compared with the control condition ($M = -.04, SD = 0.88, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.26, 0.19]$; $p < .001$), and less aggressive in the third party helping condition ($M = -0.57, SD = 0.69, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.79, -0.36]$) compared with the control condition ($p = .003$). These findings are in full support of Hypotheses 2a and 2b.

Aggression was also affected by Relationship, $F(2, 172) = 7.00, p = .009, \eta_p^2 = .04$. The actor group was seen as less aggressive when the comparison group and third party group were friends ($M = 0.18, SD = 0.97, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.004, 0.36]$)

compared with enemies ($M = -0.17, SD = 1.01, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.34, 0.01]$). No other effects were found.

Conclusion

The results confirmed the prediction that the valence of the relationship between comparison group and third party group would moderate perceptions of intergroup distinctiveness between the actor group and comparison groups in the helping condition, but not in the control or discrimination conditions. The pattern of results with respect to perceptions of the actor group's distinctiveness from the comparison group, and attitude toward and general perceptions of the actor group, replicated those obtained in Study 1.

Study 3

Given a negative relationship between the comparison group and the third party group, helping the third party was found to increase the perceived distinctiveness between the actor and comparison groups across two studies. The aim of the third study was to show that this effect is not limited to reporting that the actor and comparison group are different per se, but that it also affects perceptions of the very nature of the actor group's culture or identity. To this end, participants were presented with a cultural profile of the comparison group, and subsequently asked to indicate what they thought the actor group's profile would look like. Responses in a third party helping condition were compared with those in a neutral control condition. We expected that:

Hypothesis 4: Participants in the third party helping condition, compared with those in the control condition, would select a profile for the actor group that was more distinct from that of the comparison group.

Method

A total of 107 participants (43 women; $M_{\text{age}} = 33.87, SD = 12.94$), recruited through an online crowdsourcing platform, filled out a brief online questionnaire in exchange for a small fee. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions (Response: third party helping vs. control).

The procedure and measures were similar to the third party helping and control conditions of Study 2, with the exception of the added measures of cultural difference as described below. After reading about the actor group's actions (third party helping or no response control), attitude toward the actor group ($\alpha = .89$) was assessed, followed by a measure of perceived distinctiveness between the actor group and the comparison group ($\alpha = .91$).

Participants were then informed that, in an attempt to map the cultural diversity of Mongolia, a group of scientists had recently assessed the cultural profiles of each of the 21 tribes

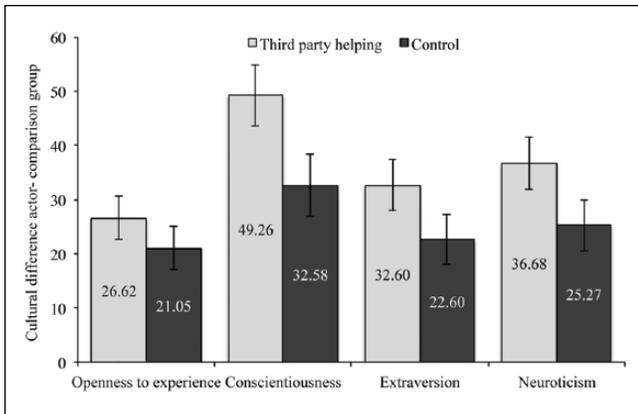


Figure 4. Perceived cultural differences between actor group and comparison group, Study 3.

Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

currently living in Mongolia. Each profile contained four primary dimensions adopted from the Big Five Personality Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999; agreeableness was omitted as this dimension involves helpfulness, which could interfere with the manipulation).³ Presented as an example of what such a cultural profile could look like, participants were shown the comparison group's cultural profile, consisting of a score on each of the four dimensions (ranging from 0 to 100). These scores were 68 (openness to experience), 21 (conscientiousness), 33 (extraversion), and 71 (neuroticism).⁴ Participants were asked to indicate what they believed the actor group's profile would look like by rating it on those same dimensions. Measures of *perceived cultural difference* were computed for each of the four dimensions by calculating the absolute difference between the comparison group's score and participants' rating for the actor group. At the end of the study, participants were thanked, paid, and electronically debriefed.

Results and Conclusion

Unless otherwise indicated, all variables were analyzed in separate ANOVAs with Response (third party helping vs. control) as independent variable.

Cultural difference actor-comparison group. The four cultural dimensions were analyzed in a MANOVA with Response as independent variable. The multivariate effect of Response was significant, $F(4, 103) = 6.65, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .21$. The means are presented in Figure 4. Univariate tests revealed that participants' estimated profile for the actor group was marginally or significantly more distinct from the comparison group in the third party helping condition compared with the control condition for all four dimensions: openness to experience, $F(1, 106) = 3.78, p = .054, \eta_p^2 = .03$; conscientiousness, $F(1, 106) = 17.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14$; extraversion, $F(1, 106) = 8.88, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .08$; and neuroticism,

$F(1, 106) = 11.26, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$. These findings support Hypothesis 4.

Perceived distinctiveness. The actor group's perceived distinctiveness from the comparison group was affected by Response, $F(1, 106) = 17.41, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14$. Participants in the third party helping condition viewed the actor group as more distinct from the third party group ($M = 5.52, SD = 1.20, 95\% CI = [5.19, 5.85]$) compared with participants in the control condition ($M = 4.55, SD = 1.22, 95\% CI = [4.23, 4.87]$).

Attitude. Supporting Hypothesis 2a, participants in the third party helping condition judged the actor group more favorably ($M = 6.17, SD = 0.81, 95\% CI = [5.91, 6.43]$) compared with participants in the control condition ($M = 5.11, SD = 1.07, 95\% CI = [4.86, 5.37]$), $F(1, 106) = 32.97, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .24$.

Conclusion

Again, the results of Study 3 show that the perceived distinctiveness with a comparison group is enhanced after helping a third party. Participants not only viewed the actor group as more distinct from the comparison group in the third party helping condition compared with the control condition—but they also thought the actor group's cultural profile was more different from that of the comparison group. These results show that the effects of third party helping are not limited to reports of perceived distinctiveness but translate to actual perceptions of the identity or culture of the helping group.

Study 4

With the effects of third party helping on outsiders' perceptions of intergroup distinctiveness demonstrated in the previous three studies, one crucial question remains: Do people actively engage in third party helping if and when they are motivated to increase their group's distinctiveness from a comparison outgroup? There is reason to be skeptical regarding the spontaneous use of third party helping. The desire to differentiate typically results from some form of threat—often a threat to intergroup distinctiveness (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Validzic, 1998; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Jetten et al., 2004). Several theories have postulated that, as a universal survival mechanism, attentional resources are automatically captured and held by the source of threat (Mathews & Mackintosh, 1998; Mogg & Bradley, 1998). Indeed, Hornsey and Hogg (2000) argued that group distinctiveness threat is a critical factor that determines whether people seek differentiation in a direct and destructive way, by means of discrimination or hostility, or in a more benign way. As third party helping involves diverting attention away from the source of threat (from the comparison group to the third party group), it remains to be seen whether people faced with

a threat to their group's distinctiveness redirect their attention to helping a third party to deflect this threat.

Participants in this study were White Americans, who represented the actor group. We manipulated a threat to the distinctiveness of their group relative to a comparison group to activate the motivation to differentiate their ingroup from this comparison group. Specifically, participants were led to believe that the growth of the population of Hispanic Americans (the comparison group) in the United States would (high distinctiveness threat), or would not (low distinctiveness threat), lead to vast changes to the culture and identity of White Americans. This manipulation was previously successfully used by Wilson and Hugenberg (2010). The third party group in this study constituted of Black Americans. Given the commonly held belief that Black and Hispanic Americans view each other with some degree of negativity (McClain & Karnig, 1990)—which was made salient in the present study—White participants' support for a Black cause would help to differentiate White Americans from Hispanic Americans. In the third party helping condition, we therefore asked participants to what extent they supported a program aimed at helping Black Americans (specifically, extra support for underachieving Black schools). We compared these responses with those in another condition in which participants were asked to what extent they supported the same program aimed at helping *Hispanic* Americans (i.e., the comparison group). The study thus compared the willingness to help the third party group with the willingness to help the comparison group. Whereas the act of helping can signal closeness and similarity, a refusal to help should do the exact opposite and create more distance. By *not* helping the comparison group, members of the actor group can therefore differentiate themselves from this group in much the same way as through discrimination (and indeed, withholding support is commonly viewed as a form of subtle discrimination; Dovidio, Kawakami, Smoak, & Gaertner, 2008; Gabriel & Banse, 2006; Henry & Sears, 2002).

A measure of identification was also included, as research has shown that group identification is important when predicting reactions to group threat in general (Branscombe, Wann, Noel, & Coleman, 1993), and group distinctiveness threat in particular (Jetten & Spears, 2003). Attempts to restore group distinctiveness should be more pronounced among participants highly identified as White Americans. The study further included a measure of symbolic racism (Henry & Sears, 2002) to explain additional variance in helping. We expected that:

Hypothesis 5: High-identifying participants in the high distinctiveness threat condition would express *more* support for helping the *third party group* compared with high-identifying participants in the low distinctiveness threat condition. However, high-identifying participants in the high distinctiveness condition would express *less* support for helping the *comparison* group compared with

high-identifying participants in the low distinctiveness threat condition. No effects were expected for low-identifying participants.

We also included a measure of perceived distinctiveness of the own actor group of White Americans relative to the comparison group of Hispanic Americans. If support for a third party (or withholding support from the comparison group) contributes to increased differentiation, then it may be expected that participants who respond to distinctiveness threat by supporting (or withholding support from) their target group (the third party or the comparison group) subsequently perceive their own actor group as more distinct.

Hypothesis 6: Support would mediate the indirect interaction effect of the target of helping, distinctiveness threat, and level of national identification on perceived distinctiveness.

Method

A total of 490 White American participants (263 women; $M_{\text{age}} = 35.01$, $SD = 13.21$), recruited via an online crowdsourcing platform, filled out a brief online questionnaire in exchange for a small fee. Participants were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 2 (Distinctiveness threat: low vs. high) by 2 (Help Target: third party group vs. comparison group) between participants experimental design. Identification was included as a continuous variable.

Unless otherwise indicated, all responses were assessed on 7-point rating scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*), and scales were created by averaging the items. The study commenced with the four-item identity subscale of the Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Collective Self-Esteem Scale to measure identification with White Americans (e.g., "In general, being White American is an important part of my self-image," "The fact that I am White American is not important to my sense of what kind of person I am" [R]). As more recent work has shown that emotions are an integral part of group identity (Smith & Mackie, 2008), this measure was supplemented with one item in which participants were asked to indicate on a slider accompanied by smiley faces how they felt about their group (1 = *very negative face*, 5 = *very happy face*). PCA with VARIMAX rotation revealed that all five items loaded on a single factor (explaining 65% of the variance), which had good internal consistency ($\alpha = .84$). The items were therefore combined into a single scale of *identification with White Americans* after z-transformation.

All participants subsequently read a text explaining that Blacks and Hispanics in the United States were culturally very different from each other and had always had a relationship characterized by tension and conflict. Two items assessed the perceived relationship between Black and Hispanic Americans ("In general, how friendly is the relationship between Hispanic Americans and Black Americans?")

1 = *not at all friendly*, 7 = *very friendly*; “In general, how similar are the cultures of Hispanic Americans and Black Americans?” 1 = *very different*, 7 = *very similar*; $r = .51$).

The subsequent distinctiveness threat manipulation was adopted from Wilson and Hugenberg (2010) and slightly modified for the current purpose. Participants were asked to read a recent article describing projected cultural consequences of the growth of the Hispanic American population in the United States. Participants in the *high threat* condition read that several big cultural changes were expected. For example, the article read that “families will become more racially mixed, and long-standing cultural boundaries will become permanently blurred,” and that “within the next 20 years, the American culture will change to incorporate more and more elements of the Hispanic culture.” Those in the *low threat* condition read that no real cultural changes were expected (e.g., “ethnic identities will remain intact, and long-standing cultural boundaries will remain clear,” and “Hispanic immigrants to America are adopting American values, but will remain in largely Hispanic enclaves.”)⁵ This manipulation was checked with two items (“To what extent do you think that, in the near future, the American culture will change due to the increasing numbers of Hispanic Americans?” and “. . . the American culture will largely stay the same as it is today, despite the increasing numbers of Hispanic Americans?” [R]; $r = .84$).

Participants then read a brief description about a Black American (*Help Target: third party group*) or Hispanic American (*Help Target: comparison group*) organization that was lobbying for additional government funding for a support program for underachieving Black (Hispanic) schools. As a refusal to help could be seen as counter normative, we also mentioned that the aid program had received some criticism because of its exclusive focus on Black (Hispanic) schools. This provided participants with a legitimate reason to withhold their support. Frey and Gaertner (1986) found that discrimination in helping was stronger in the presence of factors that could legitimize a refusal of help. Participants were then asked to indicate to what extent they supported this initiative (five items, for example, “To what extent do you agree with this initiative?” “To what extent would you like to see this program funded?” $\alpha = .98$). We subsequently measured *perceived distinctiveness* of White Americans compared with Hispanic Americans with the same items as in Study 3 ($\alpha = .94$). Finally, *symbolic racism* was measured with a scale adopted from Henry and Sears (2002; eight items, for example, “Over the past years, Black have gotten more economically than they deserve”; $\alpha = .84$). At the end of the study, participants were thanked, paid, and electronically debriefed.

Results

Checks. ANOVA of the threat manipulation check with Help Target and Threat as independent variables revealed a main effect of Threat only, $F(1, 486) = 217.25, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .31$.

Participants in the high threat condition reported more expected cultural change ($M = 5.17, SD = 1.45, 95\% CI = [4.98, 5.36]$) than those in the low threat condition ($M = 3.17, SD = 1.55, 95\% CI = [2.99, 3.36]$). This indicates that the threat manipulation was successful.

The relationship between the third party group of Black Americans and the comparison group of Hispanic Americans was unaffected by the manipulations (all $ps > .23$). Overall, it was seen as quite negative, as intended ($M = 2.08, SD = 1.01$).

Support. Support for the program to help underachieving Black/Hispanic schools was analyzed in a regression analysis. Predictors were first transformed to z -scores (age, symbolic racism, identification) or dummy-coded (gender, Help Target, Threat). Age, gender, and symbolic racism were entered in the first step to explain additional variance. This model was significant, $F(3, 486) = 111.63, p < .001, R_{adj}^2 = .40$. Age was negatively related to support ($B = -.23, p < .001, 95\% CI = [-0.35, -0.11]$) as was symbolic racism ($B = -1.08, p < .001, 95\% CI = [-1.20, -0.96]$). A significant effect of gender ($B = -.28, p = .028, 95\% CI = [-0.52, -0.03]$) indicated that men showed less support for the program than women. Entering Help Target, Threat, and Identification in the second step did not significantly change the model ($R_{change}^2 = .004, ns$) nor did entering their two-way interactions in the third step ($R_{change}^2 = .002, ns$). Entering the three-way interaction between Help Target, Threat, and Identification in the fourth step, however, did significantly change the model, $R_{change}^2 = .010, p = .004; F(10, 479) = 35.32, p < .001, R_{adj}^2 = .41$. The three-way interaction emerged as a significant predictor of support ($B = -.18, p = .004, 95\% CI = [-0.30, -0.06]$).

Tests for the simple interaction between Help Target and Threat for low ($-1 SD$) and high ($+1 SD$) identifiers showed that this interaction was significant among high identifiers ($B = -.26, p = .003, 95\% CI = [-0.43, -0.09]$), but absent among low identifiers ($B = .10, p = .260, 95\% CI = [-0.07, 0.27]$). The slopes are presented in Figures 5 and 6. The significant interaction effect for high identifiers (Figure 6) was further explored through simple slope analyses to examine the effect of Threat within each level of Help Target. Threat was a significant predictor among participants who could help the third party group ($B = .24, p = .046, 95\% CI = [0.004, 0.475]$). When distinctiveness threat was high, high-identifying participants expressed more support for the third party group’s cause than when threat was low. Threat was also a significant predictor of support among participants who could help the comparison group ($B = -.28, p = .028, 95\% CI = [-0.53, -0.03]$). When threat was high, high-identifying participants expressed less support for the comparison group’s cause than when threat was low. Together, these results support Hypothesis 5.

Perceived distinctiveness. Perceived distinctiveness of the own actor group was analyzed in a similar regression analysis as support. The analysis revealed a main effect of symbolic racism ($B = .44, p < .001, 95\% CI = [0.33, 0.56]$) as well as a

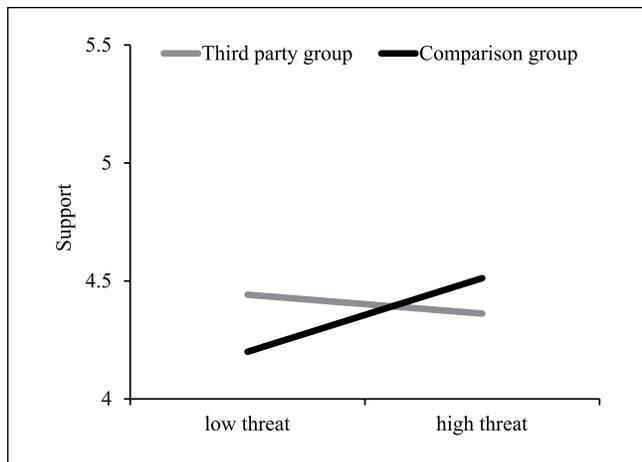


Figure 5. Support for helping the third party group and comparison group among low identifiers, Study 4.

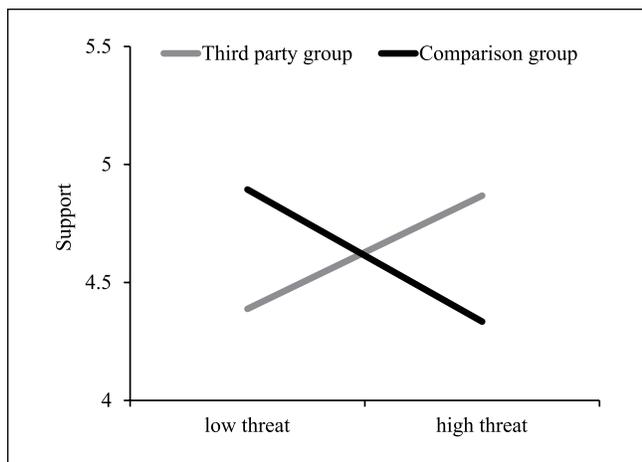


Figure 6. Support for helping the third party group and comparison group among high identifiers, Study 4.

marginally significant interaction between Threat and Help Target ($B = -.11, p = .06, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.22, 0.00]$). Simple slope analysis revealed that perceived distinctiveness was significantly higher in the third party helping condition ($M = 4.56, SD = 1.28$) compared with the comparison group helping condition ($M = 4.21, SD = 1.28$) when Threat was high ($B = -.17, p = .034, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.33, -0.01]$), but did not affect perceived distinctiveness when Threat was low ($B = .05, ns, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.11, 0.20]$). The three-way interaction between Threat, Help Target, and Identification was not significant ($B = .07, ns, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.05, 0.18]$).

We conducted a mediated moderation analysis to test for the existence of an indirect effect of the three-way interaction between Threat, Help Target, and Identification on perceived distinctiveness, as mediated by support. To this end, we used the PROCESS macro model 4 (Hayes, 2013) with 5,000 bootstrapped samples for bias-corrected 95% CIs. The demographic variables age, gender, and symbolic racism

were included simultaneously with the effects of the independent variables so that the effect of the independent variables can be interpreted as controlling for these demographic variables. In accordance with Hypothesis 6, there was a significant indirect effect of the three-way interaction (Threat \times Help Target \times Identification) on perceived distinctiveness via support ($B = .03, SE = .01, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.01, 0.06]$). The mediation model was significant and accounted for 15% of the variance in perceived distinctiveness, $F(11, 478) = 7.88, p < .001$. We also examined an alternative model in which the positions of support and perceived distinctiveness were reversed (from mediator to dependent variable and vice versa), but the indirect effect in this model was not significant ($B = -.01, SE = .01, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.04, 0.01]$).

Discussion

The results provide evidence for the active use of third party helping as a means of intergroup differentiation. Among high-identifying participants, a threat to group distinctiveness increased support for third party helping but decreased support for comparison group helping. Support also mediated the effect of the manipulations on participants' perceived distinctiveness of their own group. The observation that only high identifiers engaged in differentiation attempts in response to distinctiveness threat (either by supporting the third party group or withholding support for the comparison group) is in line with prior research demonstrating that responses to distinctiveness threat are more pronounced among high identifiers (e.g., Jetten et al., 2004).

In contrast to the previous three studies, the current study did not compare third party helping with overt discrimination of the comparison group, but rather with a reduced motivation to help the comparison group. Overt discrimination is increasingly substituted in modern societies by more subtle forms of discrimination. These subtle forms often include the withholding of support (Dovidio et al., 2008; Gabriel & Banse, 2006; Henry & Sears, 2002). Whereas the act of helping can signal closeness and similarity, a refusal to help would do the exact opposite and create more distance. However, when looking at perceptions of distinctiveness, it would appear that the refusal to help the comparison group was somewhat less effective than the active helping of a third party. When distinctiveness threat was high, the ingroup was seen as more distinct in the third party helping condition compared with the comparison helping condition. Although future research should examine this notion in more detail, it is possible that third party helping, because of the active nature of this response, increases group distinctiveness more than the inactive refusal to help the comparison group. Future research should also investigate how effective subtle discrimination in the form of withholding support is for enhancing group distinctiveness as viewed by outsiders, in addition to the ingroup's view of its own distinctiveness. Subtle discrimination by definition implies that it is not easily

recognized as discrimination. It therefore remains to be seen whether this behavioral strategy is suitable for affecting public opinion.

General Discussion

The quest for group distinctiveness is universal. The need to be distinct is so ingrained in groups that they sometimes even prefer to be *negatively distinct* (i.e., worse than) from a comparison outgroup than to be similar to that group (Mlicki & Ellemers, 1996). It is therefore not surprising that, despite the negative moral connotations associated with discrimination and its potential detrimental effects for the discriminator's moral image, the need for group distinctiveness is still at the root of a range of derogatory and discriminatory behaviors (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Jetten et al., 1998; Levin & Sidanius, 1999). In the current article, we presented four studies that examined third party helping as an alternative, more benign, strategy to discrimination in the quest for public group distinctiveness. In line with predictions, we found that third party helping was just as effective as overt discrimination in increasing perceived differentiation. This effect was fully contingent on the nature of the relationship between the third party and the comparison outgroup, and affected not only distinctiveness ratings but also perceptions of the very culture or identity of the group. Moreover, discrimination damaged the reputation of the actor group and depicted it as aggressive, whereas third party helping boosted this reputation by depicting the group as helpful. Finally, threats to group distinctiveness triggered the active use of third party helping among high identifiers, which effectively increased perceptions of the distinctiveness of the own group.

Previous research investigated responses to distinctiveness threat, identifying strategies that ranged from mostly cognitive (e.g., altered perceptions of ingroup and outgroup homogeneity; Pickett & Brewer, 2001), and affective (e.g., expressions of guilt; Zebel, Doosje, & Spears, 2009) to behavioral (e.g., identity signaling, Berger & Heath, 2008, and discrimination, Dovidio et al., 1997; Jetten et al., 1998; Levin & Sidanius, 1999). However, an investigation of the actual effectiveness of such strategies in terms of *perceived* group distinctiveness, both in the eyes of ingroup members and in the eyes of the general public, is rare. Organizations widely recognize that beliefs about what is unique or distinct about an organization affect the attractiveness and reputation of that organization (Dutton et al., 1994; Ghosh & Morita, 2012; Wilkinson & Balmer, 1996). The current article contributes to our knowledge of intergroup differentiation by providing insight into the effectiveness of discrimination (both in the form of overt derogation and in the form of more subtle help refusal) and third party helping. Discrimination was demonstrated to increase outsiders' view of the group's distinctiveness, and as such is indeed an effective tool for intergroup differentiation. In fact, discrimination was just as effective as third party helping, but with one important

caveat: discrimination lowered public opinion with respect to the group's overall image. Discriminating groups were viewed negatively, whereas helpful groups were viewed positively, compared with control groups. Discriminating other groups to increase ingroup distinctiveness thus comes at a costly price to the ingroup's reputation.

The current studies used principles from balance theories (Cartwright & Harary, 1956; Heider, 1946) to predict the effect of third party helping on intergroup differentiation. The applicability of these principles to an intergroup context was by no means a given. Research has shown that people respond differently to similarity between individuals compared with similarity between groups (Diehl, 1988), and similarity is an important component of balance theory's concept of unit relationship. The intergroup relations literature typically studies groups as duos, as reflected in common terminology such as "ingroup" and "outgroup," or "us" versus "them." By doing so, more complicated group dynamics involving multiple groups may not have received the research attention they deserve. The application of principles from balance theories to intergroup relations could go a long way in helping us to understand the more complicated dynamics of, for example, political and international relations. We therefore argue for a broader conceptualization of intergroup relations, involving not just two groups but a wider dynamic of multiple groups and its influence on group members' attitudes and behaviors.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

There are some limitations to this research that need to be addressed. To study the effect of discrimination and third party helping on perceived group distinctiveness, participants in the first three studies were given specific information about the actions of three Mongolian tribes. Although these were existing tribes, participants' unfamiliarity with them allowed for a controlled manipulation of, for example, the nature of the relationship between the target and the comparison groups, without the interference of prior knowledge of the groups. Future research could study the effect that different types of prior knowledge have on the perceived effectiveness of third party helping. For example, if a group is well known for its generosity toward others, its helpfulness toward one specific group may not be interpreted as a sign of closeness to this third party, but rather as just another expression of the group's generous nature. Likewise, if perceivers are aware of a prior negative relationship between an actor group and a third party, the actor group's sudden helpfulness toward the third party may not be interpreted as a sign of closeness, but possibly as a strategic act to dominate this third party (cf. Nadler et al., 2009).

We compared third party helping with the discrimination of a comparison outgroup (a "second party") in this article. In doing so, these strategies were confounded in the sense that they each focused on a different target group. As our

main interest was to compare the effectiveness of strategies that can enhance group distinctiveness, this difference in focus is not problematic as it reflects the social reality. That is, helping (but not discriminating) a third party can increase distinctiveness from the comparison group, as can discriminating (but not helping) the comparison group. However, because our behaviors of interest were naturally confounded with a target group, we cannot at this point identify to what extent some of the observed effects are attributable to the differentiation strategy only. Future research could, for example, compare discrimination of a comparison group with discrimination of the third party group to investigate whether discriminating groups are always seen as more distinct from other groups, or only as more distinct from the target of discrimination. Similarly, comparing third party helping with helping of the comparison group could allow one to filter out possible effects that may stem from the positive act of helping itself, regardless of the target of help.

Third party helping has one important drawback: Its effectiveness in increasing the actor group's distinctiveness from the comparison group relies on an existing negative relationship between the comparison group and the third party. It could therefore be argued that third party helping is merely a way of shifting the problem from the actor group to the third party. Given this drawback, we would certainly argue against promoting a negative relationship between a comparison group and the third party to benefit from this as an actor group. However, these negative relationships may already exist, and when they do, actor groups could benefit from them without contributing themselves to more negativity in the form of discriminating comparison groups.

Conclusion

When a group finds itself under threat from another group (the aggressor), it may seek alliance with third parties to strengthen its political, economic, or military position. Those parties most willing to align themselves with these groups under threat are typically parties who themselves have a negative relationship with the aggressor. For example, 2 days after the U.S. Boston bombings in 2013, Ron Dermer, at that time senior advisor to Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu, stated that "the bulk of the American people stand firmly with Israel . . .," ". . . after the tragic bombing in Boston, I believe that people will identify more with Israel's struggle against terror and . . . we can maintain that support" (C. Brown & Alterman, 2013). What the current research shows is that these forms of seeking alliance with third parties against a common enemy could serve not only a purely instrumental purpose but also the psychological purpose of increasing group distinctiveness, the need for which was activated by the induced threat. In Heider's (1946) terms, when one group is under attack by another group, they have a negative attitude relationship. Pressures toward balance will motivate the attacked group to match this with a similarly strong negative unit relationship. So, if you want to increase

distinctiveness from your enemy without compromising your morality or reputation, you should help your enemy's enemy.

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Supplemental Material

The online supplemental material is available at <http://pspb.sagepub.com/supplemental>

Notes

1. Although these are existing tribes in Mongolia, they were deliberately chosen because it was assumed that participants were unfamiliar with them, so that preconceived beliefs regarding the existing relationship between the comparison group and the third party would not play a role.
2. All studies reported in this article included some additional measures for exploratory purposes. Due to space limitations, only those measures that are central to the hypotheses are reported. An overview of all variables is included in a supplemental file. The data are available upon request.
3. The cultural profiles were based on dimensions for individual differences rather than existing dimensions for cultural difference, as participants were likely to believe that all three tribes, living in Mongolia, would share the same (collectivist) culture. The profiles used in this study therefore needed to indicate differences that were not specifically associated with East and Central Asia.
4. The profiles were counterbalanced by reversing the scale endings, to control for possible differences in valence or attractiveness of the profile. As preliminary analysis revealed no main or interaction effects related to the type of profile, the reported analyses were collapsed across the two profiles.
5. In a separate test of the validity of this manipulation, the articles successfully affected participants' experience of threat in the intended direction (Wilson & Hugenberg, 2010). However, distinctiveness threat can manifest itself in multiple ways (Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004), and the measurement of (specific forms of) threat is extremely difficult (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). Distinctiveness threat arguably overlaps with a threat to the very existence of a group, such that fading group boundaries imply a change to the very nature of a group. The current manipulation may therefore also contain an element of existential threat.

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