UMD Culture Lab: Exploring Group Response to Collective Threat

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Science, Discovery, and the Universe

Fire Protection Engineering

Research Question

How do members of the same in-group collectively respond to a threat from an out-group?

Research Context

The Culture Lab focuses on cross-culture relationships, often between different countries. The current research centers around Tightness-Looseness Theory to help explain differences in norms across nations. This project in particular is concerned with injunctive and descriptive norms and rhetoric.

Study Limitations

Though this research will hopefully be used one day to explain cultural differences, at the UMD we are unable to compare different countries. Instead, the in- and out- groups considered are united by shared identity, such as religion or organization affiliation.

Description of Methodology

Participants first fill out a survey about their identity. Then, they are randomly given one of two surveys with either injunctive or descriptive language. All are presented with the same scenario of an out-group threatening their in-group, and they fill out an online survey with how they would react. We compare both cases – injunctive and descriptive variables – and evaluate the influence of the rhetoric.

Step	Predictor	R	R^2	R^2ch.	Fch.	df	β
1	Attitude	.71	.50	.50	25.81***	6, 154	0.12
	Perceived behavioural control						0.35***
	Descriptive norm						0.26***
	Personal injunctive norm						0.21**
	Social injunctive norm						0.02
	Self-monitoring						−0.02
2	Self-monitoring × personal injunctive norm	.71	.50	.00	0.36	2, 152	0.06
	Self-monitoring × social injunctive norm						−0.02

Note. β coefficients computed after all variables in the equation.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Figure 1 *Regression analysis examining the interaction between injunctive norms (personal and social) and self-monitoring in the prediction of behavioral intention (White, et al).*

Data Analysis

The data used a 2x2 variable analysis: injunctive or descriptive language and a collective or individual response. The data is being compiled and analyzed in R, categorizing key words and themes in order to identify trends between the groups. These data subsets will be graphed in order to note the significance of the results.
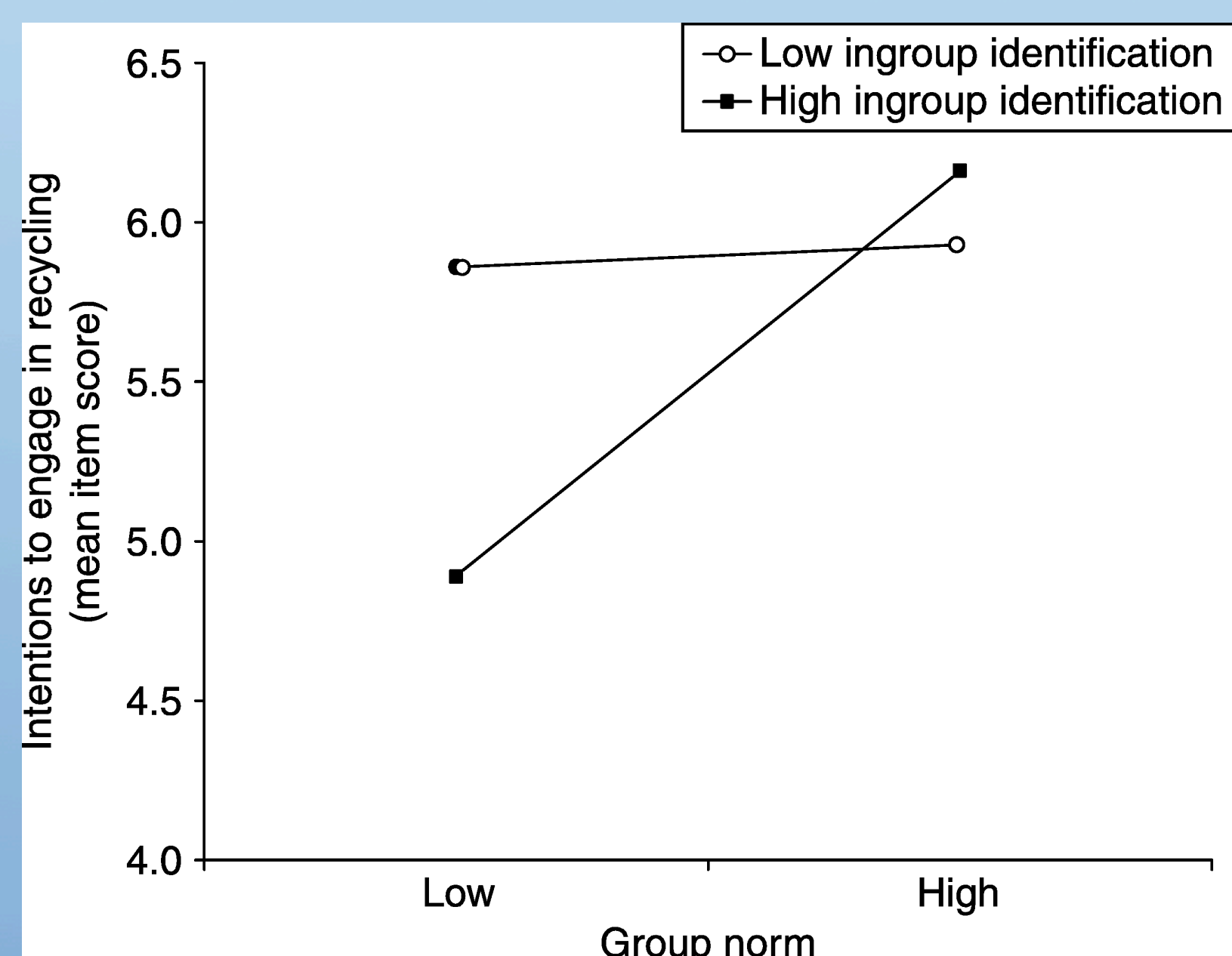

Figure 2 *Interaction between-group identification and group norm on behavioral intention (White, et al).*

Conclusions

As the research is ongoing, I have no definitive conclusions at this time. The present trends support the idea that those presented with injunctive terms feel a greater sense of unity with their in-group than members of the same group whose surveys used descriptive language. As shown in Figure 2, high in-group association correlates to adhesion to the group norms. Our data supports the same notion, but instead of the group influencing an individual reaction, we are judging a collective response.

Suggestions for Further Research

As is the nature of the Culture Lab, this experiment should be repeated in the context of tightness-looseness. Future studies should consider both different aspects of identity and similar identities of different nations in experiments. Additionally, qualitative research comparing the Threat Management Theory to Tightness-Looseness Theory approaches would further inform the subject.

Citations

Experiment design influenced by:
White, K. M., Smith, J. R., Terry, D. J., Greenslade, J. H., & McKimmie, B. M. (2009). Social influence in the theory of planned behaviour: The role of descriptive, injunctive, and in-group norms. British Journal of Social Psychology, 48(1), 135-158.