

## Threatened identities and interethnic interactions

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This chapter adopts a social identity threat perspective to examine dynamics of interethnic interactions. We first review relevant literature regarding the conditions under which both White and ethnic minority individuals are likely to experience social identity threat within the specific context of interethnic interactions. We focus on the threat of being perceived as stereotypical of one's ethnic group, considering situation- and person-level factors that trigger the experience of such threat during interethnic interactions. Next, we offer a framework for understanding how individuals cope with social identity threat during interethnic interactions, proposing three main classes of responses: avoidance, outgroup devaluation/derogation, and behaviour modulation/regulation. We review factors that are likely to influence the adoption of one of these responses, and then consider potential implications that each type of response may have for individuals' experiences during interactions, the development of interethnic friendships, and the attenuation of prejudice.

There are many ways in which people can feel their self-integrity has been threatened. The working mother who is told daycare causes psychological damage to children, the student who receives negative feedback on an exam, the boy who is unable to find a date to the senior prom, and the gay male who is denied a promotion at work, are just a few examples of cases in which people might feel a threat to their identity. Some of these threats are directed at individuals' personal identities, whereas others are directed at their social identities. Regardless of whether the threat is directed at their personal or social identity, people are motivated to engage in

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<http://www.psypress.com/ersp>

DOI: 10.1080/10463280601095240

strategies to protect their self-integrity (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). Several psychological theories, such as social identity theory, self-categorisation theory, cognitive dissonance, and self-affirmation theory, illustrate how individuals strive to preserve a positive sense of self in the face of such challenges. These theories provide an understanding of the cognitive and behavioural strategies people use to deal with threats that they currently confront to their social and personal selves (Ellemers, 1993; Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Tesser, 1988). As recent research suggests, people are quite savvy at protecting the self from anticipated threats. In fact, some theorists believe that people have a psychological immune system to protect themselves from current and impending threat (Wilson & Gilbert, 2005).

The goal of this chapter is to examine the implications of a threatened social identity for interethnic interactions. Similar to Steele, Spencer, and Aronson's (2002) work on stereotype threat, we refer to social identity threat as a concern that one will be judged on the basis of or confirm the stereotypes associated with one's group, rather than concerns about negative group evaluation more generally. In our research we have considered how social identity threat can affect the dynamics of exchanges between members of different ethnic groups, as well as its broader implications for intergroup relations. We have focused more on individuals' concern that they will be judged on the basis of group stereotypes than on their concerns about confirming the stereotypes. Our work stems from research on meta-stereotypes—individuals' beliefs regarding the stereotypes that outgroup members hold about their group. We argue that meta-stereotypes can be a source of social identity threat during interethnic interactions. Although our research focuses on meta-stereotypes, in this chapter we will also address how individuals' concerns with confirming group stereotypes are related to social identity threat during interethnic interactions.

Our idea that individuals' social identity can be threatened in interethnic interactions is not entirely novel. Recently, researchers studying prejudice and stigma have begun to ground their work in an identity threat framework. In fact Major and O'Brien (2004) acknowledge, "identity threat models dominate current research on stigma" (p. 398). In their own work, Major and O'Brien developed a model of stigma-induced identity threat that integrates contemporary research on stigma with transactional models of stress and coping. They suggest that collective representations, situational cues, and personal characteristics influence the extent to which individuals will appraise a situation as threatening to their identity. Moreover, they suggest that identity threat can lead to relatively non-volitional responses (e.g., anxiety) and relatively volitional responses (e.g., coping efforts, such as attributing negative events to discrimination). They focus on important personal outcomes such as self-esteem, academic achievement, and health.

In this paper we offer a conceptual analysis that builds on and broadens Major and O'Brien's model of stigma, which focused largely on targets of discrimination. We illustrate how both Whites and ethnic minorities can experience threats to the social self within the specific context of interethnic interactions. More importantly, we analyse the consequences of social identity threat for the dynamics of such interactions and for intergroup relations. This focus on intergroup relations leads us to emphasise other-directed responses that centre on individuals' treatment and evaluations of outgroup members.

We begin by discussing how situation- and person-level factors can trigger threats to one's social identity during interethnic interactions. We identify three main types of responses that people might have as they negotiate social identity threat during interethnic interactions. We then review factors that are likely to influence the adoption of one of these responses. Finally, we illustrate the implications that each response may have for the dynamics of interethnic interactions, interethnic friendship development, and prejudice reduction. Figure 1 presents a model that integrates the ideas discussed in this chapter.

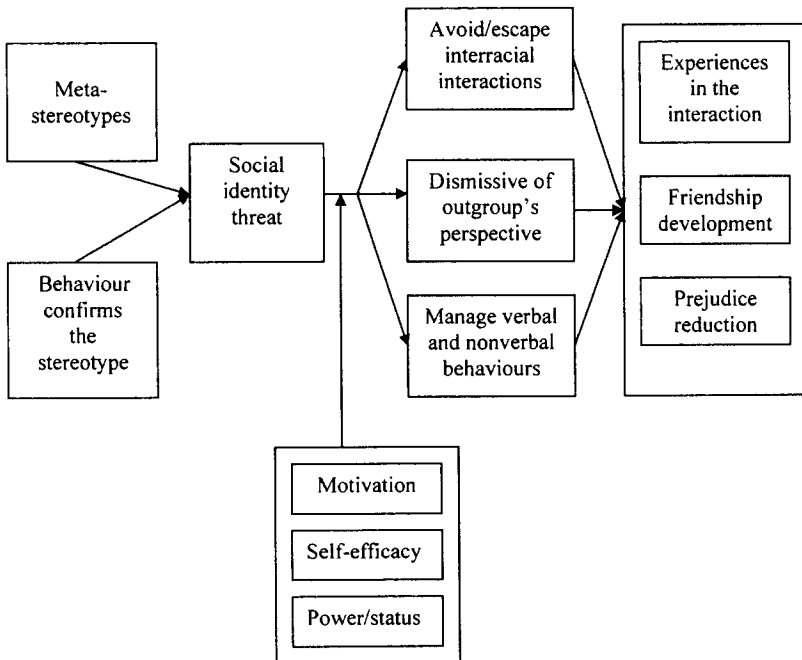


Figure 1. A model of social identity threat in interethnic interactions.

## SOURCES OF THREATENED IDENTITY IN INTERETHNIC INTERACTIONS

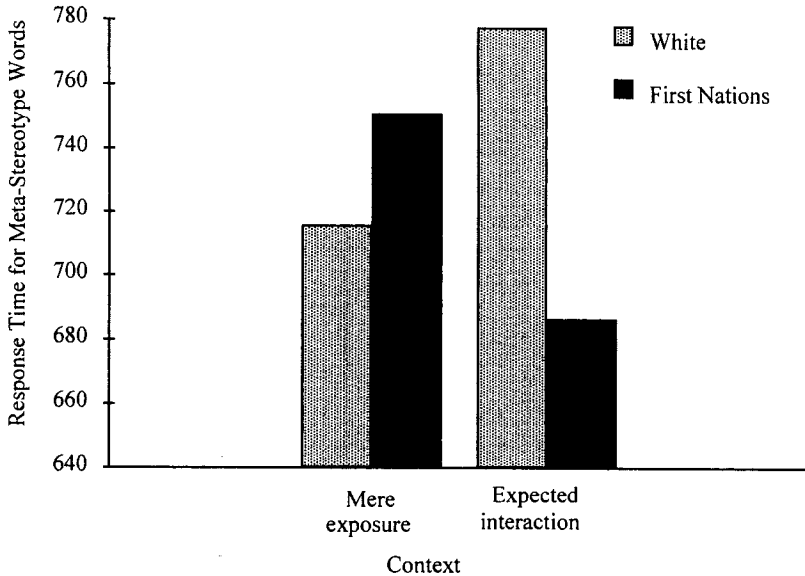
Although threats to social identity can take a variety of forms, including, for example, threats to the distinctiveness of the ingroup or one's position within the ingroup (see Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999), we focus on threats of special relevance to the dynamics of everyday interethnic interactions. In particular, we examine threats emanating from individuals' sense that they might be erroneously judged in light of negative stereotypes about their group. Thus, our analysis of social identity threat is very much in line with research and theory underscoring how individuals' personal self-esteem and identity is shaped by and responsive to perceived evaluations from others (Leary & Downs, 1995). We seek to build on the rich tradition of social identity theory and research (e.g., Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) by focusing in on this reflected, "in the eyes of the other" dimension of social identity. This dimension has not typically been emphasised in work within a social identity theory perspective (Spears, Ellemers, Doosje, & Branscombe, 2006).

One factor that guides whether individuals are apt to think about how they might be stereotyped is the salience of their social identity (see Frey & Tropp, 2006, for a recent detailed discussion). In interethnic interaction, the focus of our analysis, salience is apt to be high (at least initially) by virtue of the available visual cues regarding ethnic group membership. Thus, individuals often realise that there is the potential for an outgroup member to view them in a stereotypical and inaccurate manner. In connection with this, individuals are often preoccupied with how they are being perceived and evaluated by outgroup members (Vorauer, 2006). In such cases we consider individuals to be operating in terms of both their personal and social identity, focusing on how they personally are being seen through the lens of their group membership.

The particular focus of the threat can depend on myriad factors attached to the history of relations between the groups involved. Although our analysis is a general one that does not depend on the specific content of the threat, we focus on threats tied to status differences between the groups involved because most research to date on concerns about being stereotyped has centred on this type of intergroup relationship. Social psychologists have tended to focus on the consequences of a threatened social identity for individuals of lower-status groups, such as ethnic minorities. Recently, however, researchers have started to explore ways in which individuals of higher-status groups, such as Whites, believe that they are stereotyped and feel that their social identity is threatened. Indeed, in many social contexts in North America and Europe, one of the worst things one can do to a White person is to label him/her as prejudiced.

In a series of studies, Vorauer and her colleagues have demonstrated that meta-stereotypes are activated when White Canadians focus on how First Nations (indigenous peoples in Canada) might evaluate them during interactions. In one study, White Canadians simply listed the stereotypes they thought that First Nations have about White Canadians (Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998). Results revealed that White Canadians believe that First Nations perceive White Canadians as being prejudiced, biased, selfish, and closed minded. In subsequent research, Vorauer, Hunter, Main, and Roy (2000) explored the extent to which meta-stereotype activation occurs because of individuals' evaluative concerns or simply as a result of exposure to the outgroup. They led White Canadians to expect that they either would be having a discussion with another student about social issues (expected interaction condition) or would be shown a videotape of another student responding to a series of questions (mere exposure condition). All participants were shown a videotape of the other person answering some questions. However, only the participants in the expected interaction condition knew that it was possible for their partner to evaluate them at a later time. The ethnicity of the person in the video was manipulated such that participants saw either a White Canadian or a First Nations individual. After watching the video, participants completed a lexical decision-making task that assessed the extent to which meta-stereotypes were activated. As shown in Figure 2, results revealed that meta-stereotypes were more likely to be activated when White Canadians anticipated having an interaction with a First Nations person, compared to simple exposure to a First Nations person.

Although meta-stereotype activation is likely to occur in interethnic interactions, it does not necessarily result in identity threat. Rather, the extent to which individuals feel threatened depends on their construal of whether and how the meta-stereotype will be applied to self. There are many factors that are likely to influence meta-stereotype construal. In our work we have identified two important factors: (1) racial attitudes and (2) the presence or absence of other ingroup members, coupled with how they behave. With respect to racial attitudes, higher-prejudice White Canadians are more likely than lower-prejudice White Canadians to believe that First Nations interaction partners will perceive them meta-stereotypically (Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001; Vorauer et al., 1998). Indeed, whereas higher-prejudice White Canadians believed that they would be assimilated to the meta-stereotype, lower-prejudice White Canadians instead believed that they would be contrasted against it. These divergent effects for higher- and lower-prejudice individuals likely reflect their distinct self-concepts and different beliefs about an outgroup member's readiness to use stereotypes instead of individuating information. Thus, although meta-stereotypes are activated for both lower- and higher-prejudice White Canadians,



**Figure 2.** Response time to meta-stereotype-relevant words as a function of whether White Canadians expected to interact with a student whose videotape they were shown and the student's ethnicity (Vorauer et al., 2000).

lower-prejudice individuals may be threatened less by meta-stereotype activation because they do not believe that outgroup members will apply the meta-stereotype to them.

In additional work, however, Vorauer (2003) found that racial attitudes work in tandem with features of the social context in shaping the extent to which meta-stereotypes yield identity threat. In this study, White Canadians classified as either low or high in prejudice were videotaped as they answered questions on prejudice-relevant topics (e.g., immigration) either on their own (individual condition) or accompanied by other ingroup members (group condition). After completing the videotape, participants were informed that an observer, who was either an ingroup (White) or an outgroup (First Nations) member, would watch their tape. They then estimated how they would be perceived by the observer. As shown in Table 1, being in a group context increased lower-prejudice Whites' vulnerability to group-based threat. Specifically, lower-prejudice White Canadians believed a First Nations observer would perceive them more negatively when other White Canadians who exhibited prejudice-relevant behaviours were present, compared with when they answered the questions on their own. The opposite results were found for higher-prejudice White Canadians. These individuals believed that a First Nations observer would

TABLE 1  
White Canadians' mean estimates of how prejudiced the observer would judge them to be

	<i>White observer</i>		<i>First Nations observer</i>	
	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Group</i>
Lower prejudice	2.40 <sub>ac</sub> (1.17)	2.25 <sub>a</sub> (0.87)	2.20 <sub>a</sub> (0.92)	3.10 <sub>bcd</sub> (1.52)
Higher prejudice	2.71 <sub>ad</sub> (0.99)	3.20 <sub>bcd</sub> (1.40)	3.30 <sub>bd</sub> (1.06)	2.40 <sub>ac</sub> (0.70)

Vorauer, 2003. Judgements were made on a 7-point scale where 1 = *tolerant* and 7 = *prejudiced*. Means sharing a common subscript do not differ significantly. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

perceive them less negatively when there were other White Canadians present than when they were alone. Thus, this work suggests that individuals' racial attitudes combine with the social context to shape their perceptions of how outgroup members will view them, and thus the extent to which they will experience social identity threat during an interaction.

Just as interethnic interactions may trigger social identity threat for Whites, they can have the same effect for ethnic minorities. In fact, the majority of stigma research from ethnic minorities' perspectives implies that they are concerned about being stereotyped during interethnic interactions. As Vorauer (2006) notes, the threat that minorities face in research on prejudice and stigma is often imposed by the experimental paradigm. For example, ethnic minorities are asked to complete a test diagnostic of their intellectual ability (e.g., Steele & Aronson, 1995), or they receive racially biased feedback (e.g., Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, & Crocker, 1998). Similar to these manipulations, interethnic interactions also often raise ethnic minorities' vulnerability to feeling stereotyped, and therefore trigger social identity threat.

Research also shows that ethnic minorities hold meta-stereotypes about how their group is perceived by others. Wout, Shih, and Jackson (2005), for example, found that African Americans expect White Americans to view African Americans as a group as untrustworthy, athletic, aggressive, and not hardworking, and to apply those stereotypes during interethnic contact experiences to a greater extent than other African Americans. Similarly, Asian and Mexican Americans are aware of the stereotypes about their group. Asian Americans are aware that others expect them to be intelligent but unsociable (Chu & Kwan, 2005), and Mexican Americans believe that others perceive them in a negative manner with respect to intelligence, physical appearance, and character (Casas, Ponterotto, & Sweeney, 1987).

Likewise, French-speaking Belgians believe that French individuals perceive them as having weak linguistic skills as well as being less competent than warm (Yzerbyt, Provost, & Corneille, 2005).

Just as the behaviour of other ingroup members present in the social context can influence the extent to which Whites feel social identity threat, so the presence of other ingroup members also plays a role in determining whether ethnic minorities feel threatened. Indeed, recent research has found that witnessing ingroup members behaving in a stereotypical manner elicits vicarious threats to one's self-image. Specifically, Cohen and Garcia (2005) found that African American students were more concerned that they would be stereotyped in the academic domain based on the performance of other ingroup members than based on their own performance. Moreover, African American students had lower state self-esteem after witnessing another African American student take a test that was described as diagnostic of their verbal abilities than after witnessing the ingroup member take a test that was not described as diagnostic of verbal ability. Although the African American students were not personally evaluated, merely witnessing the evaluative situation involving an ingroup member was threatening to their identity. Additional research demonstrates that Hispanic individuals experience "collective shame" when they observe other Hispanic individuals behaving in a stereotypical manner in interethnic contexts (Schmader & Lickel, 2006). Moreover, when in the presence of an outgroup audience, African Americans report feeling more positively about their group when exposed to an ingroup member behaving counter-stereotypically compared to when exposed to an ingroup member behaving stereotypically (Richeson, Pollydore, Ambady, & Shih, 2006a). Perhaps this vicarious social identity threat is one reason why individuals derogate ingroup members in extremely harsh ways (i.e., the Black Sheep effect; Margues, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988).

Clearly, the sense of being erroneously judged in light of group stereotypes may elicit identity threat during interethnic interaction. Importantly, individuals can also experience identity threat as a function of sensing that they have in fact confirmed relevant stereotypes. For instance, White Americans often experience identity threat when they are informed or perceive that their behaviour violates norms of fairness and egalitarianism (Winslow, 2004). Indeed, when lower-prejudice White Americans are informed that their actions are prejudiced, they experience negative affect directed towards the self (e.g., shame), suggesting that their desired ideal image has been threatened by accusations of prejudice (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). Thus, beyond the adverse consequences of feeling that one might be stereotyped by outgroup members, the perception that one has confirmed the stereotype can be threatening.

In sum, individuals may experience a threatened social identity in interethnic interactions. Individuals' sense of threat can be influenced by their



racial attitudes and the behaviours of other group members in the social environment. In particular, the behaviour of other ingroup members in the setting can heighten an individual's concerns about being viewed in light of group stereotypes. In fact, it is possible that perceiving negative evaluations in connection with the stereotypical behaviour of other ingroup members is especially threatening, perhaps because in such cases individuals' sense of control over outgroup members' negative impressions is lower. Following this logic, individuals' personal sense that they have confirmed group stereotypes may be somewhat less threatening because they have greater feelings of control over their own actions as compared to outgroup members' impressions, such that threats of the personal variety might be more easily reduced.

Additional research is needed to address the extent to which contextual factors modulate feelings of identity threat after direct accusations that one has behaved in a stereotypical manner. That is, does the presence of other ingroup members behaving stereotypically protect the self-concept after an individual also behaves stereotypically? Or does the presence of these stereotypical ingroup members amplify the negative affective consequences that stem from one's own instances of stereotypical behaviour? Future research is needed to examine these and related questions, especially given that interethnic contact often occurs in public contexts in which either other ingroup or outgroup members are likely to be present.

## Summary

We have described two ways in which Whites and ethnic minorities may experience threats to their social identity during everyday interethnic interactions. Specifically, in our work we have focused on individuals' beliefs that others perceived them according to the stereotypes associated with their group as a source of threat. Another source of identity threat is individuals' concerns that their actual behaviour confirms group stereotypes. In the next section we turn to how people respond to these threats in interethnic interactions.

## RESPONSES TO THREATENED IDENTITY IN INTERETHNIC INTERACTIONS

Extant research has documented that when the self is threatened, people attempt to restore their self-integrity. Several social psychological theories—cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988), social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986)—have addressed the strategies that people use when they experience aversive psychological tension as a result of

threats to their identity. Although distinct in many ways, these theories share overlapping ideas regarding how people cope with threat. According to dissonance theory, individuals might respond by behaving in a defensive manner, such as avoiding or denying the threat. Another way in which individuals respond is by directly dealing with the threat, in so far as they change their attitude or behaviour so that the threat no longer exists. According to self-affirmation theory, however, individuals may take an indirect approach by affirming facets of the self that are unrelated to the threatened domain. Social comparison theorists suggest that people cope with threats by the types of social comparisons they make (upward or downward) and by the relevant others (close others or strangers) they select to make these comparisons. According to social identity theory, individuals might respond with collective efforts to improve their group's status.

Using the aforementioned theories as a conceptual framework, we consider how Whites and ethnic minorities respond to a threatened collective identity in the context of interethnic interactions. Specifically, we offer three classes of responses that individuals may use to cope with social identity threat during interethnic contact: (1) avoid/escape interethnic interactions, (2) dismiss outgroup members' perspective, (3) manage behaviour during the interaction. Our analysis of potential responses is not exhaustive and does not include group-level responses such as collective action. Because of our focus on the dynamics of everyday interethnic interactions, we emphasise individual-level responses that are apt to have immediate consequences for the tenor of such exchanges, as well as longer-term consequences for interethnic friendship formation and prejudice reduction.

### **Avoid/escape intergroup interactions**

When people feel threatened in a domain, one way to reduce that threat is by avoiding the domain. For example, women exposed to gender-stereotypic advertisements, compared to women exposed to neutral advertisements, avoided the maths domain by choosing to answer fewer items on a maths test and reporting less interest in quantitative majors and careers (Davies, Spencer, Quinn, & Gerhardstein, 2004). Similarly, in an interaction context one means of ameliorating feeling stereotyped by outgroup members is to avoid them or to escape interethnic interactions as quickly as possible when they do occur. Consistent with this idea, Goff, Steele, and Davies (2005) found that White Americans positioned their chair farther away from an African American person when they believed they would discuss racial profiling, compared to when they believed they would discuss love and relationships, during an anticipated interethnic interaction. Further, the more meta-stereotypes associated with White Americans (e.g., racist,

bigoted) were activated, the farther White Americans placed their chairs from their African American partner when racial profiling was the topic of discussion, but not when love and relationships was the topic. These findings suggest that the racial profiling topic triggered White Americans' concerns about the threat of being perceived as prejudiced. They coped with this threat by trying to distance themselves from the anticipated racial minority interaction partner.

Not only do White Americans who experience identity threat try to create physical distance during interethnic interactions, they also try to avoid interactions that could be threatening. For example, Plant and Devine (2003) conducted a study in which White Americans came to the lab for a study that involved either an interethnic or a same-race interaction. Ostensibly because of technical difficulties, however, the participants were asked to re-schedule their session for a later date. Participants who were highly anxious about interacting with African Americans were three times more likely to be "no-shows" the following week when they believed the session involved interacting with African Americans compared to interacting with White Americans. Intergroup anxiety results from the anticipation of a broad range of negative consequences resulting from intergroup interactions (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). One source of intergroup anxiety may be the identity threat associated with being stereotyped during the interaction. Consequently, it is possible that feelings of identity threat led the White Americans in Plant and Devine's (2003) study to feel anxious about interethnic interactions, and therefore to opt not to return to the lab when they anticipated having to engage in one.

As noted previously, accusations from another person that one is biased also present a social identity threat to many White individuals. In this context, Whites may try to avoid or escape interactions with their accuser. Indeed, research has shown that White Americans who were accused by another ingroup member of making racially biased comments during an on-line chat session were less interested in having a face-to-face interaction with the person compared to White Americans who were accused of being lazy by another ingroup member (Winslow & Aaron, 2005). Interestingly, however, this was not the case when the accuser was African American. It is possible that regardless of the accusation—prejudiced versus lazy—White Americans feared that avoiding African Americans would be perceived as prejudiced. Nevertheless, these findings provide support for the idea that Whites avoid interactions—albeit same-race interactions in this study—when there is a threat to their social identity.

Similar to Whites, ethnic minorities may avoid or escape intergroup interactions when they believe their social identity will be threatened. Indeed, research has found that Latino and Asian American individuals who overheard a White American individual with whom they anticipated having

an interaction make prejudiced comments, felt less positively about the upcoming interaction as well as about interactions with outgroup members in general (Tropp, 2003). Similar findings have been illustrated with respect to African Americans' sensitivity about expecting to be the target of racial prejudice in social interactions. Specifically, African American college students with high levels of race-based rejection sensitivity have fewer White friends and interact with professors and teaching assistants less compared to African American students low in race-based rejection sensitivity (Mendoza-Denton, Purdie, Downey, & Davis, 2002). However, race-based rejection sensitivity is unrelated to the number of ethnic minority friends African Americans have, demonstrating that African Americans higher in race-based rejection sensitivity are likely to avoid only those they feel are most likely to be threatening to them on the basis of race. Thus, ethnic minorities who encounter social identity threat, or anticipate the potential threat of becoming a target of prejudice, cope with the threat by avoiding interethnic interactions.

### Dismiss outgroup members' perspective

Rather than avoiding outgroup members, or if avoidance is not possible, individuals may cope with threats to their racial/ethnic identity by becoming less tolerant of interethnic interaction in general, and particularly intolerant of the outgroup member's perspective during the interaction. Indeed, research has found that individuals devalue and de-emphasise the importance of diverse viewpoints after threats to their social identity by outgroup members. For example, research on assimilation and multicultural ideologies suggests that when individuals feel insecure because of threats to their social identity, they are less likely to be accepting of outgroup members' perspectives—instead they have the desire to emphasise and maintain their own cultural perspective (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). This may especially be the case for individuals who are highly identified with their racial group compared to those who are less identified. For example, Whites who are highly identified with their racial group, or with racially homogeneous social clubs, are more likely than low-identified Whites to believe that ethnic minority groups threaten their social power and position in society (Sidanius, Van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair, 2004). Moreover, highly identified, compared to less-identified, White Americans believe that White Americans share few common interests and values with ethnic minorities (Gurin, Peng, Lopez, & Nagda, 1999). Similarly, the more identified Dutch individuals are with their ethnic group, the lower their endorsement of multiculturalism in the Netherlands (Verkuyten, 2005).

In addition to being less tolerant of interethnic interactions in general, as well as of the outgroup member's perspective during interactions, when individuals feel threatened they may deny the experiences of outgroup

members. Research has found that one strategy White Americans can use in order to diminish the threat of being thought of as racist is to deny that racial prejudice continues to limit the opportunities of racial minorities. Because thinking about racial prejudice evokes feelings of collective guilt for many White individuals, and therefore threatens their egalitarian self-concepts (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998), denying prejudice serves to free individuals from the threat of being perceived as a racist. If Whites' self-worth has been affirmed, however, they may be less likely to deny that racial prejudice is a legitimate experience that ethnic minorities encounter. Consistent with this notion, Adams, Tormala, and O'Brien (2006) found that when White American and Latino participants were not provided with an opportunity to affirm the self in an important domain before answering questions about racial prejudice, Latinos perceived more prejudice against ethnic minorities than Whites. However, when participants were provided with a self-affirmation opportunity before answering questions about racial prejudice, the difference between Latinos and Whites in level of perceived prejudice against ethnic minorities was attenuated. Moreover, Whites who were self-affirmed perceived more prejudice against ethnic minorities than Whites who were not affirmed.

In some cases individuals may go further in dismissing outgroup members' perspectives, engaging in defensive derogation. That is, in order to protect a threatened identity, individuals might devalue the outgroup members they happen upon in their social context. Indeed, individuals who receive self-image threatening information are more likely to evaluate an outgroup but not an ingroup target negatively, as well as to like the target less, compared with individuals who do not receive such threatening information or individuals who receive information that affirms their self-image (Fein & Spencer, 1997).

Individuals are especially likely to disparage a person who they believe is the source of their identity threat, especially if that person is from a low-status group. This phenomenon was demonstrated in a series of studies conducted by Sinclair and Kunda (1999, 2000). Specifically, they demonstrated that individuals are more likely to derogate women and African Americans who criticise them than White males who criticise them or women and African Americans who praise them. Moreover, a significant factor contributing to ethnic minorities' attitudes about Whites is their perceptions of Whites' level of prejudice towards them (Stephan et al., 2002). That is, the more ethnic minorities perceive that Whites hold negative racial attitudes, the more negative are their attitudes towards Whites. It is possible that ethnic minorities develop negative attitudes about Whites (i.e., they disparage the group) in order to cope with the threat posed by their perceptions of Whites' negative racial attitudes.

Individuals whose social identity has been threatened in an interethnic interaction are also especially likely to derogate the person they feel is the

cause of the threat when they feel the person does not have legitimate grounds for criticism. In research on the intergroup sensitivity effect, Hornsey and his colleagues have shown that Anglo-Australians and Asian Australians are less defensive in the face of criticism—which we believe could be construed as a form of social identity threat—from fellow ingroup members than they are in the face of criticism from outgroup members (see Hornsey, 2005, for a review). The intergroup sensitivity effect is driven by the extent to which the critic is perceived to be psychologically connected to the group. Outgroup members are not psychologically connected to the group and, therefore, they are not perceived to have legitimate grounds on which to criticise the group. As a result, individuals cope with the identity threat arising from the criticism by disparaging the outgroup member.

Defensive derogation has also been documented in the context of interethnic interactions. One example of this can be gleaned from studies of attributions for why interethnic contact is relatively rare. Specifically, Shelton and Richeson (2005) found that White and African Americans believe they are more interested in interethnic contact than are outgroup members, implying that the outgroup deserves more blame than the ingroup for why interethnic contact does not occur. Similarly, when White Canadians perceived they communicated a greater level of enthusiasm about potentially becoming friends than their Chinese interaction partners, they engaged in defensive distancing in order to protect their embarrassed self-image (Vorauer & Sakamoto, 2006). That is, after (erroneously) assuming that their Chinese partner was not interested in forming a friendship, White Canadians decided that they were not interested in the potential friendship after all. Moreover, it is likely that the White Canadians in this situation also blamed their Chinese interaction partner for the collective failure to develop a friendship.

Defensive derogation can be more blatant and hostile than simply blaming outgroup members for negative contact outcomes and experiences. Rogers and Prentice-Dunn (1981) found, for instance, that White individuals shocked a Black confederate more than a White confederate if the confederate had previously insulted them, but not in the absence of an insult. In addition, when lower-prejudice White Canadians were in the presence of ingroup members exhibiting prejudice-relevant behaviours (e.g., making prejudiced comments), their judgements of a First Nations observer were more negative compared to when they were alone (Vorauer, 2003). Mediation analyses suggested that the presence of ingroup members exhibiting prejudice-relevant behaviour increased lower-prejudice White Canadians' expectations that their First Nations partner would misidentify them as prejudiced, leading to a state of identity threat. In response, these lower-prejudice White Canadians derogated the source of their identity threat—the First Nations partner.

## Manage behaviour to reduce identity threat

A third way in which individuals may respond to social identity threat in an interethnic interaction context is by changing their behaviour to reduce the negative consequences of the threat. White and ethnic minority individuals may respond to threatened identities by deliberately trying to manage or modulate their behaviour in order to make a good impression on interaction partners. This may involve altering one's behaviour to *avoid* stereotype confirmation, altering behaviour to be in accordance *with* group stereotypical expectations (see Klein & Snyder, 2003, for a review), or more generally trying to facilitate smooth interaction and convey positive impressions.

Considerable research has found that in order to reduce identity threat, individuals present themselves in ways that suggest the group stereotype does not apply. For instance, African American students in the threatening position of anticipating taking a test that was described to be diagnostic of intellectual ability dissociated themselves from activities linked to stereotypes of African Americans, such as playing basketball and listening to rap music (Steele & Aronson, 1995). More specific to the context of interethnic interactions, Hispanics who imagined interacting with a prejudiced person (Lazarewicz, Schmader, & Stone, 2003), and African Americans who believed others endorsed negative beliefs about their group (Roberts, 2005), were motivated to engage in strategies to change the stereotypes that others hold. Similarly, Klein and Azzi (2001) found that Belgian students disconfirmed more negative stereotypical traits when in the presence of an outgroup (i.e., French) audience than an ingroup audience.

Rather than behaving in stereotype-disconfirming ways, individuals may cope with identity threat by altering their behaviour in a manner that is *more* stereotypical. One reason why individuals might actually enact their group stereotypes in order to reduce the identity threat is because they believe they will gain rewards for doing so. For example, if the individual wants to gain the acceptance of the person who is the source of their feelings of threat, then he or she might opt to confirm the stereotypes regarding his or her group, especially if the stereotypes are relatively positive or seemingly benign. Consistent with this perspective, women have been found to strategically enact stereotypes associated with women during job interviews with sexist men (von Baeyer, Sherk, & Zanna, 1981) or with attractive men who hold sexist attitudes (Zanna & Pack, 1975). In addition to behaving in stereotype-consistent ways, the individual might actually incorporate the stereotypes into his or her self-view (Sinclair, Huntsinger, Skorinko, & Hardin, 2005a), which, ironically, might reduce feelings of threat.

In addition to managing one's behaviour in order to confirm or disconfirm relevant group stereotypes, individuals may also engage in general

behaviours, unrelated to stereotypes, that are likely to facilitate pleasant interactions. Such efforts are likely to reduce feelings of social identity threat. For instance, Miller and her colleagues found that obese women who thought that they were visible to normal weight interaction partners (and, thus, vulnerable to identity threat because of anti-fat prejudice) behaved in a more socially skilful manner than obese women who thought that they were not visible to their partners (Miller, Rothblum, Felicio, & Brand, 1995). The behaviours displayed by these “visible” obese women were unrelated to the negative stereotypes associated with obesity per se; nevertheless, it is likely that these behaviours were intended to reduce the threat posed by the possibility that one’s partner is prejudiced against obese women. Similarly, Shelton, Richeson, and Salvatore (2005a) found that ethnic minorities who were primed to expect to be the target of racial prejudice engaged in more socially engaging behaviours, such as smiling, during an interaction with a White American, compared with ethnic minorities who were not primed with this prejudice expectation. Thus, perhaps as a means to reduce the threat posed by a prejudice-tainted situation, individuals engage in behaviours, largely unrelated to their identity, that are designed to foster pleasant interactions.

## Summary

Whites and ethnic minorities may respond to a threatened social identity in various ways. Based on previous research, we posit that three of these responses may be: (1) to avoid or escape interethnic interactions; (2) to dismiss the importance of interethnic interactions or outgroup members’ perspectives; and (3) to change one’s behaviour to create a favourable impression. Each of these responses is likely to reduce threats to social identity, and comes with both potential costs and benefits for intergroup relations in general and prejudice in particular. On the surface at least, managing one’s behaviour seems apt to be more beneficial than avoiding interethnic interactions or dismissing the importance of outgroup members’ perspective. However, before we consider possible implications, in the next section we address factors that are likely to influence which of these responses individuals will use to cope with identity threat.

## FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE RESPONSES TO A THREATENED SOCIAL IDENTITY

Individuals’ inclination to pursue a coping strategy is likely to depend on various factors. We explore individuals’ motivation and self-efficacy as well as their status and power.



## Motivation and self-efficacy

Two related factors that are likely to play pivotal roles in determining which response individuals use to negotiate a threatened identity in interethnic interactions are motivation and self-efficacy. Individuals must be motivated to engage in one of the three responses outlined previously, and they must believe they have the ability (and opportunity) to do so. Moreover, they must believe that the chosen response will result in the desired outcome (Plant & Devine, 2003), and that they have the resources to enact the desired response effectively. Individuals who are motivated and believe they have the ability to negotiate a desired impression may opt to change their behaviour to create a favourable impression, whereas individuals who are not motivated and/or do not believe they have the ability may opt to use one of the other two responses as means to cope with a threatened identity.

Contextual factors are likely to influence individuals' motivation and self-efficacy, which in turn influence the type of response selected. Environments where social norms promote tolerance and diversity are less likely to lead individuals to reduce the importance of the outgroup member's perspective or to derogate outgroup members. Instead, in these environments people with threatened social identities are likely to attempt to modulate their behaviour in order to reduce the threat and, presumably, facilitate a harmonious interethnic interaction. When the social norms are more hostile towards tolerance and diversity, however, individuals may be more likely to derogate outgroup members, less motivated to understand the outgroup member's perspective, and less inclined to attempt to create a pleasant interaction. In addition to social norms, another important contextual factor that influences the response individuals use to cope with threatened collective identities is the importance of the interaction. Some interactions may be too trivial to motivate individuals to consider modulating their behaviour; instead, individuals may simply avoid or escape the interaction as soon as possible and/or derogate the outgroup member. For example, an African American woman who is treated stereotypically in a prestigious shopping store may experience social identity threat, but she may not be motivated to try to prevent the salespeople from having stereotypical perceptions of her.

Even if individuals are motivated to reduce social identity threat by changing their behaviour to create a favourable impression during the interaction, they may lack the skills or resources necessary for actually doing so. If an environment is extremely hostile to one's social group, it might be nearly impossible for individuals to overcome the hostility and ultimately reduce their level of identity threat. In other circumstances, individuals are likely to differ in their ability to overcome identity threat. Individuals with more interethnic contact experience, for instance, may have developed

strategies that they can use to negotiate interactions that trigger identity threat. When self-efficacy is low, however, individuals are more likely to try to avoid or escape the interaction to cope with a threatened social identity than they are to try to change their behaviour to facilitate a pleasant interaction (Plant & Butz, *in press*). Thus, motivation and efficacy are apt to play important roles in shaping responses to threatened collective identities.

### Status and power

Considerable research has found that status and power are basic dimensions of intergroup relations (Berger, Wagner, & Zelditch, 1985). These variables are likely to influence both the experience of social identity threat and how individuals respond to these threats. According to Berger et al.'s (1985) Expectation States Theory, interactions between members of different groups are shaped, in part, by expectations about the status of the interaction participants, based on the status associated with their group. Berger et al. referred to person characteristics that give rise to differential status expectations as "diffuse status characteristics". During interethnic interactions, for example, West Indians are typically conferred lower diffuse status than their White European partners, and are therefore expected to contribute less to joint endeavours during the interaction. Because of the influence of diffuse status characteristics, according to this model, members of low-status, minority groups are more likely to experience identity threat during interethnic interactions than members of higher-status, majority groups.

In addition to the status conferred by group membership, the status and power associated with individuals' roles in the interaction can also influence their behaviour and, presumably, the ways in which they respond to social identity threat. Indeed, status and power are relational concepts that are often determined contextually. For instance, a graduate student may have high status in an interaction with a college sophomore but low status in a meeting with a professor. Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson (2003) hypothesise that high power and status are associated with a general approach orientation, whereas lower power and status are related to self-focused behaviour and inhibition. As a result, it is possible that individuals in higher-status roles during interethnic interactions may be more likely than lower-status individuals to respond to social identity threat in "approach-oriented" ways. For instance, high-status interaction participants may be more likely to engage in defensive derogation than to avoid the interaction—a more inhibited response. However, other research suggests that the responses of higher-status individuals may simply be more variable than those displayed by their low-status counterparts. People in power are more expressive (Ellyson & Dovidio, 1985), show less restraint from taking

action (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003), and generally demonstrate greater variability in their interactive behaviours than do less powerful people (Guinote, Judd, & Brauer, 2002).

According to research on the relation between status and stereotyping (Fiske, 1993), however, outcome dependency, rather than status alone, is the critical variable that shapes how individuals relate to one another. Low-power, low-status individuals' outcomes are often dependent on the reactions of their higher-power interaction partners. Because of these contingencies, one might expect individuals in lower-power or lower-status roles to modulate their behaviours during interactions more often than engage in defensive derogation or devalue the outgroup's perspective, both of which are unlikely to lead to positive interaction dynamics and may leave lower-power individuals' outcomes in jeopardy. Similarly, individuals in roles of low power and status are less likely to be able to avoid or escape interethnic interactions following a threat to social identity, compared to individuals in positions of high power and status.

In addition to these direct influences, individuals' situational status can combine with the status associated with their group membership to shape their experiences of threat, and their subsequent coping reactions, during interethnic interactions. Interethnic interactions that involve situational status arrangements that are the reverse of socio-cultural status hierarchies (e.g., African Americans in higher-status roles relative to White American interaction partners) have been found to trigger social identity threat for individuals (Richeson & Ambady, 2001). Specifically, after interethnic interactions in which White Americans held low status with an African American partner, and after interactions in which African American participants held high status with a White partner, participants of both races reported that their racial groups were evaluated more negatively compared to when they held the opposite role during an interethnic interaction. Furthermore, perhaps as a method of coping with the threat posed by the situational status reversal, Whites in these interactions reported that their race was relatively unimportant to them, perhaps in order to distance themselves from their threatened White identity.

## Summary

We have described two factors that might influence the type of response individuals make regarding a threatened social identity in interethnic interactions. Specifically, individuals' motivation and self-efficacy as well as their status and power have serious consequences for the type of response individuals make. Unfortunately, however, there has not been much research that explicitly focuses on these factors. Thus, future research is needed to explore these factors in more detail.

## IMPLICATIONS OF RESPONDING TO A THREATENED SOCIAL IDENTITY

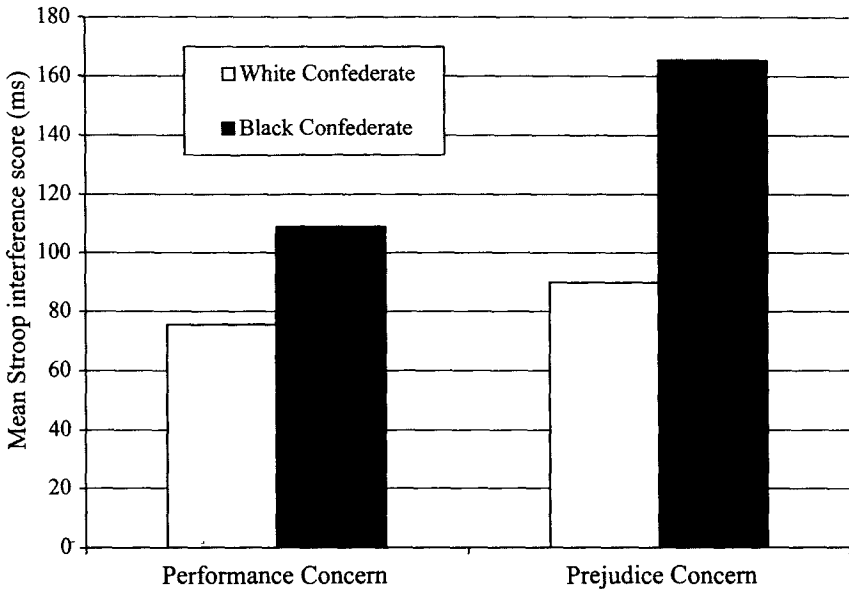
In this section we focus on the consequences of individuals' responses to a threatened social identity within three areas: (1) experiences during interethnic interactions, (2) interethnic friendship development, and (3) prejudice reduction.

### Experiences during interethnic interactions

Attempting to regulate one's behaviour as a response to an identity threat is apt to influence both one's own and one's partner's experience of interethnic interaction. The behaviours may have similar or different effects for one's own and one's partner's experiences.

In a series of studies, Richeson and her colleagues have demonstrated that interethnic interactions prompt White Americans to engage in self-regulatory strategies in response to the threat of appearing or behaving in a prejudiced manner (Richeson et al., 2003; Richeson & Shelton, 2003; Richeson & Trawalter, 2005; Trawalter & Richeson, 2006). Richeson and her colleagues argue that Whites' self-regulatory behaviour, in turn, can have negative consequences for their cognitive functioning after the interaction. Specifically, they suggest that harbouring concerns about prejudice causes individuals to carefully monitor their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in order to avoid being perceived as prejudiced. Such regulation and monitoring of thoughts, feelings, and behaviour is cognitively demanding, resulting in the temporary depletion of important cognitive resources (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Thus, concerns about prejudice during interethnic interaction are apt to leave Whites cognitively exhausted.

To test this idea, Richeson and Trawalter (2005) activated the prejudice concerns of White Americans prior to an interethnic interaction. Participants completed an implicit measure of racial prejudice. After completing the measure, half of the participants were given feedback designed to make them concerned about appearing prejudiced. Specifically, in this condition participants were told, "...most people are more prejudiced than they think they are". The other half of the participants were provided with performance feedback that was not race related, and therefore not expected to heighten concerns about appearing prejudiced. Specifically, participants in the control condition were told, "...most people perform worse than they think they did". Next participants engaged in a discussion about racial profiling with either a same-race or cross-race partner and then completed the Stroop colour-naming task, which measures inhibitory performance. As shown in Figure 3, results revealed that after the interethnic interaction, participants who received the prejudice feedback performed significantly



**Figure 3.** Mean Stroop interference scores as a function of race of confederate and prejudice concerns (Richeson & Trawalter, 2005).

worse on the Stroop task than participants who received the general performance feedback. The feedback did not influence participants' performance on the Stroop task in the same-race interaction.

When White Americans' concerns about appearing prejudiced were allayed rather than elevated, the cognitive depletion effect was eliminated (Richeson & Trawalter, 2005, Study 2). That is, participants who were provided with a script to use to discuss racial profiling, compared to those who were not provided with a script, were less likely to engage in effortful self-regulation in order to maintain a non-prejudiced self-image, which in turn eliminated the negative consequences for cognitive functioning.

Despite the negative cognitive consequences for the self, responding to social identity threat by engaging in self-regulatory processes may trigger positive experiences for one's partner. Shelton (2003) examined the extent to which ethnic minorities would have more favourable impressions of Whites who are concerned with appearing prejudiced than Whites who are not concerned. Specifically, she asked White and African Americans to engage in a "get-to-know-you" interaction with one another, where they discussed four neutral and four racially sensitive topics. Prior to the interaction,

half of the White American participants were explicitly told to try not to be prejudiced and half were given no instruction. Specifically, those in the try not to be prejudiced condition were told that previous research had shown that during interethnic interactions Whites' impressions of Blacks are often based on racial stereotypes, which can make them appear prejudiced. As a result, they should try not to be prejudiced during the interaction. Then participants engaged in a 15-minute interaction with an African American participant. After the interaction, participants indicated how much they liked their partner. Results revealed that African American participants liked White American partners who were instructed to try not to be prejudiced more than they liked White American partners who were not given this instruction (Shelton, 2003; see also Wetzel, Blalock, & Bolger, 2004).

Why did the African American participants like White partners who were concerned about appearing prejudiced more than White partners who were not concerned? There are two important factors to keep in mind. First, it is likely that White Americans who were told to try not to be prejudiced were put on guard, because such instructions imply that the experimenter may think that they are prejudiced. Moreover, the simple reminder that they should try not to be prejudiced probably activated their meta-stereotype that African Americans expect White Americans to be prejudiced, thereby creating a self-image threat. Second, as a result of concerns about appearing prejudiced, White Americans were likely to modulate their thoughts and behaviours in order to avoid confirming the group stereotype that they are prejudiced. Interestingly, the behaviour modulation of White participants under threat seemed to be successful in so far as their African American interaction partners enjoyed the interaction more than the partners of White participants who were not under threat.

Similar to Whites' self-regulatory efforts as a means of coping with a threatened self-image, ethnic minorities' responses to a threatened social identity have implications for their own and their partner's experiences during interethnic interactions. Shelton et al. (2005a) primed ethnic minority participants to expect racial prejudice by having them read a newspaper article that focused on the high incidence of racial bias. After reading the article, participants had an interaction with a White participant. As noted previously, ethnic minorities who expected to be the target of prejudice displayed more socially engaging behaviours during an interethnic interaction compared to those who did not have this expectation. As shown in Table 2, however, additional results revealed that ethnic minorities who expected to be the target of racial prejudice liked their partner less, experienced more negative affect, and felt less authentic during the interaction (Shelton et al., 2005a). However, as opposed to yielding a stressful situation for their White partners, ethnic minorities' prejudiced

TABLE 2

Mean values for ethnic minorities' and Whites' experiences during the interaction as a function of ethnic minorities' expectations about racial prejudice

	<i>Ethnic minorities primed to expect racial prejudice</i>	<i>Ethnic minorities not primed to expect racial prejudice</i>
Ethnic minority participants		
Liking for partner	4.72 (1.03)	5.41 (0.72)
Negative affect	2.97 (1.29)	2.14 (0.81)
Enjoyed the interaction	5.16 (1.14)	5.53 (0.79)
Authenticity	2.63 (0.58)	3.21 (0.78)
Self-regulatory behaviours	5.02 (1.05)	4.28 (0.89)
White participants		
Liking for partner	5.58 (0.62)	5.02 (0.54)
Negative affect	2.28 (0.73)	2.84 (0.56)
Enjoyed the interaction	5.67 (0.84)	4.78 (0.87)
Authenticity	3.50 (0.65)	3.14 (0.84)
Self-regulatory behaviours	4.73 (0.79)	4.32 (0.75)

Shelton et al., 2005a. Higher numbers represent more of the construct measured. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

expectations were associated with pleasant experiences for Whites during the interaction. Specifically, White Americans who interacted with an ethnic minority individual who expected racial prejudice liked their partner more, experienced less negative affect, and enjoyed the interaction more than White Americans who interacted with an ethnic minority who was primed to expect prejudice against another outgroup (Shelton et al., 2005a). In similar research, Shelton (2003) found that White Americans experienced less anxiety and enjoyed the interaction more when their African American partner expected them to be prejudiced compared to when their partner did not have this expectation.

Taken together, the research from Richeson's and Shelton's laboratories suggests that the consequences of individuals' desire to portray a certain image after experiencing social identity threat are primarily negative for the self and positive for one's partner (see Shelton & Richeson, 2006, for a review). However, research from Vorauer's laboratory suggests that when identity threats are cloaked in greater uncertainty, the story might be more complex. In particular, when the appropriate behavioural goals to pursue are unclear and a partner's bias against one's group is only a possibility, questions about how to handle the interaction may generally disrupt behaviour and render effective remedial strategies less likely (see Vorauer, in press, for an overview). Individuals' ongoing analysis of their actions and what those actions might mean for their interaction partner's impressions of

them should lead to hesitation, self-censorship, and second guessing, and thus prevent them from doing what comes naturally.

Vorauer notes that because of lower-prejudice Whites' egalitarian beliefs, their automatic, baseline response is to behave in a positive manner towards ethnic minorities. Situations that trigger Whites' self-image concerns (i.e., when evaluative concerns are high) cause these automatic positive responses to be disrupted for lower-prejudice Whites, such that their behaviour becomes less warm and friendly. Higher-prejudice Whites, by contrast, are less likely to have automatic, baseline positive behaviours towards ethnic minorities. As a result, situations that heighten their concerns about their self-image may disrupt negative rather than positive behaviour, such that they come to treat their partner better.

Vorauer and Turpie (2004) tested these ideas across a series of studies. In one study, White Canadians completed an explicit measure of racial prejudice and a public self-consciousness scale, which assessed their general disposition to be concerned with how they are evaluated by others. Later, these participants were brought into the lab for a study on social relationships. They were told that they would videotape messages back and forth with another participant in the study so that the researchers could determine how restrictions on communication influence social relationships. Participants had a videotaped exchange with either a White or First Nations Canadian interaction partner. Independent coders later coded the participants' verbal and nonverbal behaviours across a variety of dimensions (e.g., self-disclosure, appeared friendly, attentive etc.), which was summed to create an intimacy-building behaviour composite. As shown in Table 3, results revealed that lower-prejudice White Canadians with low evaluative concerns displayed a similar number of intimacy-building behaviours towards First Nations and White Canadian interaction partners. However, lower-prejudice participants with high evaluative concerns displayed fewer intimacy-building behaviours towards a First Nations relative to a White Canadian interaction partner. The opposite pattern was evident for higher-prejudice White Canadians, who treated a First Nations partner more negatively than a White partner when evaluative concerns were low but not when evaluative concerns were high.

In another study, Vorauer and Turpie experimentally induced White Canadians' evaluative concerns in the intergroup interaction and assessed their intimacy-building behaviour with a First Nations interaction partner. To manipulate evaluative concerns, participants were led to believe that the First Nations individual with whom they would interact perceived either a high or low level of discrimination against First Nations individuals in Canada. White Canadians' evaluative concerns should be high when they think they are interacting with a First Nations person who, in essence, expects them to be prejudiced against them. As shown in Table 4, and



TABLE 3

Predicted values for intimacy-building behaviour composite as a function of prejudice, partner ethnicity, and public self-consciousness

	<i>Low self-consciousness</i>	<i>High self-consciousness</i>
<i>Lower prejudice</i>		
White partner	-0.10	0.66
First Nations partner	0.23	0.08
<i>Higher prejudice</i>		
White partner	0.40	-0.17
First Nations partner	-0.79	-0.23

Vorauer and Turpie, 2004. Higher numbers denote higher levels of intimacy-building behaviour.

TABLE 4

Predicted values for intimacy-building behaviour composite as a function of White Canadians' prejudice level and their First Nations Canadian partner's expectations about discrimination

	<i>Low partner discrimination expectations</i>	<i>High partner discrimination expectations</i>
Lower prejudice	0.50	-0.09
Higher prejudice	-0.30	-0.09

Vorauer and Turpie, 2004. Higher numbers denote higher levels of intimacy-building behaviour.

consistent with the findings of the previous study, lower-prejudice Whites exhibited less intimacy-building behaviours when their partner had high rather than low expectations of discrimination. There was a nonsignificant reversal of this pattern for higher-prejudice Whites. Taken together, these findings suggest that evaluative concerns can disrupt individuals' automatic behaviours towards outgroup members, such that relatively unbiased Whites appear less friendly and more biased Whites appear more friendly than one would predict from their intergroup attitudes alone.

The ironic pattern evident in Vorauer and Turpie's (2004) research has implications for ethnic minorities' experiences during the interaction. To this end, Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, and Trawalter (2005b) created a situation in which African Americans formed an impression of lower- and higher-prejudice White Americans when evaluative concerns were high for the White American. Specifically, they created a situation in which White Americans would be concerned about how they would be perceived by an outgroup member by making them take a test of racial prejudice immediately before having a discussion about a controversial racial topic with an African American. Consistent with Vorauer and Turpie's ironic pattern, Shelton et al. (2005b) found that African Americans had more

favourable impressions of higher-prejudice, compared with lower-prejudice, White Americans with whom they interacted. In other words, when evaluative concerns were high, lower-prejudice Whites presented themselves more negatively than did higher-prejudice Whites.

While changing and regulating one's behaviour to create a more favourable self-image as a response to social identity threat is likely to yield a mixture of positive and negative outcomes during interethnic interactions, derogating outgroup members is more likely to yield negative outcomes. Moreover, it is likely that the outgroup member will reciprocate the derogation, which could spiral into an unpleasant interaction for all parties involved. This was evident in a situation in which women who were either high or low in stigma consciousness (i.e., dispositionally prone to expect to be the target of prejudice) worked with male interaction partners on a task where they decided on a winner for a journalism prize (Pinel, 2002). The women and men wrote evaluations of the candidates for the prize, and then had the chance to read one another's evaluations and rate one another. Some of the women were (erroneously) led to believe that their male partner was sexist. In response to this information, results revealed that women high in stigma consciousness rated the supposedly sexist man's evaluation more negatively than women low in stigma consciousness. In response to this derogation, their male partners rated the stigma-conscious women's evaluations negatively. In other words, disparaging their male partners as a means of coping with social identity threat resulted in reciprocated derogation, setting the stage for quite a negative intergroup encounter.

Avoidant responses to identity threat can affect interaction dynamics in a number of ways. First, when individuals generally avoid interethnic contact, they fail to accumulate experience that could reduce uncertainty and concerns with evaluation in situations where they do interact with someone from a different racial group (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, Lickel, & Kowai-Bell, 2001; Islam & Hewstone, 1993). Vorauer and Sakamoto's (2006) study of exchanges between White and Chinese Canadians revealed that White Canadians with lower levels of prior contact with Chinese Canadians evidenced more of the egocentric inferences that set the stage for defensive distancing than did White Canadians with higher levels of prior contact, even when prejudice and other potentially relevant individual differences were controlled. These findings suggest that limited prior intergroup contact experience can contribute to awkward interethnic interactions in which individuals are overly self-focused and draw inferences that reinforce feelings of identity threat.

Second, individuals who feel their social identity has been threatened in a particular interethnic exchange may create social distance from their interaction partners by sitting farther away, and displaying avoidant

behaviours such as decreased eye contact, greater fidgeting, and more hesitant speech (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2001; Sekaquaptewa, Espinoza, Thompson, Vargas, & von Hippel, 2003; Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974). These avoidant behaviours lead to difficult, awkward, and unfulfilling interaction experiences for individuals' partners (Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Hebl, Foster, Mannix, & Dovidio, 2002; Ickes, 1984; Word et al., 1974).

Taken together, the research reviewed here suggests that most coping strategies are likely to yield negative interaction outcomes for participants' interaction partners. Certainly devaluation and derogation are inherently negative responses to interaction partners, although they seem to be effective coping reactions in the face of social identity threat. Both response modulation and avoidance/escape seem to have more nuanced consequences for individuals under threat and their partners. Although escape alleviates feelings of threat for the self, the potential interaction partner is likely to perceive escape as social rejection. Moreover, if the potential interaction partner actually holds stereotyped beliefs, then escape may serve to confirm these beliefs. Consider, for instance, a potential interaction between a European woman who comes to learn that her American interaction partner believes most if not all European people are prejudiced against Americans. This situation is likely to activate feelings of social identity threat for the European woman. If she decides simply to escape the interaction—that is, not to take part in the interaction—she will certainly reduce her identity threat. However, when the potential American partner learns that the European individual chose to leave rather than have the interaction with her, she is likely to attribute it to the fact that the European woman is prejudiced—an attribution that confirms her expectancy. Thus, the European woman's decision to exit the situation in order to alleviate her feelings of threat is likely to fuel a self-fulfilling prophecy through which the American woman's stereotype about Europeans is strengthened.

The third coping strategy, behaviour modulation, seems to offer the most flexibility in terms of its influence on interethnic contact dynamics. As described previously, participants' efforts to manage their reactions to identity threat can lead to divergent experiences for the self and for interaction partners. Unlike any of the other coping strategies, engaging in self-regulation to foster positive interactions can be extremely successful and yield positive outcomes for interaction partners. However, regulating behaviour may come with a cost to the self. That is, individuals are likely to feel negatively and be cognitively depleted after engaging in response modulation. Consequently, although behaviour modification may be the coping strategy that is most likely to yield positive interaction outcomes, its benefits for the individual under threat may be less direct and immediate than those associated with the other coping strategies.

## Interethnic friendship development

The types of responses individuals make as a result of a threatened social identity are likely to influence the probability that friendships develop across racial lines. Research suggests that the type of intimate, personal interaction associated with friendships is likely to reduce prejudice and lead to positive intergroup relations (Levin, van Laar, & Sidanius, 2003). Clearly, coping with social identity threat by avoiding or escaping interethnic contact is unlikely to facilitate the development of interethnic friendships. For instance, Shelton and Richeson (2005) found that the more White Americans believed that fear of rejection was a better explanation for their unwillingness to pursue interethnic contact compared to African Americans' unwillingness, the less contact they had with African Americans over the course of the first semester of college. That is, White Americans' disproportionate focus on their own susceptibility to being rejected by African Americans influenced the frequency with which they engaged in interethnic contact over time, thereby limiting the potential to form long-lasting friendships with outgroup members.

Even when contact does occur, the identity threat may still serve to undermine interethnic friendship development. Recall, for instance, the responses of White individuals who thought that their friendship overtures to an outgroup interaction partner were not reciprocated (Vorauer & Sakamoto, 2006). Specifically, individuals coped with the perceived threat to their identity by derogating their outgroup interaction partner in retaliation. Given that people typically do not want to develop close bonds with individuals who disparage them, it is safe to presume that these dynamics are unlikely to facilitate the development of interethnic friendships.

In addition, if contact occurs but individuals opt to respond to a threatened social identity by reducing the importance of the outgroup members' perspective, then interethnic friendships are similarly unlikely to develop. In intergroup friendships individuals must not only negotiate interpersonal differences but also any intergroup differences. Research has shown that understanding and appreciating culture are common communication problems in intergroup friendships (Collier, 1996). Furthermore, perspective taking is an important factor in producing positive contact effects, and empathy improves intergroup relationships (Batson et al., 1997). Consequently, if individuals under social identity threat respond by devaluing their outgroup friend's concerns, then interethnic friendships may be hard to form. As a result, it seems reasonable to predict that the more individuals reduce the importance of the outgroup member's perspective in the interethnic interaction, the less likely it is that a friendship will develop.

## Prejudice reduction and maintenance

In addition to influencing interethnic contact dynamics and friendship development, the way individuals respond to social identity threat also has implications for prejudice reduction. At first blush, one might expect that social identity threat, regardless of one's response, will have negative implications for prejudice reduction. Research suggests, however, that the relationship between identity threat and prejudice reduction is less straightforward, and, furthermore, some coping strategies are likely to be associated with less prejudice reduction than other strategies.

The coping response to social identity threat for which the relation to prejudice reduction has been best substantiated is avoidance. Extant research has documented the benefit of intergroup contact on bias reduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Consequently, completely avoiding interethnic contact in response to social identity threat is likely to undermine prejudice reduction. The majority of the studies that have examined the influence of contact on bias reduction have focused on the attitudes of members of high-status groups towards members of lower socio-cultural groups. In an examination separating the groups, however, Tropp and Pettigrew (2005) discovered that the relation between contact and prejudice was weaker for members of minority-status groups compared with members of majority-status groups. In other words, contact has a reliably positive effect on attitudes for members of majority groups, but a more variable effect on the attitudes of minorities. Consistent with this finding, some research has found that African Americans with more frequent contact with Whites tend to have more negative attitudes towards Whites, largely due to their perceptions of Whites' level of bias towards African Americans (Livingston, 2002). However, Tropp and Pettigrew (2005) did find that contact led to positive attitude outcomes for minority group members when the interactions were cooperative and participants had equal status with their majority group partners. Considered in tandem, this work suggests that avoidance in the face of collective identity threat may not necessarily result in more negative racial attitudes for ethnic minorities, but, rather, its influence is likely to depend on the interaction context. For instance, avoiding interactions with blatantly prejudiced Whites may actually buffer ethnic minorities' attitudes from becoming negative.

Unlike the somewhat nuanced effects of avoidance, reducing the importance of interethnic contact and devaluing outgroup members' perspectives are unequivocally likely to have a negative relation to prejudice reduction. One manifestation of reducing outgroup members' perspectives in the context of race relations is to adopt a colourblind ideology regarding race relations. Colourblind ideologies, by definition, de-emphasise the importance of different sociocultural perspectives that are linked to racial or ethnic group membership in favour of thinking of people as individuals or as

humans. By contrast, multicultural ideologies consider, acknowledge, and appreciate both the similarities among members of different groups, as well as the cultural differences between groups. Recent research examining the relation between these differing models of diversity and racial bias suggests that multiculturalism seems to be more predictive of positive racial attitudes than is colourblindness. Wolsko, Park, Judd, and Wittenbrink (2000) found, for instance, that exposure to a statement endorsing a multicultural perspective on race relations led to less ingroup favouritism on a stereotyping task compared with exposure to a statement endorsing a colourblind perspective. Similarly, Richeson and her colleagues exposed Whites to the same prompts and found that exposure to the multiculturalism prompt led to the expression of less automatic racial bias against both African Americans (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004) and Asian Americans (Richeson, Trawalter, & Nussbaum, 2006b), compared to exposure to the colourblind prompt. Moreover, Verkuyten (2005) found that making multiculturalism salient for Dutch individuals resulted in less derogation of Turkish individuals in the Netherlands compared to making assimilation (colourblindness) salient. To the extent that devaluing outgroup members' perspective in response to identity threat leads to the endorsement of colourblindness, this research suggests that prejudice is likely to be exacerbated rather than attenuated.

Not surprisingly, defensive derogation in response to social identity threat is also likely to result in negative outcomes for prejudice reduction. In fact, some of the most convincing and profound studies documenting defensive derogation have done so using paradigms that examine the expression of prejudice as a function of identity threat. For instance, Fein and his colleagues (Fein & Spencer, 1997; Spencer, Fein, Wolf, Fong, & Dunn, 1998) found that self-esteem threats result in increased stereotyping of outgroup members, and, as a consequence, a restoration of individuals' self-esteem. This research on the motivational bases of stereotyping and prejudice suggests that defensive derogation often comes in the form of exacerbated prejudice expression, and therefore it is unlikely to do much to attenuate individuals' level of racial bias.

Although less straightforward, defensive derogation in response to social identity threat can also influence individuals' level of racial bias through the mechanisms of social tuning (Sinclair, Lowery, Hardin, & Colongelo, 2005b). Specifically, individuals "tune" their attitudes towards features of the immediate social context, including the presumed attitudes of interaction partners. For instance, White participants revealed less automatic racial bias in the presence of a White experimenter who was wearing an anti-racist T-shirt (presumably indicative of the experimenter's racial attitude) than a White experimenter who was wearing a plain shirt (Sinclair et al., 2005b). Social tuning is the mechanism through which Whites generally express less automatic racial bias when they are in the presence of African Americans

than when they are alone or in the presence of other White individuals (Lowery, Hardin, & Sinclair, 2001).

Interestingly, however, Sinclair and her colleagues have also found that individuals will tune their attitudes away from interaction partners that they do not like or otherwise are not inclined to affiliate with. Specifically, Sinclair et al. (2005b) found that the anti-racist T-shirt did not lead to attenuated racial bias if the experimenter had behaved in a rude manner towards participants. Considering the effects of defensive derogation in light of social tuning, it seems likely that defensive derogation in response to social identity threat will exacerbate the expression of prejudice. That is, if a White individual derogates an Asian interaction partner in response to feelings of social identity threat, the White individual will probably also tune their attitudes away from the presumed attitudes of their Asian partner, which will probably result in greater rather than lower racial bias towards Asians. Similarly, the Asian individual is likely to respond to being derogated by the White individual by tuning his or her attitudes away. In other words, the White individual who responds with defensive derogation is likely to be viewed by his or her Asian interaction partner just like the rude experimenters in the Sinclair et al. (2005b) study, if not worse. Consequently, the Asian partner is also likely to express greater racial bias (in this case against Whites) in response to defensive derogation.

Unlike the largely negative effects of defensive derogation on prejudice reduction, coping with identity threat by modulating one's behaviour during interethnic interactions can foster both more positive racial attitudes and more negative racial attitudes. Recall that individuals can manage their behaviour during interethnic interactions in response to social identity threat in at least three ways. They can alter their behaviour (1) to disconfirm or distance themselves from group stereotypes; (2) to conform to group stereotypes; or (3) to facilitate a smooth interaction in general. The implications that behaviour management in response to social identity threat has for prejudice reduction, therefore, are likely to vary according to these three distinct types of behaviour modulation. Furthermore, just as behaviour management has been shown to have different implications for the self and for interaction partners (Shelton & Richeson, 2006), its effects on prejudice reduction may also differ for the self and interaction partners.

Imagine an interaction between a Catholic woman who is under social identity threat and a Protestant woman. Specifically, the Catholic woman is concerned that her interaction partner might treat her according to group stereotypes. If the Catholic woman tries to distance herself from relevant group stereotypes, perhaps by mentioning things about herself that are counter-stereotypical, it is possible that her partner will express less bias towards Catholics. Indeed, research suggests that exposure to counter-stereotypical individuals reduces the expression of implicit bias (Dasgupta &

Greenwald, 2001). Similarly, if the Catholic woman responds to the threat by behaving in ways that are designed to foster a pleasant interaction, it is again possible that her partner will feel more positively about Catholics. If the Catholic woman behaves in a way that conforms to group stereotypes, however, her Protestant partner is unlikely to reveal unbiased group attitudes. Although the stereotypical behaviour may lead the Protestant partner to like the Catholic woman due to the benefits of expectancy confirmation, the exposure to a stereotype-consistent target is likely to reinforce stereotypical thinking and prejudicial evaluations. Hence, confirming group stereotypes in response to social identity threat may come with interpersonal rewards, but intergroup costs. It is important to keep in mind, however, that additional research suggests these effects would only occur in the situation where the Protestant women still perceived the Catholic woman as Catholic (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). That is, the target person (i.e., Catholic woman in this example) must be seen somewhat as a typical group member.

Furthermore, all of these behavioural modifications in response to social identity threat may leave the Catholic woman with more negative group attitudes after the interaction. Recall that self-regulatory effort during interactions often results in negative affective and cognitive outcomes (e.g., Richeson & Shelton, 2003; Shelton et al., 2005b). Behaviour regulation is often cognitively depleting, and individuals exit the interaction feeling inauthentic and with heightened negative affect. If the negative affect after the interaction bleeds into individuals' evaluations of the outgroup, their attitudes are likely to become more negative after interactions in which they attempt to modulate their behaviour. Alternatively, individuals may resent, at least in part, the effort they feel that they must put forth in order to negotiate the interaction. To the extent that they blame the outgroup for their perceived need to engage in self-regulation during intergroup interactions, they are likely to reveal greater bias directed towards the outgroup. If individuals do not make such external attributions for their efforts to facilitate smooth and pleasant interactions, then there is instead the possibility of positive attitude shifts via self-perception and dissonance processes. In general, however, individuals' behaviour modulation in response to social identity threat seems most apt to have a negative influence on intergroup attitudes.

## Summary

How individuals respond to social identity threat can have important implications for the dynamics of interactions, intergroup friendship development, and prejudice reduction. Although these outcomes are likely to be correlated (positive interaction dynamics predict intergroup friendship development which, in turn, predicts prejudice reduction), at least some of the coping reactions seem to have independent and sometimes contradictory



influences on them. For instance, avoidance is unlikely to foster intergroup friendship development but, under certain circumstances, avoidance in response to social identity threat may lead ethnic minorities to have more positive attitudes towards Whites. Furthermore, coping reactions might have divergent outcomes for the self and for interaction partners. That is, a coping reaction may lead one's interaction partner to want to pursue a friendship, but leave the threatened individual substantially less interested. Or the threatened individual may escape interethnic contact without any change in his group attitudes, but the act of exit may leave the potential outgroup interaction partner with more negative attitudes. Considered in tandem, it is quite easy to see how these types of divergent experiences can generate larger-scale misunderstandings between members of different social identity groups.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter we applied a social identity threat framework to understand Whites' and ethnic minorities' experiences during interethnic interactions. We discussed the conditions under which individuals are likely to experience social identity threat during such exchanges. In addition, we provided a conceptual framework for understanding how individuals cope with social identity threat in interethnic interactions. We concluded with a discussion of the potential consequences of individuals' responses to social identity threat for the dynamics of interethnic interactions, prejudice reduction, and interethnic friendship development.

The populations of many areas within North America and Europe are becoming increasingly multi-ethnic. Consequently, opportunities for interethnic contact, and thus identity threat, are on the rise. Given the compelling evidence that perceived threats to identity are a primary source of intergroup tension, prejudice, and hostility, it is particularly important to develop a clear understanding of how interethnic interactions result in identity threat and, more importantly, how to foster interactions that are less threatening. Consequently, we believe that an analysis of interethnic interactions from an identity threat perspective is likely to provide fruitful, and potentially invaluable, insight into our current understanding of intergroup relations.

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