

**When Me vs. You Becomes Us vs. Them:
How Intergroup Competition Shapes Ingroup Psychology**

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Abstract

Throughout evolutionary history, intergroup competition has been an influential part of social life. Although the topic has received substantial empirical attention among social psychologists, the majority of that work has focused on how ingroup and outgroup members regard one another. Only recently have researchers begun examining how intergroup rivalry changes that way that ingroup members perceive and relate to one another. New findings suggest that a variety of within-group processes are influenced by the presence of a rival outgroup. In general, altruistic cooperation and prosocial motives increase among ingroup members when their group competes against another. The relationship between leaders and followers also shifts in response to intergroup rivalry: rather than wielding their power for selfish purposes, leaders prioritize the needs of their group. On the flip side, followers' choice of leader changes, preferring males during times of intergroup competition but females in the absence of competition. Given the substantial impact of intergroup competition on ingroup processes, future research should continue to deepen the field's knowledge of this topic. Additionally, the scope of research should be broadened to capture the effect of intergroup competition on ingroup dynamics, such as performance and group outcomes.

When Me vs. You Becomes Us vs. Them:

How Intergroup Competition Shapes Ingroup Psychology

Throughout human history, intergroup competition has been a common and influential part of social life. Evolutionary theorists argue that intergroup rivalry created strong pressures for psychological processes that help people act in the best interests of their group – processes such as altruism (Axelrod, 1984), empathy (Preston & de Wall, 2002), and morality (de Waal, 1996). When confronted with rival groups, however, groups needed more than for their members to act in a socially benevolent manner. For example, they also needed an effective leader to coordinate group resources and action. Indeed, leadership may have emerged as an adaptive solution to groups' need to combat external threats, especially the threat of intergroup rivalry (Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008).

Despite the intimate link between intergroup competition and ingroup harmony, scant attention has been devoted to understanding the relationship between the two. Indeed, although intergroup processes represent one of the most widely researched topics in social psychology, the majority of this research has focused on how members of different groups regard one another. Much less work has focused on how the presence of an outgroup changes the way ingroup members regard one another.

In the current paper, we review recent theoretical and empirical work that has begun to tackle questions of whether and how intergroup competition changes the way ingroup members perceive and relate to one another. We cover work investigating ways in which intergroup competition alters the manner in which ingroup members behave toward one another, leading people to become relatively more prosocial toward members of their own group. We also discuss research suggesting that intergroup competition shifts leaders' motivations, perceptions, and behaviors toward subordinates. Additionally, we examine how intergroup competition changes group members' leader preferences. We then briefly discuss

the limitations and implications of the existing literature, as well as useful avenues for future research.

Intragroup Competition: Me vs. You

Before covering the effects of intergroup competition on ingroup relations, we address definitional issues and delineate the relationship between leaders and followers in the absence of intergroup competition. Consistent with previous work, we define leadership as the task of coordinating group performance and guiding the group toward its goals (Bass, 1990; Hollander, 1992; Van Vugt et al., 2008). Throughout history, leaders served a number of specific functions such as diffusing ingroup conflict, facilitating the acquisition and maintenance of resources, and organizing defense against predators and intergroup rivals. Although individuals vary in the degree to which they demonstrate natural leadership qualities (e.g., politicians, managers, coaches), we focus on situational demonstrations of leadership (i.e., instituting behaviors that facilitate group success).

To help the group achieve its goals, leaders are often endowed with power, which is defined in terms of a person's control over group resources (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Although power and leadership often go hand in hand, leadership and power are distinct. It is possible to be a leader but also to lack power (e.g., a well-respected emeritus faculty member). Conversely, it is possible to have power, without necessarily being a leader (e.g., a closet bureaucrat who holds an organization's purse strings).

Functionalist theories of leadership stress that the relationship between leaders and followers is marked by ambivalence (e.g., Barkow, 1989; Boehm, 1999; de Waal, 1982; Van Vugt, 2006). In exchange for a leader who acts in the best interest of the group, followers give up resources and control, thereby making themselves vulnerable to exploitation. On the other side of the equation, power affords a variety of benefits (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989; Ellis,

1995; Sadalla, Kenrick, & Vershure, 1987) and people are strongly motivated toward power (McClelland, 1975; Tiedens, Unzueta, & Young, 2007). Upon getting a taste of power and its many benefits, leaders often become more interested in keeping or increasing their power than in facilitating group success (Maner & Mead, 2010). Hence, while followers often aim to minimize the power gap between themselves and their leader, leaders sometimes try to increase that gap. Consider the recent uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya (the “Arab Spring”). In those countries, power-hungry leaders tried to maintain their power by suppressing their people. The power gap between leader and followers became so extreme that citizens of those countries revolted and uprooted the leaders.

A recent investigation systematically examined individual differences and situational factors that determine whether powerful leaders use their power in the service of self-interest (i.e., power maintenance) or for the sake of the group (Maner & Mead, 2010). To do so, the researchers created situations that pit power maintenance against group success. For example, in one experiment, participants were led to believe that one group member was especially skilled at the group task while another was quite unskilled at the group task. Although including the talented individual in the group could facilitate group success, he or she could also threaten leaders’ power, because the leader’s ability to maintain power hinged on superior performance throughout the group task. To determine whether leaders prioritized power or group success, the researchers gave leaders the opportunity to exclude one of the two group members, ostensibly because the group task only required two individuals.

Actions that reflected power prioritization (in this case excluding the talented group member) were observed among leaders who were highly motivated toward dominance and power – that is, among individuals who seek to control and influence others, regardless of whether that power is freely conferred by others (Barkow, 1989; Ellis, 1995; Fodor, 1985;

Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). In contrast, individuals possessing less of a desire to dominate others used their power to promote group success.

Additionally, power prioritization was only observed when leaders' power was vulnerable, meaning that the roles of leader and follower could change throughout the course of the experiment. Although the stability of a hierarchy varies from group to group, most human and primate group hierarchies are malleable (Sapolsky, 2005; Van Vugt et al., 2008). For example, some leaders hold a position of power and authority for a stable and specific duration of time (e.g., President of the United States), whereas others hold their position of power until they are overthrown by rivals or followers (e.g., Libya's Muammar Gaddafi). When the hierarchy was stable, even highly dominance-oriented leaders performed actions that facilitated group success. In contrast, when the group hierarchy was unstable, power-motivated leaders acted in ways that were strategically designed to protect their power but could also jeopardize group success: they excluded a very talented group member, prevented a skilled group member from having any influence on a group task, and withheld valuable information from their group – information that was critical to performing well on a group task (Maner & Mead, 2010).

Suppressing talented group members suggests that powerful leaders may perceive ingroup members as threatening competitors rather than as helpful allies. For example, a business manager may regard talented subordinates as threats to their privileged position rather than as individuals who can help fuel the company's success. To test the way that powerful leaders see themselves vis-à-vis their group members, implicit perceptions of threat were measured after participants were assigned to a position of power or equal authority and paired with a talented partner. Results indicated that, participants who were strongly motivated toward power and dominance viewed their partner as quite threatening (Maner & Maner, 2010). Thus, leaders who feel threatened may come to see ingroup members as

potential threats to be warded off. One irony is that leaders may come to feel most threatened by ingroup members who are the most valuable. Consequently, business managers, politicians, coaches, and other powerful leaders may suppress valuable people while surrounding themselves with others who are less competent (Maner & Mead, 2010).

Other work has examined the hypothesis that highly dominant leaders might seek to “keep their enemies close.” That is, when leaders cannot exclude a group member they find threatening, they may instead try to draw that person close so as to monitor and control them (Mead & Maner, 2012). Across a series of experiments, the researchers found that dominant leaders strategically tried to maintain close proximity to a talented group member, such as by moving the other individual’s chair close to their own. Desired proximity did not stem from a desire to be socially intimate or collaborative with the ingroup member. Instead, physical proximity to the talented group member was mediated by perceptions of threat and a desire to control the ingroup member. This work provides additional support for the notion that leaders tend to perceive ingroup members as threatening competitors for their position of power.

In summary, the needs, wants, and motivations of leaders and their followers are often in conflict. Followers want a leader to organize the group and guide the group towards its goals, and they want to protect themselves against being exploited by a corrupt and self-interested leader. In contrast, getting a taste of power causes many leaders to become interested primarily in maintaining their position atop the hierarchy, even at the expense of group success. This causes leaders to see ingroup members as a threat – as competitors who may seize their position of power. In the following section, we review research examining how intergroup competition changes this relationship between leaders and followers.

Intergroup Competition: Us vs. Them

Intergroup competition has been a highly influential component of social life throughout evolutionary history. Rival groups not only posed a threat to the security of a

group's resources, they also posed a substantial threat to people's physical safety. As such, it was imperative that group members banded together to combat external threats posed by rival outgroups. This reasoning has led to the hypothesis that intergroup competition promotes ingroup cooperation.

The idea that intergroup competition increases cooperation among ingroup members was tested in an informative set of experiments (Van Vugt, De Cremer, & Janssen, 2007). Participants played a step-level public-goods game in a group of 6 that was or was not competing with groups from rival universities. In this game, participants were endowed with a sum of money (e.g., \$4), which they could keep for themselves or invest in the group. If the group as a whole contributed \$16 (i.e., at least 4 of the 6 members contributed their \$4), then each group member would receive double their initial payment (i.e., \$8), regardless of their initial contribution. Thus, this game captured participants' willingness to forego short-term selfish motives in favor of altruistic group contributions. Supporting the theory that ingroup cooperation increases in the face of intergroup rivalry, the researchers found that contributions were higher in the intergroup competition condition than the no competition condition. By analogy, soccer players might be willing to place their own personal scoring ambitions aside when their team is playing against a rival than when their team is merely playing a scrimmage.

In addition to its implications for ingroup cooperation, intergroup rivalry also has implications for the behavior of leaders. Leaders are well-positioned to coordinate the actions required to compete successfully against outgroups (Alexander, 1987). In service of intergroup competition, leaders have played a key role in maintaining defenses, coordinating people's efforts, and managing group resources (Van Vugt, 2006). Indeed, leaders are essential for competing successfully and defending against outgroups.

However, leaders sometimes use their power for selfish purposes rather than for the benefit of the group, as reviewed in the previous section of this article. Does intergroup competition cause even the most power-hungry leaders to put the needs of the group ahead of their own desires? Recent studies suggest that the answer is yes.

Building on work suggesting that intergroup competition shifts people's mindset from ingroup-level comparisons (me vs. you) to intergroup level-comparisons (us vs. them; Correll & Park, 2007; Ellemers, Wilke, & Van Knippenberg, 1993; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998), several studies have shown that, in the presence of intergroup rivalry, even power-hungry leaders prioritized group success (Maner & Mead, 2010; Mead & Maner, 2012). For example, instead of suppressing a talented group member, highly dominant leaders gave talented group members authority and influence to facilitate group success (Maner & Mead, 2010). In a different set of studies, highly dominant leaders gave the most skilled and thus power-threatening group members the space and autonomy needed to work freely on tasks (Mead & Maner, 2012). These results suggest that intergroup competition may reprioritize leaders' goals, from personal power to group success. Thus, focusing managers' attention to competition between firms may stimulate managers to act in ways that are in the best of the firm rather than in the service of their own agenda.

This reprioritization of goals was also reflected in leaders' perceptions of their fellow group members. Two experiments tested whether intergroup competition caused leaders to perceive ingroup members as allies rather than threats (Maner & Mead, 2010). In one experiment, intergroup competition decreased perceptions of threat among dominance-oriented leaders. In another experiment, intergroup rivalry caused leaders to perceive a highly talented ingroup member as affiliative and cooperative. These findings suggest that, when there is a rival outgroup, not only do leaders behave relatively more in line with group goals, they also have relatively more positive perceptions of ingroup members. Rather than viewing

group members as potential threats to be suppressed, leaders came to see those same group members as desirable allies.

The research we have described so far focused on the leadership side of the leader-follower relationship. Given the consequential nature of intergroup competition for a group's welfare, competition should substantially affect the motivations and preferences of followers, as well. Unfortunately, there is scant research on this topic, but one study in particular is notable. Van Vugt and Spisak (2008) tested the effect of intergroup competition on people's choice of leader, hypothesizing that followers would prefer a female leader in the absence of intergroup competition, but a male leader in the presence of intergroup rivalry. The researchers' hypotheses were grounded in theories about how human mating strategies differentially shape the minds of men and women (Buss & Schmidt, 1993; Geary, 1998). Because women had to invest their resources in social networks to protect themselves and their children throughout evolutionary history (Taylor, Klein, Lewis, & Gruenewald, 2000), women are typically expected to have a stronger interest in keeping the group together, relative to men (Van Vugt et al., 2008). Consequently, women may be particularly good at being peacekeepers and coordinating positive interactions among group members. In contrast, men's mating opportunities enhance substantially when they were able to form coalitions and successfully defeat other groups. Hence, men might be perceived as better equipped than women to take on leadership roles during times of intergroup rivalry.

Consistent with predictions, Van Vugt and Spisak found that group members preferred a male leader rather than a female leader during times of intergroup competition. However, in the absence of intergroup competition, female leaders were preferred, because they were perceived as being best equipped to maintain ingroup harmony.

The researchers then tested whether a match between gender of leader and level of competition would affect the extent to which people were willing to support the group. After

participants had cast their vote for a male or female leader, they were told that their leader was male or female (this was a ruse and was determined by random assignment). Participants were then endowed with a small sum of money for a public-goods game, and they could use this money to invest in their group fund or in a private fund. Results indicated that, in the presence of intergroup rivalry, people invested more in the group fund when the leader was male. In contrast, in the absence of intergroup competition, people invested more when they were told their group had a female leader (vs. male leader). Thus, people's behaviors were sensitive to the correspondence between the presence of a rival outgroup and the gender of their leader.

In sum, the number of studies investigating the implications of intergroup competition for ingroup psychology is small but growing. The work that has been done indicates that intergroup competition has substantial consequences for the way ingroup members perceive and behave toward one another. In the absence of intergroup competition, group members often compete against one another for prestige, power, and resources. However, in the presence of intergroup competition, group members come to trust and cooperate with one another. Indeed, intergroup competition can cause even the most selfish leaders to implement actions designed to promote group success, even when doing so might mean decreasing their own personal power. Leadership preferences also change in response to intergroup rivalry. Whereas followers prefer female leaders during times of peace, they shift to preferring male leaders during times of intergroup conflict. These preferences are guided by people's perceptions of the distinct leadership skills among men and women. .

Limitations, Remaining Questions, and Future Directions

Although intergroup psychology is a widely investigated topic, researchers have only recently turned their attention toward understanding the implications of intergroup rivalry for

ingroup psychology. Limitations of previous work exist and questions remain, thus providing many valuable avenues for future research.

One question that remains is whether intergroup competition truly causes leaders to put the needs of the group ahead of their own interests. When faced with intergroup rivalry, it is possible that leaders use group success as a tactic to keep their power. Having one's group compete unsuccessfully with an outgroup could threaten a leader's role within the group. For example, in business, an unsuccessful company may be either dissolved or absolved, both of which would cause the leader (e.g., a CEO) to lose personal resources and power. Along the same lines, leaders may perceive that group success will increase followers' devotion towards them, thereby consolidating their position of power (Cohen et al., 2004; Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007). Thus, leaders may work to help their group succeed in part because doing so may help ensure that those leaders maintain their powerful role within the group.

The research surveyed in this article does not provide a concrete answer to whether intergroup competition causes leaders to prioritize group needs over their own needs. Likely, the two are deeply intertwined. Perhaps the most supportive evidence in favor of the argument that leaders put the group ahead of themselves comes from the experiments showing that intergroup competition changes the way leaders perceive and categorize ingroup members in relation to themselves. Specifically, in the presence of intergroup competition, leaders identify ingroup members as their allies rather than their competitors (Maner & Mead, 2010). The change in cognitive classification, from "me versus you" to "us versus them," seems to reflect a downstream cognitive consequence of a change in priorities, from one's own power to group success. Nevertheless, future work is needed to clarify whether leaders' behavior is aimed ultimately at enhancing group success or at maintaining their own power.

Another interesting question for future work concerns displays of interpersonal sensitivity among leaders. Previous research suggests that power makes people self-focused and egocentric (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006). Yet, other research suggests that core characteristics of good leaders include empathy, perspective-taking, and nonverbal sensitivity, all of which imply a lack of egocentrism (R. Hogan & Hogan, 2002; Kellett, Humphrey, & Sleeth, 2002; Zaccaro, Gilbert, Thor, & Mumford, 1991). When and why do powerful leaders display a penchant for empathizing and taking others' perspective? The research reviewed here suggests that the interpersonal sensitivity of leaders may depend on the presence of intergroup rivalry. Leaders might be especially inclined to display signs of interpersonal sensitivity – at least toward ingroup members – when their group is competing with a rival outgroup.

Another set of questions relates to the behavior and psychology of followers. To date, most of the existing research has focused on leaders. This research focus is appropriate, given that leaders have a large impact on the well-being and behavior of their group. Yet, it is also important to understand the psychology of followership (Van Vugt et al., 2008). Indeed, in any group, there are many more followers than there are leaders. How might followers attempt to reduce the capacity for being exploited (e.g., Unions)? And how might the behavior of followers change when their group is in competition with a rival outgroup? Future research would benefit from delving more deeply into the psychology of followership. One hypothesis is that followers may increase their willingness to follow a leader, so long as the leader is perceived as effective and legitimate (cf. Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008).

As is evident from the research surveyed in this article, most research tends to observe leaders and followers in isolation. Researchers might profitably investigate how ingroup dynamics change in response to intergroup competition. For example, how do the interactions

between leaders and followers differ when competing against a rival group? Do leaders show more or less nonverbally dominant behavior? Do followers become more assertive in response to authority? Another useful area for future research would be to examine the effects certain leadership strategies have on group outcomes. For example, we have reviewed evidence here suggesting that, in the presence of a rival outgroup, leaders often change their strategies so as to prioritize group success rather than individual power. To what extent does this reprioritization translate into more positive outcomes at the level of the group? Are groups with more prosocial leaders more likely to outcompete other groups? Are such groups marked by greater well-being and effective group dynamics? These and other similar questions could be profitably explored in future research.

Concluding Remarks

Intergroup competition is a prominent feature of social life. For decades, social psychologists have rigorously studied how different groups regard one another. Indeed, the literature on intergroup processes is one of the largest in social psychology. In contrast, a small but growing body of research has examined the implications of intergroup rivalry for ingroup psychology, behavior, and dynamics. This growing body of research suggests that intergroup rivalry leads people to become more cooperative with ingroup members, to regard one another as allies, and to put the needs of the group over the needs of the self. Although recent research has taken some initial steps toward deepening the field's knowledge of the topic (with promising results), more can be done. The research reviewed in the current paper suggests that intergroup competition has positive and functional consequences for ingroup members, inspiring group members to cooperate and act in ways that facilitate group success. Future research should seek to identify the implications of intergroup rivalry for group performance, leader-follower relationships, and other facets of ingroup dynamics.

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