Chapter 3
Between the Lines of Us and Them: Identity Threat, Anxious Uncertainty, and Reactive In-Group Affirmation: How Can Antisocial Outcomes be Prevented?

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Currently more than 60 million people have been driven from their home countries by war and persecution to seek peace and protection elsewhere (UNHCR, 2015). Those who survive the often arduous flight through deserts and overseas on their way to safety usually find themselves confronted with not only uncertainty about their future, but also mistrust and rejection by local citizens. As a consequence, many withdraw into fringe groups of people who share the same fate. On the other side, citizens in wealthier countries see themselves confronted with rapid and unpredictable changes in their environment and many of them fear they will forfeit their wealth, safety, and traditions by the influx of incoming refugees. The growing popularity of radical right-wing parties and movements in many European countries provides painful evidence that a state of such heightened anxiety and uncertainty creates a perfect breeding ground for ethnocentric thinking and antisocial behaviour. However, at the same time, many people feel the urge to donate money and clothes to refugees, and volunteer to help them cope with language and administrative barriers.

This chapter is intended to shed light on how people cope with threats that cause them to question their assumptions about themselves or their familiar environment. We focus on people's need for epistemic equilibrium, self-esteem, belonging, and control as underlying identity motives. According to the anxiety-to-approach model of threat and defence (Jonas et al., 2014), violations of these needs trigger neural processes sensitive to goal conflict and potential dangers that catalyse an aversive state of *anxious uncertainty*. As a consequence, people automatically engage in

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S. McKeown et al. (eds.), *Understanding Peace and Conflict Through Social Identity Theory*, Peace Psychology Book Series,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-29869-6_3

defensive behaviours to relieve aversive feelings and to re-establish approach motivation. Given that identity motives largely derive from group membership, affirming one's social identity may represent a functional tool for maintaining a positive self-view in the face of threat. Unfortunately, such reactive in-group affirmation is often accompanied by in-group bias and xenophobia and may also foster radical antisocial reactions (Hogg, Kruglanski, & van den Bos, 2013). However, as illustrated above, antisocial thoughts and behaviours are not inevitable consequences of threat. Depending on personality and contextual variables, people may use different threat coping strategies and may even engage in prosocial reactions in terms of intergroup cooperation and appreciation. Synthesising findings from several approaches related to threat and defence, we apply the anxiety-to-approach model to group-based defences as a common response to identity threat. We highlight the role of different moderators that influence the way in which individuals cope with a given threat as this may help to make better predictions about the direction of threat-related outcomes.

In the following sections, we describe how social identification provides individuals with a sense of self by fostering their underlying identity motives on a *cognitive*, *affective*, and *behavioural* dimension. We review findings showing that threat to these motives (i.e. identity threat) results in anxious uncertainty, which may be soothed by strengthened belief in one's in-group as this helps individuals to re-establish approach motivation on a neural level. We provide evidence that reactive in-group affirmation is often accompanied by antisocial behaviour, such as hostility to out-groups and extremism, before we examine dispositional and situational moderators that may help to prevent antisocial responses and foster socially constructive coping strategies. Finally, we discuss the role of political leaders and mass media in the current European refugee crisis and provide implications for future research.

Motives Behind Group Identification

The capability of reflexive consciousness and self-awareness allows human beings to integrate feelings, experiences, and ambitions into sets of assumptions about themselves, which they use to develop an idea of who they are and the person they strive to become in the future. As the self operates predominantly within social interactions, identity construction occurs primarily by comparing oneself with relevant others. It has been the core assumption of the social identity approach (Reicher, Spears, & Haslam, 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) that people derive a sense of identity by categorising themselves and others as members of specific groups. As people strive to establish and maintain a positive self-image, intergroup comparison represents a functional tool for receiving information about the relative value of one's social identity. Thus, on an *affective* dimension, being part of a highly rated collective and feeling positively distinct from relevant out-groups allows people to think and feel positively about themselves.

For decades, self-enhancement has been considered a core motivation underlying social identification until sociometer theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000) highlighted the relevance of groups for a person's need to be equipped with stable and valuable social bonds. From this perspective, self-esteem serves as a gauge for one's relative social value within groups, aimed to prevent social rejection. Adding a further social identity motive, uncertainty-identity theory (UIT; Hogg, 2007) interprets social categorisation as the attempt of an individual to reduce the experience of epistemic vagueness and resulting self-concept uncertainty (see also Hogg, 2016). Thus, UIT rather refers to a *cognitive* dimension of identity as self-categorisation decreases information complexity by enabling people to define themselves and others on the group level. As group members share common assumptions about how to behave and what to strive for, collective norms and worldviews help individuals navigate through life in accordance with others. Further extending the list of social identity motives, the model of group-based control (Fritsche et al., 2013) suggests people's desire to perceive the world as controllable through their autonomous self (Stollberg, Fritsche, & Baecker, 2015) to determine social identity construction. Specifically, on a *behavioural* level, groups serve people's need for control as they provide a sense of collective agency.

Even though there is still a lack of consensus about the range of motives that underlies (social) identity construction, there is a large body of evidence highlighting the relevance of motives of epistemic equilibrium, self-esteem, belonging, and control (c.f., Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, & Scabini, 2006). In the next section, we illustrate how groups satisfy these needs on a *cognitive*, *affective*, and *behavioural* dimension.

Cognitive Motives of Identity

Human beings want to understand the world around them to be able to make predictions about future events. Therefore, people usually prefer clear answers and explanations over those that are vague and blurry. This holds for the very basic needs of self-preservation (e.g. being certain of a secure place to stay, or knowing that one will be provided with sufficient nourishment), but also for more abstract assumptions about the self and the meaning of existence in general. However, as objective verifiability (at least for the latter) does not exist, groups help people validate their assumptions on the basis of collective cultural agreements. As groups differ in their norms and worldviews, social identification tells an individual about his or her specific place in the world.

Many researchers have highlighted that groups facilitate people's need for meaning and epistemic understanding. As one of the most prominent approaches, UIT states that through self-categorisation, people start to see themselves and others as interchangeable members of a specific group and to describe the self in terms of the in-group prototype. Hence, uncertainty decreases due to a lowered density of information with which people perceive themselves and their social

environment. The meaning maintenance model (MMM; Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006) posits that inconsistencies between people's present experiences and their mental representations violate their perception of meaning and give rise to palliative responses that relieve aversive feelings and restore consistency. According to the MMM, people may either solve a threat directly or focus on alternative resources (e.g. in-groups), which are not affected by a given threat, a process that was termed *fluid compensation*. In a similar vein, the Reactive Approach Model (RAM; McGregor, Nash, Mann, & Phills, 2010) posits that inconsistent self-relevant cognitions give rise to an aversive state of anxious uncertainty that motivates people to mask negative feelings by idealised extremes of confidence in the self or social identity.

As Hart (2014) noted, even though these theories vary in their terminology (e.g. meaning vs. uncertainty) they do all refer to the same motive of *epistemic equilibrium*. Thus, in the current chapter we will use this term substitutionally for the different facets of epistemic motivation that underlie identity construction. Given the importance of epistemic equilibrium for identity, the picture becomes clearer why so many people in Europe (and elsewhere) feel threatened by the changes in their familiar environment that are caused by the influx of incoming refugees such as border controls, congested stations, and accommodation centres in public places.

Affective Motives of Identity

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) states that because people are generally motivated to hold a favourable view of themselves, they strive for positive distinctiveness of their in-group in comparison to out-groups. As a touchstone, people compare status-relevant attributes of their own group with those of other groups. In the case of a negative evaluation (i.e. when the in-group is perceived as being less attractive), people will leave their group. Or, if this is not possible, they will engage in intergroup competition aimed at social status change or reinterpret unpleasant group attributes in a way that they align with their striving for positive self-evaluation. The latter can happen either through a shift of attention to more favourable aspects of the in-group or by depreciation of the out-group attributes.

Sociometer theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000) also underscores the role of group membership for maintaining self-esteem, but does so from a rather individualistic angle. In contrast to a social identity perspective, self-esteem is assumed to result from an individual's connectedness within the group (i.e. belonging) and not via intergroup comparisons that determine the value of the self. Thereby, self-esteem reflects the quality of valuable social relations available to an individual, and hence serves as a monitoring system to prevent rejection and social devaluation of the individual within groups. Thus, according to sociometer theory, self-esteem is not about how people feel and think about themselves, but how others value them in a given situation (state self-esteem) or in general (trait self-esteem). Support for this assumption comes from research showing that higher self-esteem correlates posi-

tively with feelings of belonging and acceptance, whereas lower self-esteem is associated with rejection, maladaptive efforts to be attractive to others, and self-devaluation (for a review, see MacDonald & Leary, 2012).

From this perspective, it seems reasonable why most people in their daily lives would be more anxious to meet the expectations of their fellow group members to avoid devaluation than to make an effort on behalf of others who do not belong to their group. However, as groups strongly vary in their certain assumptions about what is worth striving, people might gain social recognition through a broad array of different behaviours that may range from the promotion of intergroup cooperation to agitation and violence against foreigners.

Behavioural Motives of Identity

People wish to have control over their actions and their physical and social environment in a way that outcomes are contingent on their intentions and desires. Fritsche et al. (2013) developed a model of group-based control (GBC), proposing that people can maintain or restore a sense of control through the self by defining their self on the group level (i.e. on the level of social identity) and acting as a group member. Defining the self in terms of "we" (instead of "I") may help to maintain the perception that the self has control, because, heuristically, groups are perceived as homogeneous agents that exert control over their environment. In fact, Stollberg et al. (2015) found that, when reminded of lacking personal control, people were more prone to identify with agentic (vs. non-agentic) groups. In addition to mere identification, people have been shown to cope with threatened personal control by engaging in collective behaviour, indicated by increased in-group bias (Fritsche, Jonas, & Fankhanel, 2008; Greenaway, Louis, Hornsey, & Jones, 2014), conformity with in-group norms (Stollberg, Fritsche, & Jonas, submitted), and pursuit of in-group goals (Fritsche et al., 2013). The latter effects of threatened personal control have been shown to be most pronounced when in addition to personal control threat, in-group agency was also at stake or when in-group identification was high (Fritsche et al., 2013; submitted). Recently, Greenaway, Haslam, Cruwys, Branscombe, and Ysseldyk (2015) showed a direct link between social identification and subjective control perception. In a set of studies, group identification predicted stronger feelings of personal control among participants. Moreover, experimentally primed group identity buffered participants against threat to their perception of agency.

Thus, besides serving epistemic and self-evaluative functions, group membership provides individuals with a sense of control due to collective agency and may become especially relevant when control is thwarted on the personal level. This has particular implications for the understanding of why people with relative low power in their daily lives often tend to be more frightened of cultural mixing and support radical xenophobic parties and movements (Fritsche, Jonas, & Kessler, 2011; Fritsche et al., submitted).

When the Self Becomes Blurred: Identity Threat, Anxious Uncertainty, and Reactive In-Group Affirmation

When identity motives are threatened, this can evoke negative emotions and an avoidance-oriented mindset (Jonas et al., 2014). Many researchers have investigated responses to threat with regard to particular identity motives. Two typical reactions have been observed: first, threat provokes an aversive state of anxious uncertainty (McGregor et al., 2010; Nash, McGregor, & Prentice, 2011); and second, people engage in reactive defence mechanisms that help to reduce negative feelings either directly by resolving a threat at hand or by indirectly providing alternative resources that are not affected by the threat (for a review, see Jonas et al., 2014). The large overlap of findings in the threat and defence literature inspired Jonas and colleagues to develop a general process model of threat and defence that can serve to explain why people tend to affirm their social identity in the face of threat. In this chapter, we use this model as a theoretical framework to describe how people cope with experiences that challenge their underlying identity motives.

Anxiety-to-Approach Model of Threat and Defence

Feeling uncertain about important aspects of the self, holding a fragile view of oneself and one's social connections, or struggling with a feeling of lacking control can pose a threat to one's identity. Research suggests that being confronted with threats to various aspects of the self leads to an arousing state of anxious uncertainty and motivates efforts to escape from this feeling by means of reactive defensive strategies. On a neural level, this process seems to be driven by a tandem system responsible for the detection and regulation of goal conflict (Corr, DeYoung, & McNaughton, 2013). Immediately after detection of a threat, anxious uncertainty arises as a consequence of predominant activity of the behavioural inhibition system (BIS). BIS activity is hallmarked by a suite of *proximal* symptoms, including increased vigilance for potential sources of threat as well as for new information plus efforts to escape from negative thoughts and circumstances. Sometimes, heightened vigilance may help people generate possible solutions. For example, feelings of social isolation increased recall of social information (Gardner, Pickett, & Brewer, 2000) and led to faster detection of smiling faces in a crowd (DeWall, Maner, & Rouby, 2009). However, proximal defences may be insufficient or elusive, for example, when violation of epistemic needs leads to the perception of illusory patterns and conspiracies (Whitson & Galinsky, 2008). Moreover, if people are unable to escape from a threat, they show avoidance-oriented defence reactions that help them turn their attention (temporarily) away from it (e.g. by avoiding self-focus; Arndt, Greenberg, Simon, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1998). Persistent BIS activity has been shown to have deleterious effects for an individual such as decreased life satisfaction, increased state anxiety, and social avoidance (Routledge

et al., 2010). Thus, most people do not respond to threat with persistent BIS activity. Rather, after a while they seem to down-regulate BIS activity by either managing the threat at hand or engaging in an array of *distal* defences.

Distal defences often are *fluid*, hence sharing no direct content with a given threat and satisfy global psychological needs that are diminished by the threat and restored by the defence (e.g. when a lack of personal control causes people to seek control by affirming powerful in-groups or systems; Fritsche et al., 2008; Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008). According to the anxiety-to-approach model, distal defences are approach oriented as they help an individual to re-establish predominant activation of the behavioural approach system (BAS). We hypothesise that groups represent a fruitful source for re-establishing approach motivation as they give rise to approach-oriented defence mechanisms that help people maintain their need for epistemic equilibrium, self-esteem, belonging, and control. Hence, reactive in-group affirmation should be a common response in the face of threat.

Evidence that Identity Threat Causes Anxious Uncertainty

The idea that the experience of conflicting thoughts and actions leads to an aversive state of arousal has already been described by Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962). However, for a long time, *dissonance*-related feelings could be shown only indirectly, for example, when the misattribution of aversive feelings to a benign source eliminated typical defensive responses (Zanna & Cooper, 1974). This changed when researchers started to use more subtle measures of self-reported affect related to BIS-specific anxious uncertainty. For instance, McGregor, Zanna, Holmes, and Spencer (2001) showed that epistemic threats caused participants to respond more strongly to BIS-related adjectives, as thinking about an unresolved personal dilemma heightened participants' agreement with terms such as "I feel uneasy", "…unclear", and "…confused about identity". In the same manner, Nash et al. (2011) found that threats to self-relevant goals led participants to report stronger feelings of "confusion", "anxiety", and "uncertainty". On a neural level, the BIS is closely linked with the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC; Amodio, Master, Yee, & Taylor, 2008), a brain region that is activated by conflict, errors, and distress (Corr, 2011). Accordingly, heightened ACC activity was found after cognitive dissonance (Kitayama, Chua, Tompson, & Han, 2013) as well as after threats to participants' need for belonging (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003), and perception of control. For example, in a study by Salomons, Johnstone, Backonja, and Davidson (2004), the ACC responded more strongly to uncontrollable than to controllable pain.

In sum, there is neural, behavioural, and self-report evidence for anxious uncertainty following different kinds of threat that challenge people's underlying identity motives. As mentioned above, in the absence of direct resolutions, affirming one's group identity may be a fruitful resource to mask anxious uncertainty and re-establish predominant BAS activity. Keeping this in mind, it appears reasonable that

so many people emphasise the need to preserve their cultural values and traditions. However, in view of refugee issues, retreat to one's own group may impede integration processes, and even lead to social tensions and mutual mistrust. In the next sections, we will first highlight the benefits of groups for coping with a given threat, before we review empirical findings that have linked reactive in-group affirmation to antisocial attitudes and behaviour.

Favouritism of In-Groups over Out-Groups as Approach-Oriented Defence Strategy

As groups confer abstract benefits, including epistemic understanding and meaning (Hogg, 2007), social status (Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979), belonging (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), and collective agency (Fritsche et al., 2013), we propose that heightening these aspects of social identity in case of threat may help people to effectively overcome aversive feelings and catalyse approach-motivated states of relief. Support for this assumption comes from numerous experiments in which participants responded with in-group-related attitudes and behaviour after having been exposed to various types of threat. For example, Hogg, Sherman, Dierselhuis, Maitner, and Moffitt (2007) demonstrated that experimentally manipulated uncertainty on a personal level (e.g. by letting participants reflect on those aspects of their lives that made them feel uncertain [vs. certain] about themselves, their lives, and their future) enhanced participants' identification with highly entitative in-groups. Similar results were also found by McGregor and colleagues where participants reacted to a personal goal conflict (e.g. thinking of a complex yet unresolved personal dilemma) with an exaggerated perception of social consensus for group-related worldviews, in-group bias, and worldview defence (McGregor, Nail, Marigold, & Kang, 2005; McGregor et al., 2001). Attachment threats also caused worldview defence among those high in attachment-related anxiety (Hart, Shaver, & Goldenberg, 2005) and made participants more susceptible to social influence, as conformity with the opinion of others might enhance their chances to be (re-)admitted into a group (Carter-Sowell, Chen, & Williams, 2008). Although some researchers have found stronger intergroup discrimination following threats to participants' self-esteem (Fein & Spencer, 1997), others did not (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). However, there is broad consensus that self-esteem is a crucial moderator for group-related responses to threat, as people with low self-esteem are especially likely to tend to engage in social defences (Jonas et al., 2014). With regard to the control motive, the picture is clearer. In two series of experiments, for instance, Fritsche et al. (2008; 2013) manipulated personal control (i.e. by having participants think about the possibility of being left by their beloved partner [vs. leaving the partner] or aspects of their life that gave them a sense of lacking [vs. high] personal control) and found that decreased feelings of control enhanced in-group bias with regard to different in-groups based on gender, nationality, or artificial assignment in the lab, in-group identification, and in-group support (e.g. support of political parties or action groups).

There are theoretical as well as empirical reasons to believe that reactive in-group-related attitudes and behaviour reflect approach-oriented defence mechanisms as the same and other threats also caused reactive approach motivation as measured with neurophysiological, perceptual, and self-report markers (e.g. Greenaway et al., 2015; McGregor, Prentice, & Nash, 2013; Nash et al., 2011). According to Jonas et al. (2014), one aspect of the approach-oriented character of social identification lies in the function of groups to bolster idealistic goals that are supported by the in-group's worldview. Consistent with this assumption, in a study by McGregor et al. (2010), the effect of a relationship threat on personal projects was mediated by the extent of idealism associated with those projects. Moreover, as power has been closely linked to approach motivation (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003), groups high in collective agency may become highly attractive to an individual in case of threat whereas less agentic groups may lose their appeal. Consequently, Fritsche et al. (2008) found collective agency (measured by items such as "If you were to support your party, would you have a feeling of together we are strong?") to mediate the effects from lacked personal control on group identification. Additionally, Stollberg et al. (2015) found that people who were reminded of lacking personal control increased their identification with agentic in-groups, which, in turn, elevated their perception of collective agency. Aside from these findings, McGregor, Haji, and Kang (2008) have shown that reflecting on meaningful group membership prior to a threat can buffer against anxious uncertainty and reactive in-group favouritism.

In sum, there is evidence showing that in-group affirmation may help people overcome negative feelings of anxious uncertainty caused by a given threat. However, often there is only a thin line between the feeling of being socially bounded and the tendency to adopt a closed-minded view of others who do not necessarily share one's understanding of the world. Therefore, many have investigated the relationship between identity threat and the readiness to support radical and extreme behaviour against out-group members.

Identity Threat, Extremism, and Radicalisation

A survey conducted by the European Commission in spring, 2015 revealed Immigration to be seen as the major challenge facing the European Union (Eurobarometer, 2015). Moreover, the results showed a significant increase in peoples' concerns for terrorism, most likely as a consequence of the attacks on the French magazine "Charlie Hebdo" on January 7th 2015 when 17 people were murdered by Islamic extremists. Even if many European citizens showing willingness to help incoming refugees, at the same time support for radical right-wing movements as well as violence towards refugees increased (e.g. Eddy, 2015).

Research has shown a direct link between the experience of threat, reactive group affirmation, and extreme antisocial responses. Accordingly, threat to the satisfaction of people's epistemic needs has been linked to religious and ideological fundamen-

talism, zealotry, dehumanisation, and support for authoritarian leadership (Hogg et al., 2013; McGregor, Haji, Nash, & Teper, 2008). Moreover, social exclusion has been found to increase aggressive behaviour (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001) as well as prejudice against and rejection of immigrants (Aydin, Krueger, Frey, Kastenmueller, & Fischer, 2014). In the same manner, indicators of control motivation have been found to mediate hostile ethnocentrism following control deprivation on the personal level (Agroskin & Jonas, 2013). As Hogg, Meehan, and Farquharson (2010) noted, when people are under threat, one explanation for the heightened appeal of radical groups lies in their high entitativity combined with an explicit action component to achieve their goals (i.e. radical strategies). Thus, in case of threat, people may feel that radical groups will do a much better job fulfilling their desire for epistemic equilibrium and collective agency. Moreover, as many extreme ideologies rest on the assumption of superiority over others, radical groups also nourish needs for positive self-evaluation more effectively than groups that believe in equality.

According to the anxiety-to-approach model, another aspect can be added to explain antisocial elements of reactive group identification after threat. Given that anger catalyses approach motivation (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009), hostile components of group-related reactions can be interpreted at least partly as approach-oriented defence strategies. Support comes from findings showing that reactive aggressive and displaced hostility as response to threat is mostly pronounced among subjects high in dispositional approach sensitivity (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). However, future research is needed to examine the exact role of anger and other approach-related aspects of in-group affirmation that lie between the perception of threat and hostile defence reactions.

Is there Another Way Out? Predicting Alternative Responses to Threat

Given these findings, there is a fairly clear but bleak picture of the relation between the experience of threat and antisocial responses. However, there is ray of hope that reactive in-group affirmation does not inevitably result in closed-mindedness and hostility towards others. As described in the introduction of this chapter, people often differ in their strategies for coping with a given threat. For instance, with regard to the current "refugee crisis", some might feel motivated to help incoming refugees cope with the hurdles regarding their asylum application instead of falling into a xenophobic mindset. There are also findings from laboratories showing that specific conditions can lead people to be less affected by a given threat or to foster benevolent aspects of their group identity (Jonas et al., 2008). Accordingly, personality variables related to dispositional BIS/BAS sensitivity (e.g. self-esteem) as well as situational factors (e.g. salience of prosocial group norms and values) have been found to moderate the direction of threat-related outcomes (for summaries, see also Fritsche et al., 2011; Jonas & Fritsche, 2013).

Thus, although in contrast to the large number of studies that show antisocial defence responses to threat, the number of studies that provide alternative outcomes is negligible; there is a promising trend in research emphasising the role of personal and contextual factors in threat and defence processes. In the next section, we integrate the above mentioned findings into a schematic model that may help make predictions about the prosocial or antisocial direction of outcomes when one's sense of identity is threatened.

Applying the Anxiety-to-Approach Model to Group-Based Defences

Figure 3.1 illustrates how the anxiety-to-approach model (Jonas et al., 2014) can be specified for understanding group-based defences as response to identity threat. This specification combines findings from different theories related to threat and defence that show group-based defence responses with neurophysiological correlates of anxious inhibition and approach motivation. Path A describes the immediate responses after the perception of threat to identity motives. On a neural level, threat is detected by the BIS, which subsequently triggers an aroused state of anxious uncertainty. It is noteworthy that anxious uncertainty differs conceptually from epistemic uncertainty or related concepts such as meaninglessness. Whereas epistemic uncertainty refers to a violation of the need for epistemic equilibrium, anxious uncertainty reflects a global state of coflict-induced BIS activity that tells people that "something is going wrong in a bad direction". Consequently, threats to epistemic needs may evoke anxious uncertainty in the same way as other threats do. Given that this state of increased BIS activity is highly aversive, people are motivated to escape from negative feelings and get into a more pleasant state that is hallmarked by predominant activity of the BAS. As shown by Path B, people therefore may affirm their group identity because this serves their need for epistemic equilibrium, self-esteem, belonging, and control, hence helping them to re-establish approach motivation. However, such group-based defence strategies often result in antisocial responses such as in-group bias or hostile behavioural reactions. This is because rather than value diversity with its inherent complexity, it might be easier to fulfil one's needs by holding a clear prototypical picture of others paired with feelings of superiority about one's own group. Furthermore, in-group bias might be a by-product of elevated in-group identification following identity threat, and, as in-group bias is the default norm in most groups, favouring the in-group might be an expression of collective action and thus collective agency.

Still, several factors have been proposed to influence responses to threat in a way that provides hope that antisocial responses are not an inevitable outcome. Path I describes the most direct way in which people may differ in their response to threat, namely, the initial appraisal of present experiences as challenge or threat. Path II refers to individual differences in threat vulnerability. Although there is still room for investigation, some factors linked to dispositional approach sensitivity have

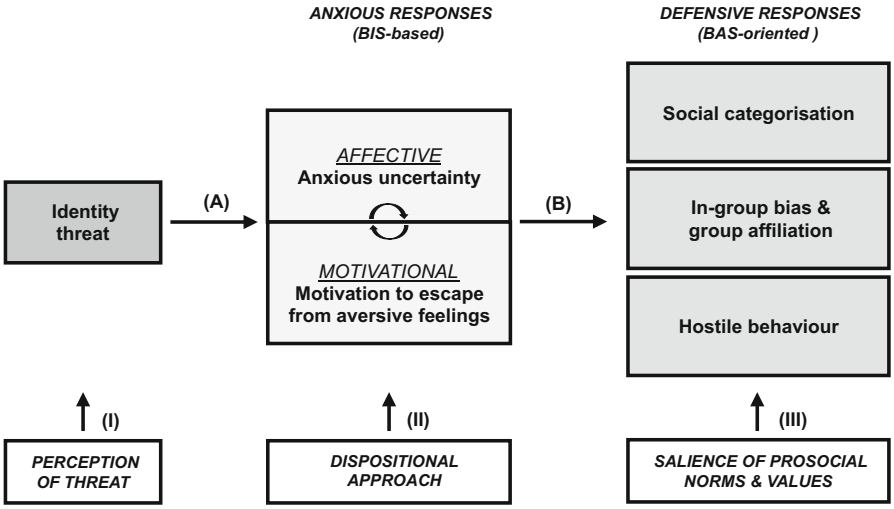

Fig. 3.1 An application of the anxiety-to-approach model to group-based defences following identity threat

been thought to make people more or less prone to the experience of threat and to influence their individual coping strategies (e.g. self-esteem, need for closure/need for structure). Path III refers to the contextual salience of prosocial norms and values prescribed by the cultural worldviews of one's group. When under threat, people tend to use cultural worldviews as an orientation to adjust their behaviour and assumptions. Research has shown that consequently, when prosocial components related to participant's group identity are salient, they react to threat in accordance with these aspects.

Path I: Perception of Threat

As mentioned by Jonas and Fritsche (2013), people can differ in how they appraise a potentially threatening situation. For instance, in wealthier countries, many might be threatened by the fact the influx of thousands of refugees seeking asylum whereas others may not be affected at all or even see it as an opportunity (e.g. for preventing negative outcomes due to demographic changes). According to the biopsychosocial model of challenge and threat (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1996), people may interpret a situation as a challenge when it appears controllable and can be linked to personal growth and success. In contrast, a situation that is overtaxing and linked to failure would be perceived as a threat. Hence, a crucial factor for explaining subjective reactions while coping with a potential threat lies in the way in which it is perceived by an individual. For example, many people who advocate for multicultural societies argue that cross-cultural interactions would enrich all parties due to mutual

learning and understanding. In contrast, people who protest mixed cultures focus primarily on possible threats such as diminished well-being and loss of tradition.

Some factors have been revealed to influence the perception of threat in social interactions. For example, Alter, Aronson, Darley, Rodriguez, and Ruble (2010) demonstrated that highlighting beneficial aspects of a situation in a test scenario made people impervious to stereotype threat. Thus, even in unfavourable situations, highlighting potential benefits and including alternative aspects that might change the nature of threat may help prevent negative outcomes. Research on the role of perceived control in the prevention of threat effects showed that reminding people of, at least partial, personal control over potentially threatening events, such as terrorism, or personal consequences of economic crises (Greenaway et al., 2014), eliminated threat effects on ethnocentric responses (i.e. prejudice). According to Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, and Salomon (1999), challenge and threat are at least conceptually related to approach and avoidance motivation, as they describe motivationally relevant states that refer to goal-relevant scenarios and involve both cognitive and affective processes. As goal striving is closely linked to approach motivation, the perception of challenge may represent a functional mechanism for coping with a discrepant situation directly without first blundering into a state of anxious uncertainty.

Path II: Dispositional Moderators of Threat-Related Outcomes

According to Jonas et al. (2014), people who are particularly high in BIS-related and low in BAS-related personality traits respond more strongly to threat as they show higher levels of anxious uncertainty and defensive behaviour. Up to now, individual differences in self-esteem and need for structure/need for closure have appeared to be the most likely sources of differences in threat-related responses. Both have been linked to dispositional BIS/BAS sensitivity and found to moderate people's general vulnerability to threat (Agroskin, 2015; Jonas et al., 2014).

Self-Esteem

In research on threat and defence, self-esteem is thought to play a key role in individual differences in threat-related outcomes. High levels of self-esteem have been linked to dispositional approach motivation as well as to BAS-related life satisfaction, meaning, vitality, and exploration motivation (Jonas et al., 2014). Moreover, those high in self-esteem seem less prone to threat as they show higher levels of approach motivation immediately after the experience of threat (McGregor, Nash, & Inzlicht, 2009). In contrast, their low self-esteem counterparts respond to threat with increased inhibition, avoidance motivation, and BIS-related negative affect. Thus, it is not surprising that participants with high self-esteem favour approach

goals following a relationship threat, whereas such with low self-esteem favour avoidance goals (Cavallo, Fitzsimons, & Holmes, 2009). Jonas et al. (2014) proposed that individuals with lower amounts of self-esteem are more likely to invest in social resources in case of threat whereas those with high self-esteem tend to invest in personal goals. Thus, for people with low self-esteem, shared social categories with out-group members such as farmers helping farmers (e.g. Farmers, 2015) and students helping students may represent an opportunity to prevent antisocial responses to threat. However, it is noteworthy that higher levels of self-esteem have also been linked to heightened aggression and hostility after threat. For example, in a study by McGregor and Jordan (2007), participants with high explicit self-esteem but low implicit self-esteem were more likely to mask feelings of threat by engaging into defensive zeal and extremism. Additionally, Baumeister, Smart, and Boden (1996) reviewed evidence that high self-esteem can foster hostile responses following ego threats (i.e. when a positive self-view is challenged by an unfavourable external appraisal).

Thus, in sum it appears that self-esteem represents a vital buffer against threat-induced anxiety that helps individuals high in self-esteem cope with a threat faster and more effectively than their low self-esteem counterparts. Nonetheless, identity threat might prompt high self-esteem people to react with more hostility, especially when important aspects of the self are unstable (i.e. high explicit self-esteem and low implicit self-esteem; Jordan, Spencer, & Zanna, 2005).

Need for Structure/Need for Closure

As people differ in their dispositional vulnerability to ambiguity and epistemic vagueness, the two closely related constructs personal need for structure (PNS; Neuberg & Newsom, 1993) and need for closure (NFC; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) have become particularly important in research on threat and defence. People high in epistemic needs generally tend to show higher amounts of ethnocentrism following threat and share a stronger desire for social consensus about attitudes and beliefs within their group. They perceive out-group members to differ more strongly from their in-group and are less tolerant towards alternative worldviews. Thus, in case of threat, NFC leads to a syndrome of "group centrism" that is hallmarked by a suite of antisocial responses such as in-group favouritism, a preference for homogeneous groups, and rejection of people who do not act in line with group norms (for a review, see Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011). Given that the need for closure scale is highly correlated with measures of BIS sensitivity (Corr, Hargreaves-Heap, Tsutsui, Russell, & Corr, Hargreaves-Heap, Tsutsui, Russell, & Seger, 2013), it is not surprising that people high in NFC are more vulnerable to threat and respond more negatively to unambiguous and unfamiliar information, such as that provided by cultural out-groups. They may also have an increased desire to reduce uncertainty by increasing in-group identification resulting in in-group bias (Hogg, 2007). McGregor, Haji and Kang (2008) demonstrated that the antisocial response

tendency of participants with high epistemic needs can be reduced if they have the opportunity to affirm their in-group identity immediately after threat. The authors found this mitigating effect resulted from the amount of self-certainty and self-worth participants felt by affiliation with the affirmed groups. Thus, for people who tend to be more prone to epistemic threat and BIS-related anxiety, the knowledge of a valuable and stable social identity might help them maintain a sense of certainty in the face of threat without engaging in hostile defensive reactions.

There are additional factors that should be addressed by future research. For instance, in a set of studies conducted by Mikulincer and Shaver (2001), attachment security was shown to attenuate the appraisal of threat caused by an out-group immigrant and significantly decrease the negative evaluation of out-group members after participants' self-esteem or cultural worldview had been threatened. Moreover, Agroskin, Jonas, and Traut-Mattausch (2014) showed that participants high in victim sensitivity responded to threat with increased vigilance towards malevolent cues while they sought order and protection. As victim sensitivity was positively correlated with dispositional BIS sensitivity, the authors conclude that victim sensitivity may reflect a hyper-vigilant negativity bias toward attributing malevolence to others combined with the motivation to avoid threat. Such findings may help explain why many supporters of populist parties and movements react to threat with increased patriotism while simultaneously strongly condemning their local political and economic systems.

In sum, dispositional moderators may play a key role in explaining individual differences in threat and defence dynamics. This also appears to be validated by real-life experiences: For example, conservative parties tend to be more sceptical towards incoming refugees than liberal parties. As political conservatism has been linked to higher levels of need for closure and lower self-esteem (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003), one may assume that followers of conservative political parties are more strongly identified with the ethnic in-group and thus more prone to in-group bias or feel more threatened when reflecting on changes caused by cultural mixture than do liberal voters. Thus, comprehensible and clearly structured strategies offered by authorities (such as concrete sub-goals and timelines) paired with social recognition (e.g. by media) and collective agency (e.g. "we can manage"; c.f., "Migrant Crisis", 2015) might help those whose personalities render them more vulnerable to threat to be less exhausted by the ongoing influx of immigrants.

Path III: Salience of Prosocial Norms and Values

So far, we have reviewed results showing that groups help people cope with threats to their identity by serving their underlying need for epistemic equilibrium, self-esteem, belonging, and control. Thus, shared norms and worldviews that allow individuals to validate their assumptions in the face of threat are essential to ensuring that they are on the right track. At the same time, group-based defences transform

individual actors into collective actors, as a social identity is adopted. Moreover, on a neurophysiological level, worldviews contain abstract goals to strive for; hence group-related values and ideals represent vital mechanisms for activating approach-motivated states of relief in the face of threat.

Yet given that most cultural groups contain an array of different assumptions about how to think and behave in different situations and under various conditions, why do the majority of findings show antisocial responses, even though many worldview-specific assumptions explicitly refer to prosocial values of trust, charity, and compassion?

Jonas et al. (2008) explored whether the contextual salience of primed pacifist norms would affect German participants' responses to threat (i.e. a nuclear armed Iran). As expected, without the pacifism prime, threat salience decreased their approval of peaceful conflict-resolution strategies. However, when pacifism was primed, the results changed in a way that threat significantly increased participants' interest in peaceful solutions. Comparably, Schumann, McGregor, Nash, and Ross (2014) tested whether reminding participants of their religious social identity would reduce typical antisocial reactions to threat and found support for their assumptions in a number of studies. A single-sentence religious belief system prime (i.e. which religious belief system do you identify with?) paired with a self-threat (i.e. frustrated academic goals) decreased endorsement of revenge and worldview defence in contrast to a no-prime condition. However, religion seems to cut both ways, as in case of threat it may also foster fanaticism and radical behaviour, which is sadly proven by the ongoing religious terror perpetrated by fanatic groups such as ISIS, al-Qaeda, and Boko Haram. One explanation may lie in the difference between the salience of injunctive norms that define how one *should* behave and descriptive norms that show how others *actually* behave (for most people in Western societies, religious values represent prosocial injunctive norms, whereas radical groups use them instead as descriptive norms to justify their antisocial behaviour). There is evidence suggesting that especially in case of threat, people may chiefly orientate on how their fellow group members think and act in a given situation (c.f., Hogg & Reid, 2006). For instance, recent studies by Stollberg et al. (submitted) have convincingly demonstrated the group-based nature of the effects of threatened personal control on norm conformity. Control threat increased students' approval of university curriculum changes only when a clear majority of other German students was said to approve of these changes, in comparison to situations where two out-groups (Polish and Czech students) but not the in-group approved of the curriculum changes, or when in-group and out-groups all displayed similar medium levels of approval (see also Jonas & Fritsche, 2013).

Thus, with regard to the actual debate on how to deal with incoming refugees, there are two practical ways to avoid hostility and xenophobic responses. First, political representatives should not jump on the populist bandwagon in the hope of garnering votes but instead should promote the prosocial norms and worldviews that belong to the citizens of their country and explicitly describe the expectations of how citizens should behave. Given that they serve as role models, other public figures such as artists and celebrities (also mass media schools, churches, etc.) may

also play a key role in promoting prosocial norms and values in case of threat. Second, with regard to descriptive norms, it seems of great relevance to promote alternatives to antisocial attitudes and behaviour in everyday life, for example showing citizens' responses of solidarity and open-mindedness in mass media coverage. This is also important with regard to refugees' behaviour, as they will also orientate themselves on their fellow group members. It seems reasonable that giving refugees a chance to take part in society will foster their attempts to integrate and will support the development of mutual trust.

Conclusion

In the current chapter, we have reviewed research as well as real-life evidence showing that threats to people's sense of self as epistemically certain, positive, socially included, and agentic may foster xenophobic attitudes and hostile behaviour towards out-group members. However, there is a ray of hope that this is not inevitable, as studies that focused on the moderators and mediators in threat and defence dynamics extended the field by providing alternatives to the unilinear *threat leads to socially destructive attitudes* view. As research on this topic is still in its infancy, it is hoped that future research will provide more insights by focusing on the underlying factors of threat and defence processes. This might include a clearer differentiation between the effects of different identity motives that are violated by a specific threat and research on personal moderating factors as well as the interplay between different motives when coping with a given threat (cf., Hart, 2014). Moreover, the inclusion of neurophysiological correlates related to approach may help impart a deeper understanding of the functionality of different defence mechanisms. Because in real life it is often easier to seek simple "quick and dirty" solutions than to reflect on an unpleasant problem intensively, research should also search for factors that foster attempts to cope with a given threat directly and in a sustained manner.

Acknowledgement Adrian Lüders has been financed by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF-P27457). Dimitrij Agroskin has been financed by the Doctoral College "Imaging the Mind" of he Austrian Science Fund (FWF-W1233).

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