

## **'Our way of life is worth defending': Testing a model of attitudes towards superordinate group membership through a study of Scots' attitudes towards Britain**

DENIS SINDIC<sup>1,2\*</sup> AND STEPHEN D. REICHER<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Psychology, University of St Andrews, Scotland, UK*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Psychology, University of Limerick, Republic of Ireland*

### *Abstract*

*This research used a survey design (N = 227) to investigate Scottish people's support or opposition to independence from Britain. It was hypothesised that political attitudes towards supra-national bodies are not a direct function of the degree of ingroup (Scottish) identification, but are moderated by the extent to which the expression of ingroup identity is seen as being undermined within the larger entity. This feeling of identity undermining is assumed to arise from perceptions of incompatibility with the outgroup and ingroup powerlessness within the common group. The results provided support for these hypotheses. Only for those participants who had high feelings of identity undermining did identification lead to stronger separatist attitudes. Moreover, incompatibility with the outgroup and ingroup powerlessness predicted feelings of identity undermining while this latter mediated their impact on attitudes to being part of Britain. These findings underline the importance of taking into account (a) the contents ascribed to identities and their relations, and (b) the practical ability to pursue a way of live based on these contents in order to understand the way identity processes shape attitudes towards superordinate groups. Copyright © 2008 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

This research seeks to investigate the conditions under which people support or oppose membership in superordinate groups. More precisely, drawing its main premises from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), it focuses on the role social identity processes play in influencing attitudes towards membership of supra-national bodies. We will argue that, in order to predict such attitudes, one must examine how group members see membership as impacting on their ability to create a society based on the values and norms associated with their identity. That is, it is necessary to first examine the content ascribed to identities, and then to examine the perceived ability to realize this identity in practice as part of the supra-national body. The concept of *identity undermining* will be introduced as a means of tackling these issues and it will constitute the main focus of the present empirical investigation.

### **SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND SUPERORDINATE GROUP MEMBERSHIP**

For the past 30 years, Social Identity Theory (SIT) has been one of the major theoretical frameworks for social psychological analyses of intergroup relations. One of the main claims of SIT is that intergroup behaviour is motivated by the way we perceive others and ourselves in terms of our group memberships (social identity) rather than in terms of our individual characteristics (personal identity). It further assumes that, for reasons of self-esteem, people are driven by a

\*Correspondence to: Denis Sindic, Department of Psychology, University of Limerick, Limerick, Republic of Ireland. E-mail: denis.sindic@ul.ie

desire to possess a distinct and positive social identity, and that this is a crucial element to consider in the dynamics of intergroup relations.

For SIT, social identities are defined through comparison with relevant outgroups. Hence, a distinct and positive identity can be achieved through the establishment of positive differentiation, whereby the ingroup is evaluated as superior to the outgroup (Tajfel, 1978; Turner, 1975). Such ingroup bias can frequently lead to discriminatory and derogatory behaviour towards outgroups (Brewer & Brown, 1998; Brown, 1995). However, as Tajfel stressed many times (e.g. Tajfel, 1981), differentiation occurs along *valued dimensions of comparison*. Hence, the precise behavioural consequences of the process of differentiation will depend upon the dimensions that are valued by the given group. Under certain conditions, group members might want to differentiate themselves from others by being more generous, more charitable, more kind towards others than those they compare themselves with (Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1999; Reicher, 2004).

This is a crucial point which relates to the interactionist meta-theory that frames SIT. While the psychological processes of social identification might be universal, the way they will translate into specific attitudes and behaviours always depends on contextual and social factors which provide the content of those processes. The point is so frequently ignored that Turner (1999) recently felt the need to reaffirm it.

Process theories such as social identity... require the incorporation of specific content into their analyses before they can make predictions either in the laboratory or the field, and are designed to require such an incorporation... Acknowledging the causal role of social and psychological content is a way of facing the specific political, historical and ideological facts of society and moving to the interactionist psychology which Tajfel advocated so powerfully (p. 34).

Therefore, Turner argues, SIT strongly rejects the idea that 'there are individual-level cognitive and/or motivational processes which directly produce negative outgroup attitudes' (p. 19).

If we apply this reasoning to the issue of attitudes towards superordinate groups, and more particularly to issues of national integration and separation, then it is wrong to think of SIT as suggesting that high national identifiers will necessarily be more hostile to union with others in a superordinate body, or indeed that there will be any simple relation between the positions which people take regarding superordinate group membership and their level of national identification. Instead, one must look at the situated social meanings that are attached to the relevant social identities. That is, just as it has been argued that attitudes to outgroup members in situations of intergroup contact depend upon the meaning that members ascribe to the presence of the other (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005; Dixon & Reicher, 1997), so attitudes toward integration with other groups depend upon the significance that members ascribe to union with the other and its consequence for ingroup identity. Do 'we' risk being subordinated by others within the larger body, or will we maintain or even enhance our identity as a group and our ability to realise this identity? These, we suggest, are the key psychological concerns against which integration will be evaluated.

## DISTINCTIVENESS THREAT AND IDENTITY UNDERMINING

What we are suggesting could be reframed in the language of *identity threat*. That is, people will reject membership of superordinate bodies to the extent that these are seen as threatening a significant social identity. As Hornsey and Hogg (2000) point out, however, the concept of identity threat remains somewhat vague. Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, and Doojse (1999) have sought to achieve some clarity by distinguishing between different types of threat. That which might seem most relevant to our concerns is the notion of distinctiveness threat, understood as a threat to the need for group members to possess a positive and distinct identity.

A range of research on intergroup contact (Gaertner, Bachman, Dovidio, & Banker, 2001; Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachevan, & Rust, 1993; Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989) and on multiculturalism (Berry, 1984; Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989) stresses the negative consequences of failing to acknowledge the category-based differences. Hornsey and Hogg (2000) conclude that the key to harmonious relations between subgroups in a common group is minimising distinctiveness threat. Thus any superordinate identity must be viewed: 'as a source of positive identity that does not conflict with or contradict cherished attributes of subgroup identity' (p. 143). Although their reasoning is focussed on the issue of subgroup attitudes towards each other, the leap to political attitudes towards the

superordinate group itself seems quite straightforward, that is people should oppose membership in superordinate groups that are construed as posing a threat to their subgroup identity.

Yet, for all the similarities between the arguments based on distinctiveness threat and our own position, there is one substantial difference. Generally speaking, distinctiveness is defined at a cognitive level. It refers to the ability of group members to *conceptualise* themselves as distinctive. By contrast, we lay more emphasis on the practical ability to act on the basis of one's social identity. That is, social identity should not just be seen as a representation of self in social relations. Rather, it is also a model of how the world should be organised as a function of this identity (Reicher & Haslam, 2006a,b). On the one hand, then, the ability to enact the norms, values and priorities which characterise a given social identity (*collective self-realisation*) is experienced as highly positive (Reicher & Haslam, 2006c; Haslam & Reicher, 2006). On the other hand, the inability to base social being on a social identity (*collective impasse*) is experienced negatively.

The issue on which we focus, therefore, is whether or not people believe that they will be able to live by their social identity within the superordinate group or whether that ability will be compromised. We coin the term '*identity undermining*', as opposed to using '*distinctiveness threat*', in order to denote this concern with identity-based practices. Our prediction is that groups will have negative attitudes to superordinate bodies where they believe identity-based practices will be undermined through membership. Conversely, where they believe that the ability to express group identity will be increased (identity enhancement) through membership, their attitudes toward the superordinate body will become more positive.

### ANTECEDENTS OF IDENTITY UNDERMINING

The distinction between distinctiveness threat and identity undermining becomes clearer by considering their respective antecedents. Distinctiveness threat derives from perceptions of excessive intergroup similarity and lack of intergroup boundaries (Brown, 1984a,b; Brown & Abrams, 1986; Moghaddam & Stringer, 1988; Roccas & Schwartz, 1993). Identity undermining, we propose, derives from two factors. The first is incompatibility. This is the sense that it is impossible for the different subgroups within a superordinate body to express their identities at the same time. Thus, what matters are not so much inter-subgroup similarities and differences *per se*, but the practical implications of such similarities or differences. In some circumstances, differences between groups (whether they concern traits, values, norms or behaviours) may allow them to complement each other (Brown & Wade, 1987; Deschamps & Brown, 1983), while at other times differences may lead to incommensurable ways of life (e.g. 'we are communal and support enhanced welfare provision, they are individualistic and support smaller government' — see Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Equally there are times when similarities may mean that both groups can express their identities at the same time (say, where both groups value tolerance) and some circumstances where similarity renders this impossible (where, by contrast, both groups value competition and dominance).

The second factor is power/powerlessness. Incompatibility becomes a greater problem under conditions where the ingroup is more likely to impose its priorities and way of life upon the outgroup than vice-versa. We would expect both incompatibility and power to have independent effects upon identity undermining (and thereby upon attitudes to the superordinate body) because both, even alone, set up the *possibility* of being unable to express aspects of ingroup identity if one were yoked to the other. However, we would expect the greatest impact to depend upon the combination of the two factors. That is, it is when identities are incompatible and the ingroup is powerless, that it is most likely that, *in actuality*, an 'alien' reality will be imposed by the outgroup. These are therefore likely to be the conditions where people will be most hostile to joining with the outgroup in a superordinate body.

### A MODEL OF SUPERORDINATE GROUP MEMBERSHIP

We are now in a position to combine the various elements of our argument into a simple model. First, the relation between subgroup identification and attitudes to the superordinate group will be *moderated* by perceptions of identity undermining/identity enhancement. High subgroup identifiers will be more negative towards membership of the superordinate group

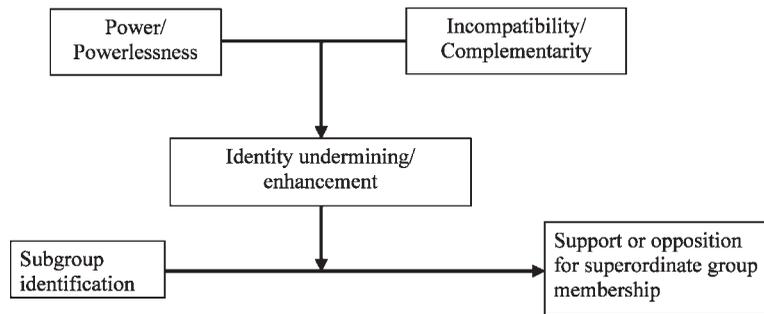


Figure 1. A model of attitudes towards superordinate group membership

when they have high perceptions of identity undermining and they will be more positive about superordinate group membership when they have high perceptions of identity enhancement. Second, identity undermining will be a product of incompatibility and powerlessness, both independently and multiplied together. Consequently, identity undermining will mediate the impact of these variables. This model is illustrated in Figure 1.

### SCOTLAND'S PLACE IN GREAT BRITAIN

We tested our model through a study that addressed the determinants of Scottish people's attitudes to Scotland remaining part of Great Britain. Historically, Scotland has been part of Britain since the Union of the Scottish and English parliaments in 1707. Since that period there has always been a diversity of opinions, with some people strongly favouring the Union, some arguing for increased autonomy for Scotland within an overall Union, and some favouring outright independence. In 1999 Scotland was granted its own devolved parliament at Holyrood in Edinburgh. Holyrood has control over certain issues such as education powers and limited tax raising powers. However core control over such issues as the economy, defence, immigration and foreign policy remains with the Westminster parliament in London. Since 1999, few people and no mainstream political parties advocate abolition of the Holyrood parliament, therefore the debate is between those who support a devolved settlement within the Union (Great Britain) and those individuals and parties (notably the Scottish National Party or SNP representing somewhere between a quarter and a third of the vote) who advocate dissolution of the Union.

Technically, Great Britain is made up of Wales as well as England and Scotland. Moreover, it is also arguable that one should refer to the United Kingdom (which additionally includes Northern Ireland) and not just Great Britain. However, in practice, the debate focuses (and has always focussed) on the relation of Scots and the English whether in Britain or the UK (see Marr, 1992). Accordingly, we look at Scottish identity, the ways in which Scottish people perceive their relation to the English, the extent to which they see a way of life based on Scottish identity as possible under the Union, and the relation between these factors and attitudes towards Britain.

Our choice of the Scottish example is motivated partly by its obvious relevance to our concerns, partly due to the fact that, being in Scotland, data collection is most convenient for us, and partly due to the fact that our theoretical claims are derived, to some extent, from Reicher & Hopkins studies of Scottish political rhetoric (Hopkins & Reicher, 1996; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). These authors show how politicians from the SNP advocate separatism on the grounds that England predominates within the Union, that the English impose policies based on English values and that, therefore, a 'Scottish' way of life is impossible within Britain. Conversely, those who defend the Union claim to have as strong a Scottish identity as anyone. However they stress the compatibility of English and Scottish identities and/or the fact that Scots are far from being powerless within the British system, in order to claim that Scottishness is preserved or even enhanced by being part of Britain. If anything, they claim, it is the separation which would threaten the Scottish way of life.

These examples show (a) that there is no simple link between expressed identification and separatism (see also Brown, McCrone, Paterson, & Surridge, 1999; Thomson, Park, & Bryson, 2000) (b) that attitudes to Britain for high identifiers is a function of how superordinate group membership impacts on the practical realisation of ingroup identity, (c) that this

impact is a function of the way in which the content of English and Scottish identities, and—critically—the relation between them, is construed.

There are, however, a number of limitations to this work. First it was conducted largely during the 1992 general election campaign—that is, before the Holyrood parliament came into being. It is therefore a test of the generality of our argument to see if the same processes affect attitudes to Union now that there is such a parliament. Second, Reicher and Hopkins conducted their studies on professional politicians. It remains to be seen whether the arguments which political parties use to advocate for and against Union are the same which affect the attitudes of ordinary people towards Union. Third, Reicher and Hopkins provide a qualitative analysis of political rhetoric. Whatever its value in showing how identities are defined and arguments constructed, such an analysis cannot establish general relations between key variables.

We therefore seek to confirm and extend the work of Reicher and Hopkins through a survey study of attitudes of ordinary Scots towards Britain. Our specific hypotheses are as follows (see model in Figure 1):

*H1.* The relation between Scottish identification and attitudes to Union will be moderated by perceptions of whether Scottish identity is or is not being undermined within Britain. More specifically:

*H1a.* Where ‘identity undermining’ is perceived as high, there will be a positive relation between Scottish identification and separatist political attitudes, and a negative relation between identification and unionist attitudes. The more strongly that people identify themselves as Scottish, the more they will oppose being part of Britain and support independence.

*H1b.* When ‘identity undermining’ is perceived as low, there will be no relation between Scottish identification and attitudes to Britain.

*H2.* Identity undermining will, itself, be a product of (i) a sense of incompatibility between Scottish and English identities, and (ii) a sense that Scotland is powerless compared to England. We predict main effects of ‘incompatibility’ and ‘powerlessness’ (*H2a*) as well as an interaction between these two variables (*H2b*) in predicting identity undermining.

*H3.* Given that the importance of ‘incompatibility’ and ‘powerlessness’ in determining attitudes to Union springs from their role as antecedents of identity undermining, identity undermining will mediate the effect of incompatibility and power on political attitudes.

*H4.* Given that the effect of identity undermining on political attitude depends on the level of Scottish identification, the mediational model specified in *H3* will only hold true for high identifiers. For low identifiers, power and incompatibility will still predict identity undermining, but the latter will not impact on political attitude. In other words, there will be a moderated mediation (Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005).

## METHOD

### Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire contained the following scales designed to test our hypotheses (see appendix for details of the items):

*Scottish identification:* The strength of Scottish national identification (4 items); this scale was composed of a compilation of identification items which have been used in earlier research (Haslam, 2001; Rutland & Cinnirella, 2000).

*Incompatibility:* The perception of compatibility/incompatibility between Scottish and English people (6 items).

*Powerlessness*: The perception of the lack of Scotland's power within Britain, in comparison with England and English people (6 items).

*Identity undermining in Britain*: The perceived extent to which Scottish national identity is undermined by inclusion within Britain (6 items).

*Political attitude towards Britain*: This scale measured the support for independence versus support for the Union in Britain—with or without a Scottish parliament (9 items).

All items in the scales were Likert-type items with 7 points (from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'). About half of the items in the scales of incompatibility, power and identity undermining were formulated in a negative way and accordingly they were reverse coded in the analysis of results. At the end of the questionnaire participants were also asked to fill in some personal details (gender, age, occupation etc.)

The questionnaire also contained other measures designed for exploratory purposes, but which are not relevant to the focus of this paper (full details are obtainable from the authors).

## Pilot Study

Apart from the identification scale, the other scales mentioned above were not borrowed from existing research but were created anew for the purposes of the present research. Accordingly, they were first submitted to piloting in order to ensure they constituted valid and reliable measures. A pilot questionnaire was therefore designed, which contained more items than the final questionnaire described above (usually 50–100% more, depending on the scale), so that a process of item selection would be possible. Thus, a pool of items was generated through conversational exchanges with Scottish people or by adapting statements by Scottish politicians reported in Reicher and Hopkins' analyses of political speeches (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001).

Twenty-one participants (13 males, 8 females), between 18 and 56 years old ( $M = 30.6$ ), were recruited among the student and staff body of the university of St Andrews and asked to fill the pilot questionnaire. The criteria for selection were (a) self-categorisation as being of Scottish nationality; (b) living in Scotland. Recruits were told that the study was about Scottish people's attitudes towards Britain. Besides answering the questions, they were also encouraged to comment freely on their clarity and their validity. Cronbach's alphas were calculated for each of the measures. All alpha scores were higher than .80, ranging from .80 to .89.

It was nonetheless necessary to make a selection of items in order to make the questionnaire more manageable in terms of length. This was done according to the three criteria. First of all, part-whole correlations between each item and its respective scale were calculated. Any item that failed to correlate significantly at  $p < .01$  with the scale was immediately discarded. Second, for those which did correlate significantly, the items were selected by trying to keep those with the highest correlations, while (third) also keeping a balance between normal and reverse coded items.

## Procedure and Participants in the Survey

Participants were recruited amongst the student body of the Universities of St Andrews and Aberdeen, and invited to take part in a web-based survey. In St Andrews, the survey was advertised to students by way of e-mail; the advert was inserted into one of the messages sent periodically by the Student Union to all students about general student events. In Aberdeen, it was advertised on the university website and within the campus news. An abstract of the advert also appeared whenever computers were started in classrooms.

The research was presented as an opinion survey on Scottish people's attitudes towards Britain and Europe. Students interested in participating were invited to click on a link which directed them to an electronic version of the questionnaire. Based on the pilot study results, it had been estimated that filling in this questionnaire would take about 20 minutes of their time. Two hundred and thirty-four questionnaires were received back by way of e-mail. Five were discarded because less than 50% of questions were answered, and two more because the participants admitted to not being Scottish. This left us with 227 participants (115 males, 107 females, 5 participants did not report their gender) aged between 17 and 60 ( $M = 21.8$ ).

## RESULTS

### Scale Reliability and Discriminatory Power

Cronbach's alphas were computed for each scale in order to evaluate their internal reliability. Scores ranged from .80 to .93, thus indicating that all scales had good internal consistency.

Next, a principal component analysis with VARIMAX rotation and with all items of each scale entered separately was conducted in order to appraise both whether each scale measured a single factor and whether the different scales measured different concepts which could be meaningfully distinguished. Accordingly we expected that all items belonging to the same scale should load mainly on a single component on which the other items should not load. The results of this analysis yielded a six-component solution in which all scales but one conformed to this expectation. That is, for the identification, incompatibility, powerlessness and identity undermining scales, all items belonging to the same scale loaded strongly on the same factor (loads above .6), while all other items loaded weakly (loads below .3).

The one exception was the political attitude scale which loaded on two separate factors (see Table 1 for details). The first factor had an eigenvalue of 10.99 and accounted for 37.9% of total variance. It was interpreted as measuring support for independence (since all independence items loaded at .6 or more) versus support for the union with a devolved parliament (since all 'devolution' items loaded at  $-.8$  or more and all items addressing support for a Union without the devolved parliament loaded at .3 or less). The second factor had an eigenvalue of 1.17 and accounted for 4.04% of total variance. It was interpreted as attitude towards the abolition of the Scottish parliament since all items measuring this position loaded strongly and negatively (at least  $-.8$ ), while no other items had a significant load (.3 or less).

This confirmed our supposition that the main political issue is whether people support the present devolved settlement within the Union or else support independence. A wish to move back to the position before devolution is very much a marginal position. Accordingly, we chose to focus only on the first factor for the testing of our hypotheses. Moreover, in the following analysis, we used participants' factor scores on the first component (rather than the whole scale) as our dependent variable of support for separatism (vs. support for the Union).

Table 2 contains the univariate statistics and bivariate correlations for all variables. Note in particular the significant correlations between identification and separatism ( $r = .178, p < .01$ ), identification and identity undermining ( $r = .494, p < .001$ ) and incompatibility and powerlessness ( $r = .477, p < .001$ ), as we will comment on these correlations in the discussion.

### Scottish Identification, Identity Undermining and Support for Separatism

In this section we present the results relating to H1: namely that the relation between Scottish identification and support for separatism will be moderated by the level of perceived identity undermining. As we were dealing with continuous variables, a multiple linear regression (MR) analysis was used following the guidelines provided by Aiken and West (1991). Scottish identification, identity undermining and the product term of those two variables (representing the

Table 1. Loads of political attitude items in principal component analysis

Items	Component 1	Component 6
Independence 1	.731	—
Independence 2	.758	—
Independence 2	.639	—
Devolved union 1	-.902	—
Devolved union 2	-.886	—
Devolved union 3	-.840	—
Union 1	—	-.801
Union 2	—	-.871
Union 3	—	-.835

Note: Loads below .3 are not reported.

Table 2. Univariate and bivariate statistics of all measures

	Identification	Incompatibility	Powerlessness	Undermining	Separatism
<i>M</i>	5.48	3.15	4.59	4.10	0
<i>SD</i>	1.22	1.25	1.21	1.30	1
Correlations					
Identification		.369***	.475***	.494***	.178**
Incompatibility			.477***	.540***	.201**
Powerlessness				.522***	.156*
Undermining					.296***
Separatism					

Note: All scales ranging from 1 to 7, except separatism based on factor scores (range between 1.88 and 2.02). \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

interaction) were entered as predictor variables, while support for separatism was entered as the criterion variable (using factor scores in the latter case).

The results of this MR analysis showed significant average effects for both Scottish identification ( $\beta = .153$ ,  $t_{223} = 1.99$ ,  $p = .048$ ) and identity undermining ( $\beta = .234$ ,  $t_{223} = 3.25$ ,  $p = .001$ ).<sup>1</sup> These effects, however, were qualified by a significant interaction between the two predictor variables ( $\beta = .255$ ,  $t_{223} = 3.78$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = 0.055$ ). Simple slope analysis (analogous to simple main effects in ANOVA designs) confirmed that the pattern of this interaction was as expected. At high levels of identity undermining (i.e. 1 SD above the mean), identification significantly and positively predicted support for separatism ( $\beta = .408$ ,  $t_{223} = 3.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ). At low levels of identity undermining (i.e. 1 SD below the mean), the relation between identification and support for separatism was negative but non-significant ( $\beta = -.102$ ,  $t_{223} = -1.25$ ,  $p = .211$ ). However, this negative relation between identification and support for separatism became significant when the level of identity undermining was smaller than 1.35 SD below the mean. This indicates that at very low levels of identity undermining, identification actually increased support for the union. Overall, then, the results provide support for H1.

### Incompatibility, Powerlessness, Identity Undermining and Support for Separatism

The results in this section relate to H2 and H3: (i) incompatibility and powerlessness will be predictors of identity undermining, both on their own (H2a) and in interaction (H2b), and (ii) the relation between incompatibility/powerlessness and separatism will be mediated by identity undermining (H3).

H2 was tested using a similar MR procedure as above, that is, incompatibility, powerlessness and their interaction were entered as predictors of identity undermining. The analysis showed significant main effects for both incompatibility ( $\beta = .367$ ,  $t_{223} = 5.88$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as well as powerlessness ( $\beta = .349$ ,  $t_{223} = 5.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ), providing support for H2a. However, the interaction term was not significant ( $\beta = .012$ ,  $t_{223} = .22$ ,  $p = .823$ ), thus failing to provide support for H2b.

Given this absence of significant interaction between incompatibility and power, our mediational hypothesis H3 was tested using incompatibility and powerlessness separately, while the interaction term was dropped from further analyses. A series of regression equations was used, following the procedure recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986).

As far as incompatibility is concerned, the results of the analyses showed that it was a significant predictor of perceptions of identity undermining ( $\beta = .540$ ,  $t_{225} = 9.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Secondly, they showed that identity undermining significantly predicted separatism even when the effect of incompatibility was controlled for ( $\beta = .265$ ,  $t_{224} = 3.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Thirdly, and crucially, the impact of incompatibility on separatism was significant when entered as sole predictor ( $\beta = .201$ ,  $t_{225} = 3.08$ ,  $p = .002$ ), but this relation was not significant once it was controlled for identity undermining ( $\beta = .058$ ,  $t_{224} = .76$ ,  $p = .451$ ). The success of this mediation analysis was more formally confirmed by the use of Sobel's test (Sobel, 1982), which provides a significance test for the indirect path via the mediator, and thus indirectly assesses if the reduction in the direct path between the predictor and the outcome is significant (MacKinnon, Warsi, & Dwyer, 1995; Muller et al., 2005). This test was highly significant ( $z = 3.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

<sup>1</sup>Here as in all following analyses, Beta weights were computed using the method recommended by Friedrich (1982).

Likewise, mediational analyses showed that powerlessness was a significant predictor of identity undermining ( $\beta = .522$ ,  $t_{225} = 9.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ); that identity undermining was a significant predictor of separatism even when powerlessness was controlled for ( $\beta = .295$ ,  $t_{224} = 3.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ); and that powerlessness was a significant predictor of separatism when entered as sole predictor ( $\beta = .156$ ,  $t_{225} = 2.37$ ,  $p = .018$ ), but not when identity undermining was controlled for ( $\beta = .002$ ,  $t_{224} = .03$ ,  $p = .974$ ; Sobel's test:  $z = 3.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, our hypothesis H3 was supported for both incompatibility and powerlessness separately, but not for their interaction.

### **Incompatibility, Powerlessness, Identity Undermining and Support for Separatism as a Function of Level of Identification**

The results in this section relate to H4: the role of identity undermining in mediating the relation between incompatibility/powerlessness and support for separatism will be moderated by the level of Scottish identification. That is, mediation will only be obtained for high identifiers.

This moderated mediation model was tested using a series of regression equations following the procedure recommended by Muller et al. (2005). Simply stated, it consists in extending the classic test for mediation by adding the moderator and its interaction with the other predictor(s) in each regression equation. Provided that there is a significant moderation of the mediational effect, the mediational model can then be computed at varying levels of the moderator (here, 1 SD below and above the mean) to assess the pattern of the moderation, that is, how the moderator is affecting the paths of the model.

Using first incompatibility as predictor, the results of this analysis showed that the mediation of the effect of incompatibility on separatism by identity undermining was indeed significantly moderated by the level of identification. More precisely, although the relation between incompatibility and identity undermining was not significantly moderated by the level of identification ( $\beta = -.017$ ,  $t_{221} = -.40$ ,  $p = .692$ ), the relation between identity undermining and separatism was significantly moderated by the level of identification ( $\beta = .265$ ,  $t_{221} = 3.14$ ,  $p = .002$ ).<sup>2</sup>

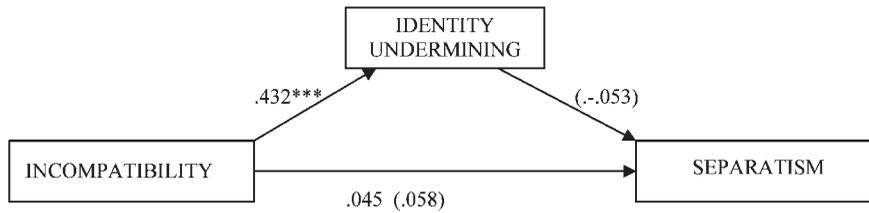
As can be seen from Figure 2A, at high level of identification (+1 SD), the mediational model was successful, as the significant path between incompatibility and separatism ( $\beta = .255$ ,  $t_{223} = 2.91$ ,  $p = .004$ ) became non-significant ( $\beta = .026$ ,  $t_{221} = .26$ ,  $p = .796$ ) once the indirect path was taken into account (Sobel's test:  $z = 3.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ). By contrast, at low levels of identification (-1 SD), incompatibility did not significantly predict political attitudes ( $\beta = .045$ ,  $t_{223} = .49$ ,  $p = .626$ ), and consequently there could be no mediation. Nevertheless, incompatibility remained a significant predictor of identity undermining ( $\beta = .432$ ,  $t_{223} = 5.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ). If the indirect path was not significant overall (Sobel's test:  $z = -.43$ ,  $p = .667$ ), this is because at low levels of identification, identity undermining did not predict political attitude ( $\beta = -.053$ ,  $t_{221} = -.42$ ,  $p = .672$ ). Thus these results are fully consistent with H4.

A similar analysis using powerlessness as predictor revealed the same pattern of results. The relation between powerlessness and identity undermining was not significantly moderated by the level of identification ( $\beta = -.018$ ,  $t_{221} = -.32$ ,  $p = .749$ ), but the relation between identity undermining and separatism was again significantly moderated by the level of identification ( $\beta = .265$ ,  $t_{221} = 2.62$ ,  $p = .009$ ). As can be seen from Figure 2B, at high levels of identification (+1 SD), the mediational model was successful, as the significant path between powerlessness and separatism ( $\beta = .266$ ,  $t_{223} = 2.57$ ,  $p = .011$ ) became non-significant ( $\beta = .028$ ,  $t_{221} = .27$ ,  $p = .813$ ) once the indirect path was taken into account (Sobel's test:  $z = 3.05$ ,  $p = .002$ ). By contrast, at low levels of identification (-1 SD), power did not significantly predict political attitudes ( $\beta = -.064$ ,  $t_{223} = -.69$ ,  $p = .492$ ), and consequently there could be no mediation. Nevertheless, power remained a significant predictor of identity undermining ( $\beta = .388$ ,  $t_{221} = 4.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ). If the indirect path was not

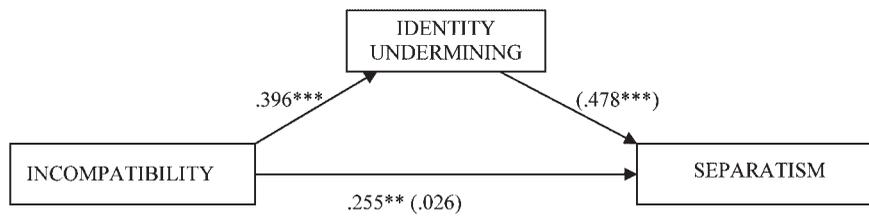
<sup>2</sup>There was also a marginally significant moderation of incompatibility by identification in predicting separatism ( $\beta = .105$ ,  $t_{223} = 1.88$ ,  $p = .061$ ), which disappeared when the indirect path was taken into account ( $\beta = -.016$ ,  $t_{221} = -.24$ ,  $p = .811$ ). Likewise, there was a significant moderation of powerlessness by identification ( $\beta = .166$ ,  $t_{223} = 2.54$ ,  $p = .012$ ), which disappeared when the indirect path was taken into account ( $\beta = -.006$ ,  $t_{221} = -.06$ ,  $p = .950$ ). Accordingly, and following Muller et al. (2005)'s discussion of prototypic cases of mediated moderation and moderated mediation, our results would seem to better fit the former case rather than the latter. However, as these authors also point out, every case of mediated moderation can be seen as a case of moderated mediation (but not vice versa), and the choice of referring to one or to the other ultimately depends on the theoretical goal of the researcher. In the present case, although both ways of reading the results would be consistent with our model, our theoretical goal and the way we presented our model means that we are more interested in emphasising the fact that the mediation of incompatibility and powerlessness by identity undermining is moderated by identification rather than the fact that the moderation of incompatibility and powerlessness by identification is mediated by identity undermining.

**A. INCOMPATIBILITY**

LOW IDENTIFICATION (-1SD)

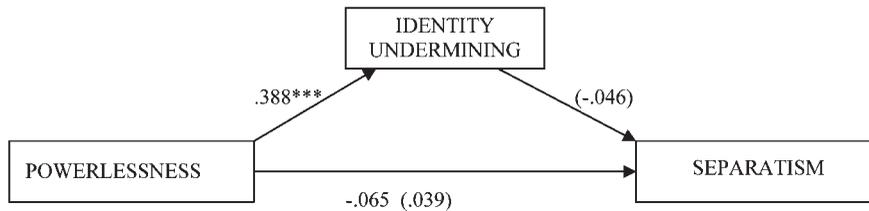


HIGH IDENTIFICATION (+1SD)



**B. POWERLESSNESS**

LOW IDENTIFICATION (-1SD)



HIGH IDENTIFICATION (+1SD)

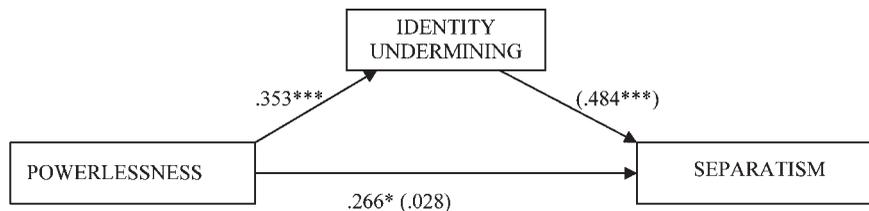


Figure 2. Identity undermining as a mediator between incompatibility/powerlessness and separatism, at low and high levels of Scottish identification. All figures represent  $\beta$  weights with \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Figures in brackets represent partial effects when both predictor and mediator are entered in the equation

significant overall (Sobel's test:  $z = -.032$ ,  $p = .974$ ), this is because at low levels of identification, identity undermining did not predict political attitude ( $\beta = -.046$ ,  $t_{223} = -.31$ ,  $p = .758$ ). Thus these results are fully consistent with H4.

## DISCUSSION

The results of our study provide overall support for our hypotheses and for our model. In terms of H1, the relation between identification and support for separatism is, as predicted, moderated by the perception of identity undermining. Most notably, high identifiers only support separatism when they believe that their ability to sustain a 'Scottish way of life' will be compromised within the Union with England. Indeed, where the belief in identity undermining is sufficiently low, there is evidence that higher identification is actually associated with decreased support for separatism. It seems, then, that attitudes to separatism cannot be deduced from the degree of identification alone.

However, this conclusion is a little stark and needs to be tempered in three ways. First, our results also show that, overall, there remains a positive relation between identification and support for separatism (see also Abrams, 1994). This can be explained as resulting from the fact that no low identifiers are likely to support separatism under any circumstances, whereas some high identifiers will. Taken as a whole, then, high identifiers will support separatism more than low identifiers. Our point, however, is that while identification may be *necessary* for supporting independence, it is clearly *not sufficient*.

Second, Scottish identification and identity undermining are positively correlated. Once again, this is hardly surprising. Those who are more concerned about their Scottishness are likely to be more sensitive to threats to a Scottish way of life. Nonetheless, as our factor analysis shows identification and identity undermining are clearly separable factors, and it is certainly possible to identify very highly and yet still see Scottish identity as in no danger of being undermined in Britain. This echoes Reicher and Hopkins' analysis of politicians who protest their Scottishness and yet insist that Scottish life flourishes in Britain (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001).

Third, we are not questioning *whether* social identification processes are important either in general or in the specific explanation of attitudes to union/separation. Rather, we seek to clarify *how* identification is important. That is, it is not a mechanical and automatic determinant of attitudes and actions. Rather, it is a criterion against which the significance of specific phenomena is interpreted, evaluated and acted upon. For our particular participants the issue is, being Scottish, how so they see the meaning of Union for their Scottishness? Depending on the answer that people give to this question they will be for or against Union, or, more eloquently, '*One might say that national identity in Scotland is a poor predictor of vote and constitutional preference not because it is unimportant, but because it is all-pervasive, and not the property of any single political party*' (Brown et al., 1999, pp. 115–116).

What, then, shapes the perceived meanings of Union for Scottishness? Or, in the terms we are using here, what are the antecedents of identity undermining? As we predict (H2), both incompatibility and powerlessness are significant factors. However, contrary to our predictions, the combined effect of the two factors is not more significant than either factor on its own. One way of explaining this is to argue that 'identity undermining' is more about a sense of potentiality than of reality (Sindic, 2005) and that an increase in either powerlessness or incompatibility increases the possibility of ones identity being undermined at some point, apart from the limit condition where significant levels of the other variable are inconceivable. In terms that we have used elsewhere, identity undermining—like identity—may be more about 'becoming' than 'being' (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001).

This is clearly speculative and requires further examination. Nonetheless these findings suggests only a rethink of how incompatibility and powerlessness work together in producing a sense that ones identity will be undermined in a superordinate group. By contrast they provide clear support for our more basic contention that both variables are important as antecedents of identity undermining. This is further demonstrated by the fact that identity undermining mediates the impact of both incompatibility and powerlessness on attitudes to Union (H3)—provided that people also identify strongly enough as Scots (H4).

The important thing to note about both variables is that they address the ability to express identity in the face of the outgroup rather than similarities and differences from the outgroup in and of themselves. Hence, our findings are somewhat different from and complementary to existing work on identity threat in general and distinctiveness threat in particular. They support our broad contention that identity is not simply bound up with the perception of social reality.

Rather, the concern with identity has to do with practicalities of day-to-day living, while identity defines what in day-to-day life is of concern for the subject. However, before we go too far with such broad claims, it is important to reflect critically upon the generalisability of our study.

To start with our participant population were young and highly educated. Such a sample is not representative of the Scottish population as a whole and it is highly likely that populations that differ in age or education might well differ on many of our variables—notably political attitudes. While this does not necessarily mean that other samples would differ in the nature of the *relation between* variables (which was our main concern), nonetheless, some caution must be exercised in generalising from our results until further studies are conducted with more varied populations.

One striking result, which adds to this concern, was the very high level of Scottish identification expressed by our participants (the median on a 7-point scale was 5.875). While this may perhaps partly reflect the fact that we recruited people by e-mail and the web such that those who did not identify might not have been motivated to go further, there is solid evidence that high levels of national (Scottish) identification are typical of Scots in general as a minority nation compared to their English neighbours (see, for instance, the data from the Scottish Election surveys and the Scottish Social Attitude Surveys; Bond & Rosie, 2002; Brown et al., 1999; McCrone, 2001). Nevertheless, this still means that our survey is best considered as concerning mostly the response patterns of middling to very high identifiers, and that no sound conclusions can be made about really low identifiers. Indeed, only 33 participants on the 227 scored on the midpoint or below of this scale.

But if this is a limitation of the data, in another sense it strengthens our claims. Given the limited variability in the identification scores, it becomes even more noteworthy that we obtained the expected interactions between identification and identity undermining. Whether this does or does not hold for low identifiers is relatively less important in order to make the point that identification is clearly not sufficient on its own to predict political attitudes, and to stress the importance of the meanings associated with identity relations. Furthermore, the median statistic for identity undermining in Britain ( $Mdn = 4$ ) shows that the distribution on this latter variable was quite balanced, showing that high identification can, in absolute terms, lead to low as well as high levels of identity undermining.

As well as asking whether the results from our sample can be generalised to Scots as a whole, there is also the obvious question as to whether our findings and model are of relevance beyond Scotland. Obviously a systematic answer to this question depends upon further empirical study. However, there is some historical and political evidence to suggest, at least, that our approach may have a more general application. What we are seeking to generalise, of course, is not necessarily the precise levels of our variables as found in Scotland, but rather the ways in which they inter-relate. So, to take an example from a very different historical, geographic and cultural setting, consider the role of incompatibility, powerlessness and identity undermining in the debate over the partition of India.

In his Presidential Address to the Muslim League's Lahore Congress of 1940, the eventual leader of an independent Pakistan, Jinnah, launched the so-called 'two nations theory'. He argued that Muslims are a separate nation from Hindus with a separate history and indeed conflicting identity. Moreover, as a numerical minority they would always be dominated by the Hindus unless they established their own state. In our terms, incompatibility and powerlessness led to identity undermining and hence necessitated separation (see Jinnah, in Hassan, 1993). By contrast, the Muslim leader of the Indian National Congress, Abdul Azad, replied in his Presidential Address to his own party later that year by saying that Muslims and Hindu identities had become one and the same over time: 'Whether we like it or not, we have now become an Indian nation, united and indivisible' (Azad, in Hassan, 1993, p. 68). That is, complete compatibility excluded the question of Muslim identity being undermined and hence of separation.

Such examples give us confidence that our findings are not just of parochial interest. However, there are two further limitations to our research which we would like to underline here because they also point to some directions for future research. First of all, one obvious lacuna is that the present research addressed only one facet (identity undermining) of the possible meanings which Union with the English could have for Scottish nation. Union could be said to impact upon the Scots in many ways, both negative (corruption, contamination etc.) and positive (e.g. identity enhancement, facilitation of the expression of identity). This could well influence political attitudes in various ways. In particular, we would predict that when there is a perception that ingroup identity is actually enhanced by being part of the superordinate group, then higher identification should lead to stronger support for Union. We suspect that this is what underlines the results of participants with very low scores of identity undermining, for whom identification lead to stronger support for the union. However, this should be tested more directly in future research using an explicit measure of identity enhancement, as it cannot be assumed *a priori* that it is the exact polar opposite of identity undermining.

Secondly, and most obviously, our survey design is correlational and hence excludes any definitive conclusions about causal links between variables. Hence the use and description of variables as ‘predictor’ and ‘outcome’ rests on theoretical reasoning and must be treated with caution. The obvious next step is to undertake experimental studies in which our key variables—compatibility, powerlessness and identity undermining—are manipulated and not simply measured in order to see the effects both upon political attitudes and upon the way identification relates to political attitudes.

## CONCLUSION

The findings from this study confirm and extend the arguments of Reicher and Hopkins (2001). For ordinary Scottish people as for their politicians, support or opposition for Britain is not a simple function of national identity, but rather depends upon the perceived impact of Britain on the Scottish way of life. To be more precise, (1) the relation between identification and attitudes to Union is moderated by identity undermining, (2) identity undermining is predicted by incompatibility and powerlessness, (3) for high identifiers, identity undermining mediates the relation between incompatibility/powerlessness and attitudes to Union. In this way, the findings are consistent with our model of attitudes to superordinate groups. More generally, we would argue that this research shows (a) the necessity of considering the specific meanings associated with social identities in order to know the outcomes of social identity processes, and (b) the need to lay greater emphasis upon social identity as a form of social being and hence upon the practical/experiential aspects of social identity processes.

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## APPENDIX

### Items and Alphas of Survey Scales

All items ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree.

Items in italics were reverse coded.

#### *National Identification*

Alpha = .82

1. Being Scottish is very important for me.
2. I feel strong ties with other Scottish people.
3. I see myself as being Scottish.
4. I feel personally criticised when someone who is not Scottish criticises the Scots.

#### *Incompatibility with Outgroup*

Alpha = .87

1. The Scottish way of life is basically out of tune with the English way of life.
2. *Scottish and English people are like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. They may differ, but they fit together well.*
3. *The fact that the Scottish way of life might differ from that of the English does not mean that they are necessarily in opposition.*
4. The Scots and the English are like chalk and cheese: they just don't go together.
5. *Scotland and England are like members of a team where the different qualities of each member combine together to make a coherent whole.*
6. The Scots and the English are simply incompatible.

#### *Ingroup Powerlessness*

Alpha = .84

1. *If the Scots really want to, they can get their way in determining British government policies.*
2. *The Scottish interest plays a part in determining British government decisions.*
3. Decisions in Britain are based on what the English want irrespective of what others want.
4. *Even though they might have the power to push things through alone, the English generally take the Scottish view into account when determining British government policy.*
5. When push comes to shove, the English always get their way in British policy.
6. English people too often take advantage of their stronger power to make their point of view prevail in the politics of Britain.

#### *Identity Undermining*

Alpha = .85

1. *Being part of Britain has allowed Scotland to keep its specific and separate identity.*

2. By being part of Britain, Scottish values are corroded by alien values which are imposed on them.
3. Being part of the UK has undermined the Scottish way of life.
4. *Being part of Britain has helped Scotland to preserve its identity more than if Scotland had stood alone.*
5. Scotland might lose part of its identity if it were independent of Britain but the loss will be even greater if it decides to stay in Britain.
6. Scottishness has flourished inside the Union with Britain, but it would have flourished even more if it had been independent.

*Political Attitude to Britain*

1. Scotland should become an independent country, separate from the rest of the UK.
2. The goal of having a parliament in Scotland should be ultimately to achieve total independence in the long-term.
3. Having a Scottish parliament is a good thing only if it ultimately leads to total independence.
4. Scotland should have its own parliament but remain part of the UK.
5. Having a Scottish parliament is a good thing, but it should not lead to total independence from the UK.
6. I support devolution but I don't support independence nor do I support being in the UK without a Scottish parliament.
7. Scotland should remain part of the UK but without a separate parliament.
8. I support the Union in Britain but not devolution or independence.
9. I oppose devolution because it endangers the union between Scotland and England.

Alpha = .89 (the first three items were reverse coded for the purposes of computing Cronbach's alpha).