

# Social Motives in Intergroup Conflict: Group Identity and Perceived Target of Threat\*

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## Abstract

We experimentally test the social motives behind individual participation in intergroup conflict by manipulating the perceived target of threat—groups or individuals—and the symmetry of conflict. We find that behavior in conflict depends on whether one is harmed by actions perpetrated by the out-group, but not on one's own influence on the outcome of the out-group. The perceived target of threat dramatically alters decisions to participate in conflict. When people perceive *their group* to be under threat, they are mobilized to do what is good for the group and contribute to the conflict. On the other hand, if people perceive to be *personally* under threat, they are driven to do what is good for themselves and withhold their contribution. The first phenomenon is attributed to group identity, possibly combined with a concern for social welfare. The second phenomenon is attributed to a novel victim effect. Another social motive—reciprocity—is ruled out by the data.

## Keywords

intergroup conflict, intergroup prisoner's dilemma, asymmetric conflict, framing, group identity.

## JEL classification codes

C72, C92, D03, D62, D74, H41

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## Introduction

Social identity informs and shapes individual and social behavior (Akerlof and Kranton, 2011). Recent developments in economics promote the notion that identity is arguably more important than the monetary incentives that take center stage in standard theory. Besley and Ghatak (2003, 2005) argued that organizations can more effectively enhance worker motivation and effort by matching the organization *mission* to the workers' preferences. Akerlof and Kranton (2005, 2008, 2011) take a more general view and regard the mission as one of many ways to foster an *insider* identity in the worker. An insider adopts the organizational affiliation as part of her social identity, and the organization's objective as her own. In this view, rather than relying on optimal pecuniary contracts, "the success of an organization depends on employees who share its goals" (Akerlof and Kranton, 2011, p. 58).

Social, or group, identity facilitates cooperation within groups. Kramer and Brewer (1984) found that priming a joint community identity rather than a subordinate divisive social identity increased cooperation in a common resource pool dilemma. Similarly, inducing *common fate* by determining part of the experimental payoff by a random mechanism at the group or at a subordinate level increases cooperation in social dilemmas (Brewer and Kramer, 1986; Kramer and Brewer, 1984; Wit and Wilke, 1992). Eckel and Grossman (2005) artificially enhanced group identity incrementally, from using arbitrary labels to participation in a collaborative task and group competition, to find that strong manipulations increase contributions to a group public good. Similarly, Charness et al. (2007) created artificial groups to show that the saliency of the group affects individual behavior, increasing within-group and reducing between-group cooperation. In Chowdhury et al. (2015), participants invested more in a between-group Tullock contest when informed that the experimental groups are based on existing ethnic groups.

These studies—while clearly placing group identity at the heart of economic behavior—provide only a limited understanding of how group identity *emerges*. Akerlof and Kranton (2005, 2011) assert that firms should be willing to invest in creating 'insider' identities for their employees, and review and discuss suggestive evidence on how the military, firms, and political parties can influence social categories.<sup>1</sup> These include training, tight interactions within the group, and explicitly stated organizational norms. In this paper, we draw on the vast knowledge accrued in psychology, sociology, and political science on the role of *inter-group conflict* in breeding group identity and thus cooperation (Campbell, 1965; Coser, 1956; Sherif, 1961; Stein, 1976). For example, pro-social behaviors directed at the group increase during times of war (Glynn et al., 2003; Gneezy and Fessler, 2012; Janis, 1951; Penner et al., 2005; Schmiedeberg, 1942; Steinberg and Rooney, 2005).<sup>2</sup> Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) places intergroup conflict as the first and obvious determinant of social identity. Conflict with other groups creates a clear distinction between the groups, which is required to establish a collective identity. Moreover, conflict induces a common fate within the group, as the actions of the competing group affect the in-group as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup>See also Ellemers et al. (2004) for an analysis of the interplay between identity and work motivation.

<sup>2</sup>On the evolution of intragroup cooperation with intergroup conflict, see Bowles (2008); Bowles et al. (2003); Choi and Bowles (2007); Guzmán et al. (2007); Hugh-Jones and Zultan (2013).

We use a controlled experiment to study the necessary conditions for intergroup conflict to trigger group identity-mediated cooperation. The experimental data lead us to draw two main conclusions. First, it is the *threat* that another group (the outgroup) poses to one's group, as opposed to having the opportunity to harm the other group, that fosters cooperation within the group. Second, for group identity and cooperation to emerge in conflict, it is crucial that the group, rather than individual group members, is perceived to be under threat. When the objectively same threat is perceived as imposed separately on the individual group members, they are *less* likely to cooperate.

Our workhorse is the *Intergroup Prisoner's Dilemma* (IPD; Bornstein, 1992; Bornstein and Ben-Yossef, 1994), which embeds a standard Prisoner's Dilemma (PD) game in intergroup conflict. In our experimental PD game, each of three players in the group receives an initial endowment of 140 ECU (Experimental Currency Units) and decides whether to contribute to a group account or not. Contribution carries a cost of 50 ECU and increases the payoff of each of the three group members (including the contributor) by 30 ECU (the contributor's net loss is thus 20 ECU). The IPD game maintains this payoff structure within the group. The gain of the in-group members, however, is *at the expense* of members of a matched group. Put differently, in the PD payoffs are based only on the sum of contributions in the group, while in the IPD payoffs increase with the sum of contributions in the group, and decrease with the sum of contributions in the matched group.

In a pioneer study, Bornstein and Ben-Yossef (1994) found that cooperation levels in the IPD were roughly double those in the PD. Why does intergroup conflict facilitate intragroup cooperation, despite the severe negative effect that cooperation has on the outgroup? From the point of view of an individual player, embedding the social dilemma within the group conflict adds two aspects to the game. First, her group is placed under threat of being harmed by contributions in the out-group. Second, her own contributions harm the members of the out-group. While these two aspects are confounded in the IPD, only the first implies common fate. We disentangle these two aspects by introducing a new game, the *Asymmetric Intergroup Prisoner's Dilemma* (AIPD). In the AIPD, contributions made by members of one group—which we label the *Attacker* group—increase the payoffs of the group's members and decrease the payoffs of members of the other group, as in the IPD. In contrast, contributions made by members of the other group—which we label the *Victim* group—only affect payoffs within that group, as in the PD. In other words, the payoff function of Attacker group members are determined as in the PD (i.e., they *are not* affected by the out-group); and the payoffs of members of the Victim group are determined as in the IPD (i.e., they *are* affected by the out-group).

If common fate is the crucial aspect that triggers group identity and consequently cooperation, we should observe more cooperation, relative to a PD game, in the Victim group, but not in the Attacker group, as only members of the former share a common fate due to the actions of the other group. If intergroup conflict enhances group identity, at least to some extent, through creating a clear group boundary with respect to another group, we should also observe an effect in the Attacker group.<sup>3</sup>

Group identity, however, is not the only social motive involved in group conflict. Reciprocity, for example,

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<sup>3</sup>De Dreu et al. (2015) similarly used an asymmetric predator-prey game to disentangle motives. In their game, the prey/victim—but not the predator/attacker—is exposed to a fear motive, similar to the way in which the victims in our game, but not attackers, share a common fate.

has been shown to drive behavior across many social interactions (Fehr and Gächter, 2000).<sup>4</sup> The high level of contributions in the IPD can accordingly be explained as the manifestation of negative reciprocity between individuals belonging to opposing groups. In the appendix we develop a model based on Rabin (1993) that incorporates reciprocal preferences into individuals' utility functions and shows that, consequently, expected contribution levels are higher in the IPD than in the PD.

Another important social motive that emerges from the experimental and behavioral literature is a taste for maximizing social welfare or efficiency. In many cases, people are willing to incur a small personal cost if it results in a larger benefit to others (e.g., Charness and Rabin, 2002; Choshen-Hillel and Yaniv, 2011; Engelmann and Strobel, 2004; Kritikos and Bolle, 2001).<sup>5</sup> Perhaps somewhat oddly, the opposite is observed in the context of intergroup conflict, where contributions are higher in the less efficient IPD (where it is necessary to harm the out-group in order to benefit the in-group) in comparison with the PD (where the in-group benefit does not entail harming the out-group). Nonetheless, preferences for social welfare maximization can explain another result in the context of group conflict. In the *Intergroup Prisoner's Dilemma-Maximizing Differences* game (IPD-MD; Halevy et al., 2008), players who wish to contribute in order to increase the payoff of their in-group can allocate their contribution between two pools. Contributions to a *within-group pool* do not (negatively) affect the payoff of the out-group, as in the PD, whereas contributions to a *between-group pool* do, as in the IPD. Several experiments found that contributions to the inefficient between-group pool are substantially lower than contributions to the efficient within-group pool, suggesting a concern for the welfare of outgroup members (De Dreu et al., 2010; Halevy et al., 2008, 2012; Weisel and Böhm, 2015).

Why do people tend to engage in conflict in the IPD game of Bornstein and Ben-Yossef (1994), but choose to avoid conflict in the IPD-MD game of Halevy et al. (2008)? We see three possible explanations. The explanation put forward by Halevy et al. (2008) is that group identity induced by conflict fosters in-group love but not out-group hate, such that people have no particular interest in harming the out-group unless it is essential for helping the in-group (as is the case in the IPD). Another possible explanation is that people have a preference for social welfare maximization, which is not apparent in the IPD due to the stronger effects of group identity. In the IPD-MD, however, this preference induces aversion to the between-group pool, as individuals can satisfy both their desire to benefit in-group members and to increase social welfare by directing their contributions at the within-group pool.

A third explanation for the discrepancy between the two types of studies hangs on the way in which conflict was presented, and as a result, *perceived* by group members. In the experiments that found higher contributions in the IPD than in the PD, the payoffs were presented to participants as a function of the difference between the total contributions made by the members of the two groups. In other words, the comparison

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<sup>4</sup>In the one-shot simultaneous games that we study, players are not able to reciprocate observed actions by others. We nonetheless use the term *reciprocity* to describe reciprocal preferences that sustain cooperation in equilibrium when actions are taken to reciprocate *expected* actions by others. A static equilibrium notion based on a 'principle of reciprocity' was offered by Sugden (1984). Fischbacher and Gächter (2010) have argued, based on experimental evidence, that people choose their contribution to a public good as if they reciprocate the contributions they *expect* others to make.

<sup>5</sup>In this paper we do not distinguish between concern for efficiency—maximizing aggregate payoffs—and for social welfare—maximizing aggregate utilities—since both notions are essentially equivalent in the conflict games that we study.

Table 1: **Effects of social motives on contribution**

Social motive	PD	IPD	Attacker	Victim
Group identity	–	+	–	+
Reciprocity	–	+	–	–
Social welfare	+	–	–	+

Note: The "+" signs indicate that the social motive (row) is hypothesized to increase contributions in the respective game/group type (column).

between the two groups was made salient (see Table 3 and the instructions for the *Comparison Frame* in the online appendix). The experiments on the IPD-MD, in comparison, distinguished in their experimental instructions between the direct effects of individual contributions on in- and out-group members, without explicitly comparing contributions in the two groups (see the instructions for the *Individual Harm Frame* in the online appendix). In fact, no published study has hitherto compared contributions in the PD and the IPD using the same presentation that was used in the IPD-MD studies. The current study remedies this situation.

### *Aims and hypotheses*

Our aim in this paper is twofold. First, we wish to identify the unique effects of group identity, reciprocity, and social welfare considerations (henceforth *GI*, *REC*, and *SW*, respectively) on cooperation in intergroup conflict. This is made possible by comparing the new AIPD game to the PD and IPD. The three social motives diverge in their predictions with regard to contribution behavior in the different games. We accordingly draw our main hypotheses, also summarized in Table 1:

**Hypothesis 1.** *GROUP IDENTITY: Cooperation is higher in the IPD and in the Victim group, in which group members share a common fate due to the joint effect of contributions in the out-group on their payoff.*

**Hypothesis 2.** *RECIPROCITY: Cooperation is higher in the IPD, in which there is a reciprocal relationship between the two groups.*

**Hypothesis 3.** *SOCIAL WELFARE: Cooperation is higher in the PD and the Victim group, in which contributions do not have a negative effect on out-group members.*

These hypotheses can be combined to generate new predictions for combinations of any two motives. Table 2 summarizes the different theoretical predictions.<sup>6</sup>

Second, we compare different ways in which the experimental game of conflict has been presented in previous experiments to determine how perceptions of the nature of the conflict affect behavior, and how

<sup>6</sup>The qualitative prediction of a combination of all three motives cannot be distinguished from that of a combination of just GI and SW due to the conflicting effects in the IPD.

Table 2: **Predicted contribution levels for different social motives**

Social motive(s)	Predicted contribution levels					
GI	<i>IPD</i>	=	<i>Victim</i>	>	<i>PD</i>	= <i>Attacker</i>
REC	<i>IPD</i>	>	<i>Victim</i>	=	<i>PD</i>	= <i>Attacker</i>
SW	<i>Victim</i>	=	<i>PD</i>	>	<i>IPD</i>	= <i>Attacker</i>
GI & REC	<i>IPD</i>	>	<i>Victim</i>	>	<i>PD</i>	= <i>Attacker</i>
GI & SW	<i>Victim</i>	>	<i>IPD</i>	>=<	<i>PD</i>	> <i>Attacker</i>
REC & SW	<i>IPD</i>	>=<	<i>PD</i>	=	<i>Victim</i>	> <i>Attacker</i>

Notes: Contributions in different games are assumed to be identical when the same set of social motives applies ("="); contributions in a given game are assumed to be higher than in another when the relevant social motives in the latter are a (proper) subset of those in the former (">"); we do not assume anything about the relative effect of *different* social motives on contributions (">=<").

these perception interact with GI, REC, and SW. Bornstein and Ben-Yossef (1994) used what we refer to as a *Comparison* frame to describe the payoffs in the IPD, and found more cooperation in the IPD as compared to the PD. Under a *Comparison* frame, payoffs in the PD are determined by a player’s choice (to contribute or not) and the number of contributions in the group, and payoffs in the IPD are determined by a player’s choice and the difference in the number of contributors between her group and the other group, as in Table 3. In contrast, Halevy et al. (2008) used an *Individual Harm* frame and found that people refrain from contributing to an IPD-type pool. In an *Individual Harm* frame the payoffs are determined by the direct externalities (negative or positive) that individual contribution has on members of the two groups.

We manipulate the framing to explicitly test whether contributions in the IPD depend on how the game is presented. To explain the existing results, we conjecture that the *Comparison* frame, in which the actions and payoffs are presented at the group level, induces an increased sense of common fate, which triggers group identity. Furthermore, in the *Individual Harm* frame, in which actions and payoffs are presented at the individual level, the harm inflicted on out-group members is brought to the fore and social welfare considerations are more pronounced. The latter prediction is rooted in the principle that “When people are seen as individuals rather than as members of a group, the desire to hurt them for the sake of beating them may be reduced because of greater empathy or identification” (Baron, 2012, pp. 218–219). Our next hypotheses reflect this conjecture.

**Hypothesis 4a.** COMPARISON FRAME: *The effects of group identity described in Hypothesis 1 are stronger under the Comparison frame.*

**Hypothesis 4b.** INDIVIDUAL HARM FRAME: *The effects of social welfare maximization described in Hypothesis 3 are stronger under the Individual Harm frame.*

The effects of conflict on cooperation depend on individual characteristics. For example, Probst et al. (1999) found that contributions in the IPD are either higher or lower than in the PD, depending on individually

held cultural values. To account for individual differences, we measure participants' social value orientation (SVO; Liebrand and McClintock, 1988; Van Lange, 1999) using the slider measure (Murphy et al., 2011); and their willingness to punish by eliciting minimum acceptable offers (MAO) in an ultimatum game. SVO increases with the willingness to forgo a personal payoff in order to increase others' welfare, hence, it is expected to be correlated with concern for SW. GI is also a pro-social tendency, and is therefore expected to be moderated by SVO. REC, on the other hand, is conceptually orthogonal to SVO, and is expected to be correlated with the willingness to retaliate in the ultimatum game. Accordingly, we draw the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 5a.** SOCIAL VALUE ORIENTATION AND SW: *The effects of social welfare maximization described in Hypothesis 3 are stronger as SVO increases.*

**Hypothesis 5b.** SOCIAL VALUE ORIENTATION AND GI: *The effects of group identity described in Hypothesis 1 are stronger as SVO increases.*

**Hypothesis 6.** RETALIATION: *Participants who are more willing to reject low offers in the ultimatum game are more likely to contribute (only) in the IPD.*

## Experimental design and procedure

The computerized experiment was conducted at the experimental economics lab in Jena and programmed in z-Tree (Fischbacher, 2007). Four hundred and forty four participants were recruited using ORSEE (Greiner, 2015). Sessions lasted approximately one hour, and the average payoff was 15€, including a showup fee of 2.50€.

Each experimental session included three stages comprised of the conflict game (PD, IPD, or AIPD), presented in either a Comparison or an Individual Harm frame, an ultimatum game, and the SVO slider measure. The participants were informed at the beginning of the experiment that there will be three independent stages, but not of their content.

### *The conflict game (stage 1)*

We manipulated group type and the way conflict is framed (presented) in a 2 x 4 between-subjects design with group type (PD / IPD / Attacker / Victim) and framing (Comparison / Individual Harm) as independent variables. At the beginning of the stage, participants were randomly allocated to pairs of three-person groups. The groups in each pair were labeled Group A and Group B. Each group member was endowed with 140 ECU (Experimental Currency Unit). Contribution carried a fixed cost of 50 ECU and increased the payoff of each group member, including the contributor, by 30 ECU. Contributions made in the IPD and by the Attacker

Table 3: Payoff tables in the Comparison frame

(a) PD and Attacker payoffs				
<b>contributions in the group</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Contribute	-	120	150	180
Not contribute	140	170	200	-

(b) IPD and Victim payoffs							
<b>Contributions in the group minus contribution in the other group</b>	<b>-3</b>	<b>-2</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Contribute	-	30	60	90	120	150	180
Not contribute	50	80	110	140	170	200	-

group in the AIPD additionally reduced the payoff of each out-group member by 30 ECU.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the payoff function for participants in the PD and in the Attacker group was

$$\pi_i = 140 - 50c_i + 30 \sum_{j \in I} c_j, \quad (1)$$

where  $c_i \in \{0, 1\}$  is  $i$ 's contribution decision and  $I$  denotes  $i$ 's in-group. The corresponding payoff function for participants in the IPD and in the Victim group was

$$\pi_i = 140 - 50c_i + 30 \sum_{j \in I} c_j - 30 \sum_{k \in O} c_k, \quad (2)$$

where  $O$  denotes  $i$ 's outgroup.

The instructions in the Individual Harm frame explained the direct effect of contribution on the contributor, her in-group members and her out-group members. The instructions in the Comparison frame treatments presented the game payoffs in tables following Bornstein and Ben-Yossef (1994).<sup>8</sup> In the PD and Attacker groups, the payoffs were presented as a function of the *number of contributors* in the group and the individual decision. In the IPD and Victim groups, the payoff was presented as a function of the *difference in the number of contributors* between the in-group and the out-group and of the individual decision (to contribute or not). Table 3 reproduces the payoff tables shown to participants. The instructions for the PD and IPD sessions included and explained the relevant payoff table. Instructions for the AIPD sessions included both payoff tables.

<sup>7</sup>To keep the instructions identical across treatments and to control for the mere existence of another group, the instructions in the PD also referred to Group A and Group B.

<sup>8</sup>See the appendix for an English translation of the instructions. The German original is available upon request.



In all treatments, the explanation of the payoff structure was followed by a detailed example. Participants indicated that they understood the instructions and were then required to correctly calculate their payoff in two hypothetical situations before the experiment proceeded.

Next, participants made their contribution decisions, after which they were asked to guess how many members of their in-group and their out-group chose to contribute. Guesses were not incentivized. This concluded the first stage.

### *The Ultimatum game (stage 2)*

In the second stage, participants played a strategy-method ultimatum game (UG), in which each player played both as a responder and as a proposer. First, each participant  $i$  played the role of the *responder* in the UG by indicating the “minimum acceptable offer” (MAO) in ECU,  $r_i \in \{10, 20, \dots, 190\}$ .<sup>9</sup> Second, each participant made a decision in the role of the *proposer* in the UG and suggested a division of 200 ECU between herself and her partner  $j$  by selecting  $p_i \in \{10, 20, \dots, 190\}$  ECU for herself, with the rest,  $200 - p_i$ , going to the partner. Participants were randomly paired and the payoff relevant roles were determined randomly, with one member of the pair as a proposer and the other as a responder. If the proposer’s ( $i$ ) division was accepted by the responder ( $j$ ), i.e.,  $200 - p_i \geq r_j$ , the proposer received  $p_i$  ECU and the responder received  $200 - p_i$  ECU. If it was rejected, i.e.,  $200 - p_i < r_j$ , then both the proposer and the responder received nothing.

The instructions for the second stage explained the rules of the UG, the way participants were paired and selected to the roles of proposer or responder, and included an example for illustration. Participants indicated that they understood the instructions and then proceeded to make their decisions.

### *The Social Value Orientation slider measure (stage 3)*

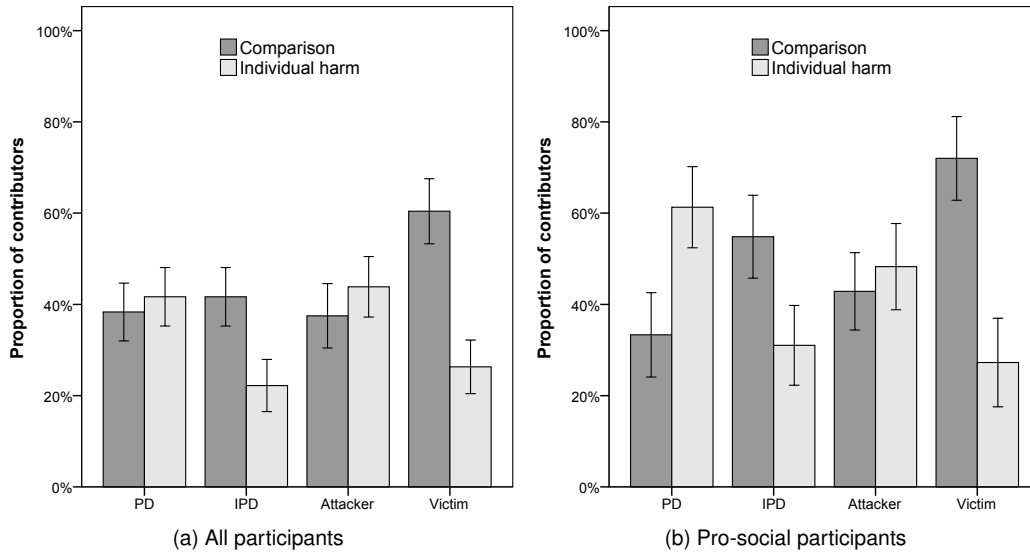
In the third and final stage participants completed the Social Value Orientation slider measure (Murphy et al., 2011). In this measure, which aims to measure the magnitude of the concern people have for others, each participant makes a series of 15 dictator decisions. In each decision, the participant chooses one of nine possible allocations. Choices are then aggregated to determine a unique value for each participant, expressed as an angle on a self/other two-dimensional space. A value of zero indicates perfect selfishness. Higher values indicate stronger regard to the payoff of others.

After deciding on their allocations, participants were randomly matched in pairs to determine the payoff in this stage. One participant in each pair was randomly chosen to be the allocator, and one randomly selected decision of that participant determined the payoff for both participants in the pair.

Table 4: Logistic regressions on the probability of contribution

	(1) Comparison	(2) Individual Harm	(3) All data	(4) all data
IPD	0.139 (0.373)		0.139 (0.373)	1.314* (0.771)
Victim	0.898** (0.397)		0.898** (0.397)	2.413*** (0.872)
Attacker	-0.0354 (0.399)		-0.0354 (0.399)	0.655 (0.778)
Individual Harm			0.139 (0.373)	2.128*** (0.802)
Individual Harm x IPD		-0.916** (0.419)	-1.055* (0.561)	-2.781** (1.172)
Individual Harm x Victim		-0.693* (0.399)	-1.591*** (0.563)	-4.125*** (1.247)
Individual Harm x Attacker		0.0896 (0.374)	0.125 (0.547)	-1.616 (1.122)
SVO				-0.0186 (0.0209)
IPD x SVO				0.0520* (0.0294)
Victim x SVO				0.0663** (0.0326)
Attacker x SVO				0.0322 (0.0321)
Individual Harm x SVO				0.0910*** (0.0318)
Individual Harm x IPD x SVO				-0.0782 (0.0483)
Individual Harm x Victim x SVO				-0.118** (0.0478)
Individual Harm x Attacker x SVO				-0.0837* (0.0457)
Constant	-0.475* (0.266)	-0.336 (0.262)	-0.475* (0.266)	-0.917 (0.570)
N	216	228	444	444

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ . SVO baseline is set at  $45^\circ$ .



Note: error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

**Figure 1: Proportions of contributors**

## Results

Figure 1 presents the proportions of participants contributing in the different treatments, for all participants (Panel 1a) and for pro-social participants only (Panel 1b).<sup>10</sup> Table 4 presents the results of a series of logistic regressions taking the probability of contribution as the dependent variable. Columns (1) and (2) describe separate models for the two frames. Column (3) presents an aggregate model, and Column (4) adds the SVO and its interactions.<sup>11</sup> The MAO data collected in the ultimatum game of Stage 2 did not predict behavior in the conflict games and are therefore omitted from the analysis. Because the results are markedly different between the Comparison frame and the Individual Harm frame, we describe the results separately for each.

<sup>9</sup>We also asked participants what is the maximal amount they wish to reject, to ensure proper understanding.

<sup>10</sup>Individuals are classified as pro-social according to the criterion in Murphy et al. (2011).

<sup>11</sup>Since the SVO elicitation followed the conflict game decisions, it is possible that the allocation decisions in the later stage were affected by the specific game encountered in the early stage. However, a model comparing SVO across group types and frames is not overall significant ( $F(7, 436) = 1.37, p = 0.218$ ). From all 28 possible pairwise comparisons, none are significant when applying a Bonferroni correction. Even without correcting for multiple comparisons, only three pairwise comparisons are significant at the 0.05 level, as a result from the mean SVO being relatively high in the Attacker group under the Comparison frame (26.5 vs. 19.3–23.3 in the other seven cells), a treatment in which the SVO was not significantly correlated with contributions in the conflict game, and which bears little on the conclusions.

## Comparison frame

Contribution levels were significantly higher in the Victim group (60.4%) than in the PD (38.3%,  $z = 2.50, p = 0.012$ ), the IPD (41.7%,  $z = 1.99, p = 0.047$ ), and Attacker (37.5%,  $z = 2.45, p = 0.014$ ) groups, which were not significantly different from each other ( $p > 0.500$  for all three pairwise comparisons).<sup>12</sup> The high proportion of contributors in the Victim group, in particular when compared to our baseline PD treatment, is in line with Hypothesis 1 (Group Identity). Recall that group identity was originally invoked to explain the high contributions in the IPD game observed by Bornstein and Ben-Yossef (1994), a pattern not replicated in our data. Thus, the lack of a significant difference between the PD and IPD treatments deviates both from previous findings and from the predictions of Hypothesis 1.

Nonetheless, these deviations can be accounted for when considering the interactions of the treatments with the SVO measure presented in Column (4) in Table 4. We see that participants who score high on the SVO measure are more likely to contribute in the IPD than in the PD, as in Bornstein and Ben-Yossef (1994).<sup>13</sup> The fact that the behavior observed by Bornstein and Ben-Yossef (1994) was similar to the behavior we observe in highly pro-social participants suggests that social value orientation moderates the tendency to contribute more in the IPD than in the PD. Social value orientation was not measured in Bornstein and Ben-Yossef (1994), but since their sample differed from ours in generation (1990's vs. 2010's), country (Israel vs. Germany), and recruitment procedures—which can affect the proportion of pro-social individuals that are selected to participate (see, e.g., Krawczyk, 2011)—it is plausible that pro-sociality levels were higher. Individual contributions to conflict, therefore, can be viewed as a manifestation of pro-social tendencies. This interpretation is consistent with the view that human altruism, as manifested in high pro-sociality, is inherently parochial and rooted in intergroup conflict, which gains theoretical support from evolutionary models and simulations (Bowles, 2008; Choi and Bowles, 2007), as well as empirical support from hormonal studies (De Dreu, 2012; De Dreu et al., 2011).

The test of Hypothesis 5b further supports group identity as the main motive driving behavior in the Comparison frame. As can be seen in Figure 1b, pro-socials contribute significantly more in the IPD and Victim group, in which intergroup conflict instills common fate. This result is supported by the regression presented in Column (4) of Table 4, which provides the treatment coefficients estimated for purely pro-social participants.<sup>14</sup>

If group identity is the only social motive at play, we would expect to observe the same levels of contri-

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<sup>12</sup>Pairwise  $z$ - and  $p$ -values were computed based on model (4) in table 4.

<sup>13</sup>A similar dependence on individual types was previously observed by Probst et al. (1999), who found higher contributions in the IPD compared to the PD only for *vertical individualists*, classified as participants that agree with competitive statements such as 'competition is the law of nature' and 'winning is everything' (Probst et al., 1999; Singelis et al., 1995).

<sup>14</sup>No significant effects were found for participants categorized as pro-self and for the model estimates at  $SVO=0^\circ$ , representing purely selfish individuals. Interpreting the SVO as reflecting a-priori preferences, as we do here, is not necessary for our conclusion. Even if contributions in the conflict game influenced the allocation choices used to estimate the SVO—somewhat unlikely, as the principle of moral balancing (Nisan, 1990, 1991) would predict a negative, rather than a positive, correlation—the fact that this only happens in the treatments associated with enhanced group identity due to common fate equally speaks for the importance of group identity in determining behavior in intergroup conflict.

contributions in the IPD and in the Victim group, as both experience common fate due to the out-group's actions. The difference between the two groups can be explained by a concern for social welfare. That is, if we restrict ourselves to the PD, IPD, and Victim groups, the results are perfectly in line with a combination of GI and SW (cf. Table 2).<sup>15</sup> Behavior in the Attacker group is not in line with this explanation, however, as contributions are not significantly lower than in the PD and the IPD as would be predicted according to SW. This disparity can be explained in two ways. One is that members of the Attacker group, unlike players in the IPD, completely ignore the other group as it does not affect them, hence social welfare considerations do not enter their decision. Another possible explanation is that although the members of the attacker group do not share a common fate in the sense that it exists in the IPD and in the Victim group, they do experience enhanced group identity due to having a dependent, strategically linked, out-group. This explanation, although sufficient to fully explain the contribution patterns in the Comparison frame, does not explain why contributions in the Attacker group are not moderated by pro-sociality and are not sensitive to the framing of the game (as will be discussed below), two factors that theoretically and empirically should moderate group identity. Therefore, to the extent that group identity is promoted by having a strategically-linked out-group (as in the Attacker group), this effect is separate from the group identity effect that emerges from sharing a common fate (as in the IPD and Victim group), which is moderated by pro-sociality and the way conflict is framed.

In sum, we conclude that when intergroup conflict involves a comparison between groups, it triggers group identity due to common fate and, possibly, also due to imposing a common fate on another group. We find indirect evidence for the existence of social welfare concerns that mitigate the effects of group identity in bilateral conflict. Reciprocity in the sense of retaliation against expected hostilities does not appear to play a role in participation in conflict.

### *Individual Harm frame*

The perceived target of threat has a stark effect on behavior. While conflict had a weak positive effect on cooperation within the group in the Comparison frame (i.e., slightly more cooperation in IPD relative to PD; significantly more for pro-socials), conflict framed as Individual Harm had the opposite (!) effect, with cooperation levels dropping sharply from 41.7% in the PD to 22.2% in the IPD ( $z = 2.18, p = 0.029$ ). Furthermore, the interactions with SVO follow a different pattern from that observed in the Comparison frame, as high SVO scores in the Individual Harm frame are associated with higher contribution rates only in the PD (and not in the IPD and Victim group), and do not affect the overall contribution pattern.

The Individual Harm framing boosts the saliency of the adverse effect of contributions on out-group members as well as the fact that there is no overall social gain from contributions. According to our hypotheses, the results in the PD and the IPD support a social welfare maximization motive. However, SW and its combinations with any of the other two motives predict that cooperation in the Attacker group would

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<sup>15</sup>Note, however, that the data in the Individual Harm frame, discussed below, strongly rejects the existence of social welfare considerations. As our ex-ante Hypothesis 4b predicted that social welfare plays a larger role in the Individual Harm frame, it is not clear that it indeed comes into play in the Comparison frame.

be lower than in the other groups (in particular, lower than the Victim group) and cooperation in the Victim group would be at least as high as in the PD (cf. Table 2). The pattern evident in the results is quite the opposite, with low cooperation levels evident in the Victim (26.3%) rather than in the Attacker group (43.9%). Thus, including the AIPD game in our design allows us to reject all three social motives as driving behavior under the Individual Harm frame. Rather, we find that being exposed to Individual Harm inflicted by members of another group led people to withdraw their contribution to the in-group. We conclude that perceiving conflict as a threat to one's self triggers selfishness and leads to low contribution rates. We elaborate on this conclusion in the next section.

## Discussion and conclusion

The literature on within-group cooperation and collective action in conflict has so far focused on group identity as the main mediator of the effects of intergroup conflict on intra-group cooperation. The behavioral literature led us to hypothesize that collective action in conflict is also driven by (negative) reciprocity between members of opposing groups. Additionally, we hypothesized that these effects mask a negative effect of social welfare maximization on cooperation in conflict.

The experiment reported in this paper explicitly tested these three hypotheses by introducing the Asymmetric Intergroup Prisoner's Dilemma (AIPD). Our framing manipulation varied whether the harm inflicted by contributions in the out-group (in-group) is targeted jointly at all members of the in-group (out-group) or separately at each individual. Our results can be summed by the following principle, which we term the *Perceived Target of Threat Principle*:

*When people perceive their group to be under threat, they are mobilized to do what is good for the group and contribute to the conflict. On the other hand, when people perceive themselves to be personally under threat, they are driven to do what is good for themselves and withhold their contribution.*

These effects are apparent in the two treatments that involve being harmed by contributions in the out-group, namely the IPD and the Victim group. In line with the Perceived Target of Threat principle, contributions in these treatments are significantly higher when the threat is presented at the group level than when the threat is presented at the individual level. Thus, our paper contributes to the literature on subjective perceptions of strategic situations and their effect on norm perception and behavior. In a scenario study by Tenbrunsel and Messick (1999), for example, participants were significantly less likely to perceive a social dilemma as an ethical decision situation if there was a small probability of being sanctioned for defecting. Accordingly, cooperation levels were lower in the sanctioning treatment. A field study by Gneezy and Rustichini (2000) similarly found a detrimental effect of sanctions on cooperative behavior, and similar framing effects were found in ultimatum bargaining as well (e.g., Blount and Larrick, 2000).

In the Comparison frame, previously used in similar laboratory studies of the IPD game (e.g., Bornstein

and Ben-Yossef, 1994; Bornstein et al., 1996), Group identity provided the best explanation for observed behavior in both symmetric and asymmetric conflict, lending support to Hypotheses 1, 4a, and 5b, which are related to group identity. Studies of evolutionary dynamics argue that parochial altruism—the willingness to sacrifice for one’s fellow group members—evolved as a response to intergroup conflict (Bowles, 2008; Choi and Bowles, 2007). Our results support this view and identify the effect of common fate on group identity as the underlying proximate mechanism.

In consideration of the alternative social motives invoked by the Comparison frame of intergroup conflict, comparing contributions in the IPD and in the Victim group served to ascertain the role of reciprocal tendencies, as both group types include an element of common fate but differ with respect to the existence of reciprocal relationships between the in-group and the out-group. The experimental results reject reciprocity as an underlying motive, as contributions are higher in the Victim group, where contributions do not affect out-group members and therefore there is no room for intergroup reciprocity. Thus, related Hypotheses 2 and 6 were not supported.

The evidence for social welfare maximization in the Comparison frame data is mixed. The markedly high contribution rates in the Victim group, compared to the IPD, suggest that behavior is partially driven by a concern for SW. Hence, the central Hypothesis 3 is partially supported. Related hypotheses 4b and 5a, which predict the effects of SW to increase in the Individual Harm frame and with the SVO scores, respectively, do not receive support from the data.

Our study of the Individual Harm framing of the conflict games reveals that the perceived target of threat carries dramatic implications for the mobilization of individual group members in intergroup conflict. Comparing the PD and the IPD, and for pro-social individuals in particular, we find a strong interaction of the framing and conflict. When individual payoffs in group conflict are presented as a result of a comparison between groups—such that one’s group is perceived to be the target of threat—conflict increases contributions. Conversely, when the direct effects of in-group and out-group contributions on individual payoffs are highlighted—such that the perceived target of threat is the individual—conflict reduces contributions. An alternative way to think about this result is to consider how the way conflict is framed affects contribution decisions. On the one hand, emphasizing the effects of contribution on individuals, as is the case in the Individual Harm frame, leads pro-social individuals to contribute more in the PD, where contributions have a positive effect on society. In contrast, the same framing leads to fewer contributions in the IPD, where contributions carry a negative effect on (some) others and on overall social welfare. On the other hand, emphasizing the effect of contribution on the group, as in the Comparison frame, leads pro-social individuals to contribute more in the IPD, where the positive effect of contribution for the group is congruent with the frame.

In both presentations of the games, behavior in the IPD qualitatively resembles that in the Victim group, but not in the Attacker group. In the Comparison frame, this pattern is predicted by group identity. In the Individual Harm frame, however, none of the three social motives we considered ex-ante is able to explain this pattern. Our interpretation is that we observe what we refer to as a *Victim effect*, referring to the tendency of

individuals to behave selfishly when they perceive to be under personal threat. We consider this novel effect to be a generalized principle of *concern withdrawal*. Charness and Rabin (2002) formulated the original principle by arguing that “[subjects] withdraw their willingness to sacrifice to allocate the fair share toward somebody who himself is unwilling to sacrifice for the sake of fairness” (p. 820). Our results suggest that people’s unwillingness to sacrifice is not a result of misbehavior on the part of the potential beneficiary of the sacrifice, but is rather a more egocentric reaction to being harmed or being exposed to harm.

Generalized concern withdrawal is linked to the notion of indirect reciprocity, and specifically to *upstream reciprocity*, by which an individual who receives favorable treatment from another individual reciprocates by treating a third individual favorably (Boyd and Richerson, 1989). Upstream reciprocity is evolutionary stable in certain conditions, such as when interactions occur in small groups or when direct reciprocity is possible (Nowak and Roch, 2007; Pfeiffer et al., 2005).

Several experimental studies found that people are more likely to help others after being helped themselves (Bartlett and DeSteno, 2006; Dufwenberg et al., 2001; Greiner and Levati, 2005; Güth et al., 2001). However, unlike our experiment, these studies compared behavior conditional on the actual actions of others, whereas our study compared different game structures. This difference allows us to extend the existing knowledge in two important ways. First, the behavioral principle we identify is based on *negative* reciprocity, as in Charness and Rabin’s (2002) original formulation of concern withdrawal. That is, out-group actions potentially affected personal welfare in a negative way. Second, the factor that drives people behavior in our setup is not actual harm, but *mere exposure to potential harm*.

The unexpected result under the Individual Harm frame raises two testable hypotheses: that concern withdrawal is a special case of a general victim effect, and that exposure to harm has similar effects as actual harm. Future research is needed to test and refine these hypotheses and their implications.

Our results also have significant implications for the study of in-group love and out-group hate as driving motives in intergroup conflict (Brewer, 1999). Halevy et al. (2008) introduced the IPD-MD game as a way to disentangle the two motives associated with group identity. The study of the IPD-MD game has established that people refrain from harming out-group members when given an option to cooperate within the group without affecting the out-group. Consequentially, enhanced group identity as a result of intergroup conflict was considered to induce in-group love, but not out-group hate.

Studies of the IPD-MD game, however, relied exclusively on the Individual Harm frame. Given the current results, which show that group identity does not seem to be invoked by conflict when the perceived target of threat is the individual, it is not clear whether group identity induces in-group love, rather than out-group hate—as per the interpretation of results obtained with the IPD-MD—or whether the way conflict was framed did not induce group identity in the first place.

Whether out-group hate will emerge in the IPD-MD when the perceived target of threat is the group (e.g., using the Comparison frame) is up for future experiments to determine. One observation suggests a negative answer to this question. In our experimental games, in-group love implies higher contributions in the IPD and Victim groups, whereas out-group hate should only affect the IPD players. Since the positive effect of



conflict on intra-group cooperation was primarily observed in the Victim group, in-group love appears to be the major motive invoked by group identity.

Group identity plays a significant role in the life of individuals and organizations (Akerlof and Kranton, 2005; Charness et al., 2007; Chen and Li, 2009; Chowdhury et al., 2015). We conducted a controlled experiment to establish that the effects of intergroup conflict and competition on intragroup cooperation are mediated by group identity while controlling for other social motives. We find that group identity increases cooperation when group members' attention is focused on the risk born collectively by the group. When attention is shifted to the personal risk sustained by each group member, however, group identity no longer plays a role, and intergroup conflict inhibits, rather than facilitates, cooperation.

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