International Journal of Conflict and Violence

urn:nbn:de:0070-ijcv-2007231
IJCV: Vol. 1 (2) 2007, pp. 127–141

Attributions of Responsibility for Terrorist Attacks: The Role of Group Membership and Identification

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Three studies examine how people's attributions of responsibility for terrorist attacks depend on their group membership and their identification with the victim (study 1) or their identification with the victim's or perpetrator's ingroup (studies 2 and 3). We observe that people's group membership (perpetrator group versus victim group) determines the judgments of responsibility for recent terrorist attacks. Members of the perpetrator group hold the direct perpetrators responsible, while members of the victim group perceive the perpetrator world as a whole as relatively responsible as well. Identification with the victim (study 1) or victim group (studies 2 and 3) strengthens attributions of responsibility to the whole perpetrator group, and this relationship is partially mediated by the perceived typicality of the perpetrator for the whole group. We discuss possible explanations for this pattern, and indicate the implications of these results in terms of improving intergroup relations.

Tension between the "Islamic world" and the (non-Islamic) "Western world" has increased over the last few years, partly due to the impact of terrorist attacks (Bar-Tal and Labin 1998; Doosje, Kateman, and Mathyi, forthcoming; Pettigrew 2003; Skitka, Bauman, and Mullen 2004). In three studies, we examine how attributions of responsibility for terrorist attacks may depend on group membership (studies 1 to 3: perpetrator vs. victim group membership), perceived typicality of the perpetrator (studies 1 and 3), and level of identification with either the victim (study 1) or victim or perpetrator ingroup (studies 2 and 3). In studies 1 to 3, we examine these attributions in relation to attacks perpetrated by Islamic people. In addition, study 3 also explores how attributions are made in relation to attacks committed by non-Islamic people.

Our most basic argument is that people's attributions of responsibility for terrorist attacks depend on their group membership. Specifically, we propose that the typical intergroup attribution bias will be observed in this context, in which members of the perpetrator group will attribute less responsibility to their own group than members of the victimized group do. We extend this work in two ways: by investigating the role of victim identification (study 1) and victim or perpetrator group identification (studies 2 and 3), and the role of perceived typicality of the perpetrator for the group as a whole (studies 1 and 3). In the case of Islamic terrorists, we expect the victimized group (i.e., non-Islamic respondents) to make stronger attributions to the Islamic world to the extent that they feel a bond with the victim (study 1) or the victimized ingroup (studies 2 and 3), and have stronger perceptions of the perpetrators as typical Islamic group members. In contrast, we propose the hypothesis that members of the perpetrator group (i.e., Islamic participants) will perceive the Islamic perpetrators of terrorist attacks as "black sheep," and focus on the responsibility of the non-Islamic world for creating tension between the groups.

* This research by Bertjan Doosje, Sven Zebel, Marieke Scheermeijer and Pauline Mathyi at the Department of Social Psychology, University of Amsterdam, was funded by a grant from NWO (the Dutch Science Foundation). We would like to thank the two reviewers for their useful comments on an earlier version of this article.

1. Social Identity Theory and Beyond

People have a general motivation to display a favorable attitude towards the ingroup in comparison to relevant outgroups. Throughout the history of humankind, people have been favorably predisposed towards their own group (McNeill and McNeill 2003). Some people explain this general ingroup-bias in terms of evolutionary origins, while others stress the importance of a positive social self-image – e.g., Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory (1986) or a need to reduce uncertainty about one's position in the world.

We argue that other motivations may have arisen from this general tendency. One such motivation is coined the "intergroup attribution bias" (Hewstone 1990; Maass 1999; Maass, Ceccarelli, and Rudin 1996; Pettigrew 1979). According to this theory, people are likely to explain positive ingroup behavior in terms of own qualities (rather than pure luck or other external factors), while the same positive behavior by an outgroup is perceived as less internally controlled. With respect to negative group behavior, the reverse pattern has been observed (Hewstone 1990; also Maass 1999). In other words, people tend to perceive their own group as better than outgroups, and to make internal attributions for positive ingroup behavior and negative outgroup behavior, while making external attributions for unfavorable ingroup behavior and favorable outgroup behavior. Furthermore, Doosje and Branscombe (2003) have shown than this typical intergroup attribution effect becomes stronger when identification with one's own group increases. Ingroup identification or attachment can be defined as the cognitive, affective, and emotional ties between an individual and the ingroup. Doosje and Branscombe showed that people are more likely to attribute negative ingroup behavior externally and negative outgroup behavior internally when they identify strongly with their ingroup (see also Doosje et al. 1998). Similarly, Pennekamp et al. (2007) show how members of disadvantaged groups make stronger attributions of responsibility to the perpetrator outgroup for previous misdeeds as ingroup identification (and the associated relevance of the subject for people) increases.

When we apply these ideas to our context of terrorism and increased tension between the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds, this leads to a general prediction that non-Islamic respondents will attribute more responsibility for the terrorist attacks and increased intergroup tension to Islamic people as a whole than do Islamic participants. Islamic respondents are more likely than non-Islamic participants to perceive non-Islamic people as responsible for increased tension. In line with this hypothesis, we found the following comment by a non-Islamic person on the internet:

"Are the Muslims done yet? I'm so sick of turning on the news or hearing on the radio about them protesting this or rioting over that… . I mean come on … get a life! All these people do is fight and hate!" (posted on www.SFGate.com, accessed February 15, 2006).

In addition, we predict this intergroup attribution bias will be stronger for people who identify highly with their group. Specifically, when explaining negative behavior by an Islamic person, non-Islamic participants are more likely to attribute the behavior to the Islamic outgroup as a whole, the more strongly they themselves identify with their own group. Islamic respondents are more likely to attribute negative ingroup behavior externally the more strongly they themselves identify with their own group. Thus, we predict that when Islamic people feel a strong bond with their own group, they are more likely to point to the role of the non-Islamic outgroup in causing the harm done by Islamic people.

2. The Black Sheep Effect

The second motivation in intergroup contexts that is highly relevant in our research is the "black sheep effect" (Abrams et al. 2002; Marques, Yzerbyt, and Leyens 1998). According to this idea, negative ingroup members are perceived as atypical or, in other words, as black sheep by other ingroup members. Research has shown that people judge ingroup deviants more harshly than outgroup deviants. One way to explain these tendencies is that people want to maintain a positive image of their ingroup. By excluding antinormative deviants from their group, the image of the group as a whole stays intact. This black sheep effect has been demonstrated in a wide range of studies, in different contexts, using different sorts of samples (Abrams et al. 2000; Abrams, Rutland, and Cameron 2003; Marques and Yzerbyt 1988; Marques et al. 1998). In addition, it has been shown that the black sheep effect is stronger when identification is relatively high (Abrams et al. 2003; Branscombe et al. 1993).

In our context, we expect Islamic participants to perceive Islamic perpetrators as less typical of the Islamic group than non-Islamic people do. We found the following quote by an Islamic person posted on www.mkuk.wordpress.com (accessed February 15, 2006), nicely illustrating our basic hypothesis:

"I felt that I had to explain that the embassy burning and flag burning were in no way representative of Muslims as a whole or Islam. Islam forbids these kinds of acts… . As Muslims we now have a huge responsibility to portray Islam in its true form, by this I mean we need to show that the Islam as portrayed by the extremist fringe and certain media outlets is an abnormality, not the norm."

Thus, this Islamic person aims to portray the perpetrators as black sheep and atypical of their group.

In addition, we predict that high identification results in more extreme judgments, leading to higher black sheep scores for Islamic respondents (i.e., perceiving Islamic perpetrators as atypical ingroup members), and higher "white sheep" scores for non-Islamic participants (i.e., perceiving Islamic perpetrators as typical outgroup members). This latter prediction can also be derived from work on outgroup variability perceptions as a function of level of ingroup identification (Doosje and Branscombe 2003; Doosje, Ellemers, and Spears 1995; Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 1997). Here we show that people with strong ingroup identification have a homogeneous perception of the outgroup. Thus, non-Islamic people are likely to perceive Islamic terrorists as typical, in order to maintain a homogeneous and coherent perception of the outgroup, and they are expected to do this more strongly when they identify strongly with their group.

3. Study 1

In this study, we investigated the immediate reactions to a terrorist attack in the Netherlands, in which the nationally famous Dutch film maker and Islam critic Theo van Gogh was murdered by an Islamic terrorist (Mohammed B.). We expected a stronger tendency for Islamic people than for non-Islamic people to create an image of this perpetrator as a black sheep. In addition, we expected Islamic people to attribute *less* responsibility to the *Islamic group as a whole* than non-Islamic people do (i.e., the general attribution bias). Moreover, we expected these patterns to emerge more strongly, the more strongly non-Islamic people identified with the victim. Although identification with the victim is not the same as identification with a group, it is possible to predict that high identification with a victim may lead people to be better able to take the victim's perspective, and as such make stronger internal attributions to the perpetrator and his Islamic ingroup, while attributing less responsibility to the victim. Finally, we expect that the perceived typicality of the perpetrator for his ingroup will mediate the path from victim identification to attributions of responsibility to the Islamic world among non-Islamicrespondents.

3.1. Method

Participants

Our participants were forty-nine males and thirty-one females recruited in Amsterdam. Three to six days after the nationally famous Dutch filmmaker and critic Theo van Gogh was shot and murdered on November 2, 2004, we recruited seventy-one participants at the university and nine at the crime scene. The mean age of participants was twenty-seven. On the basis of religion, participants could be divided into four groups: thirteen were Muslim, sixteen were Christian, ten stated another (unspecified) religion, and forty-one participants were not religious.

Design

We created one between-participants variable: group membership. The thirteen Islamic respondents formed one group and all the other people were included in a second, non-Islamic group (n=67). We treated identification with the victim as a continuous independent variable. As dependent variables we assessed attributions of responsibility for the terrorist attack on Theo van Gogh (five items: perpetrator, surrounding group of perpetrator, Islamic world, victim, Western world) as well as judgments of the typicality of the perpetrator for his group.

Procedure and Dependent Variables

Potential participants were requested to take part in a study about the "recent shooting of Theo van Gogh." Those who agreed to participate were given a questionnaire that started off with a set of questions about participants' attributions of responsibility for the deadly attack on Theo van

Gogh. People were asked to indicate to what extent they considered (a) the perpetrators, (b) the surrounding group (e.g., friends and family) of the perpetrator, (c) the Islamic world as a whole, (d) the victim himself, and (e) the Western world as a whole responsible. Perceived typicality of perpetrator was assessed by a question about the extent to which they perceived the perpetrator as a typical Muslim. One question measured the extent of identification with the victim: "How much did you feel connected with Theo van Gogh *before his death?*" Participants rated all questions on four-point scales ("not at all," "a little," "much," and "very much." The questionnaire ended with questions about age, gender, and nationality.

3.2. Results and Discussion

First, we performed a general linear model (GLM) mixed design analysis of variance with five levels (perpetrator, surrounding group of perpetrator, Islamic world, victim, and Western world), with group membership (Islamic and non-Islamic) and identification with the victim (continuous) as independent variables and attribution of responsibility as a within-subject variable. Due to large cell differences in sample size, we used the type I sum of squares, which takes into account differences in cell sizes, and thus is advised by Tabachnik and Fidell (2001, 296–97; see also Zebel et al. 2007; it is important to note that the results presented below do *not* differ substantially if we use the standard type III sum of squares). We observed a significant main effect of target of responsibility, $F(4, 73) = 108.88$, p ' .0005, eta squared = $\eta^2 = .86$. In line with the predictions, there was a significant interaction between target and group membership, $F(4, 73) = 9.66$, p' .0005, $\eta^2 = .35$. In addition, there was a significant interaction between target and identification with the victim, $F(4, 73) = 3.34$, p ' .014, $\eta^2 = .16$, as well as the hypothesized significant three-way interaction between target, group membership, and identification with the victim, $F(4, 73) = 3.46$, p ' .012, $\eta^2 = .16$.

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, sample sizes (n), and beta values between variable and victim identification for study 1, and ingroup identification for studies 2 and 3, for Islamic and non-Islamic people.

	Islamic People				Non-Islamic People			
	M	SD	n	B	M	SD	n	B
Study 1								
Attribution perpetrator #	3.51 a	0.65	13	-.38	3.75 a	0.42	67	-.03
Attribution friends/family	2.36 b	0.94	13	.48	2.22 b	1.05	67	.18
Attribution victim #	2.82 b	0.55	13	-.41	1.80 c	0.73	67	-.01
Attribution Islamic world #	1.55 c	0.75	13	.03	2.30 b	0.92	67	.52 *
Attribution non-Islamic world	1.73 c	0.43	13	-.10	1.55 d	0.79	67	.07
Typicality perpetrator #	1.15	0.55	13	-.12	1.91	1.10	67	.50 *
Study 2								
Attribution perpetrator	4.18 a	1.03	62	.20	3.84 b	1.11	74	.24
Attribution al Qaeda #	2.66 c	0.94	62	-.12	4.36 a	0.63	74	.48 *
Attribution Islamic world #	1.77 d	0.84	62	-.50 *	3.07 c	0.84	74	.79 *
Attribution non-Islamic world #	3.45 b	0.79	62	-.01	2.64 d	0.81	74	-.21
Study 3: Islamic perpetrator condition								
Attribution Islamic world	1.90 a	2.00	20	-1.05 *	2.94 a	1.83	34	.77 *
Attribution non-Islamic world #	3.75 b	2.31	20	-.68	3.26 a	1.46	34	-.27
Typicality perpetrator #	2.17	1.18	20	-.42	3.04	1.61	34	.43 *
Study 3: Non-Islamic perpetrator condition								
Attribution Islamic world	3.13 b	2.01	24	.24	3.93 a	1.85	29	-.07
Attribution non-Islamic world #	3.96 a	2.03	24	.19	3.17 b	1.80	29	.33
Typicality perpetrator #	3.10	1.79	24	-.02	2.26	1.20	29	.03

Islamic and non-Islamic people differ on this variable (p' .05).
* B-values p' .05; within columns, attributions of responsibility with different subscripts within each study differ from each other (p' .05).

The means corresponding to the two-way interaction between target and group membership are summarized in table 1. In addition, in this table, we present all the relationships (i.e., betas) between level of identification with the victim and the five types of attributions of responsibility, for the Islamic and non-Islamic respondent group separately, corresponding to the significant three-way interaction. We performed specific contrast analyses (within the full design) to test for differences between Islamic and non-Islamic people and for differences between the different types of attributions within each respondent group.[1]

Inspecting the means first, it can be seen that non-Islamic participants attributed more responsibility to the perpetrators than did Islamic respondents. Unexpectedly, we did not find an effect of group membership on attributions of responsibility to the direct surrounding group of the perpetrator (family/friends). In line with the expected general intergroup attribution bias, Islamic participants attributed less responsibility to the Islamic world as a whole than did non-Islamic respondents. In line with the prediction, Islamic participants attributed more responsibility to the victim himself than did non-Islamic respondents. However, unexpectedly, there was no significant effect of group membership on the attribution of responsibility to the Western world, even though the means were in the predicted direction.

When we consider the relationships (beta values) between identification with the victim and attribution of responsibility separately for Islamic and non-Islamic respondents (see table 1), it should be noted first that the number of Islamic participants (thirteen) was too small for a reliable estimate of the relationships. However, the relationships for non-Islamic respondents were based on a sample size of sixty-seven, and were thus reliable. In this group, identification with the victim was positively related to attributions of responsibility to the Islamic world as a whole. This indicates that when people felt a bond with the victim, they placed more blame on the group to which the perpetrator belongs.

A GLM analysis on the *perceived typicality* of the perpetrator showed the predicted main effect of group membership, F (1, 76) = 6.38, p = .014, η^2 = .08. Non-Islamic respondents (M =1.91: SD =1.10) perceived the perpetrator as more typical of the Islamic group than did Islamic participants (M = 1.15; SD = 0.55). In addition, the interaction between group membership and identification with the victim showed a trend, F (1, 76) = 3.08, p = .083, η^2 = .04. In line with the predictions, there was a positive and significant relationship between victim identification and perceived typicality in the non-Islamic sample, while this relationship was slightly negative (albeit non-significant) for Islamic participants.

To test the prediction that typicality of perpetrator would mediate the effect of victim identification on attributions of responsibility, we conducted regression analyses in the non-Islamic sample: identification predicted attributions of responsibility to the Islamic world (b=.52, p'.0005) and identification predicted perceived typicality (b=.50, p=.002). In the final analysis, we included both identification and perceived typicality as predictors of attributions (R^2=.37, F (2, 64) = 18.93, p'.0005). Perceived typicality predicted attributions (b=.36, p'.0005), and the path from identification attributions remained significant (b=.35, p=.006). However, this latter path dropped in strength, resulting in a significant Sobel test for mediation, (z=2.90, p=.004). Thus, attributions of responsibility to the Islamic world were predicted by typicality, but the direct path from identification with the victim remained significant as well, indicating not a full, but partial mediation of perceived typicality.

Finally, in order to provide a further test of the notion that perceived typicality is related to a homogeneous perception of the outgroup, we created a difference score between attributions to the perpetrator and the Islamic world (a high score denotes a bigger difference, thus a stronger attribution to the perpetrator than to the Islamic world). In the non-Islamic sample, we observed a substantial negative correlation between this variable and perceived typicality (r=-.50, p'.0005).

1 Considerations of space led us to restrict the methodical information provided. The authors would be pleased to provide further information on statistical details.

4. Study 2

In study 1, we observed that people are more likely to generalize the negative behavior of one outgroup member to the outgroup as a whole (and as such implicitly explain the behavior as typical of that group) than to generalize the negative behavior of one ingroup member to the ingroup as a whole. In addition, results showed that members of a victim group perceived the perpetrator as more typical of his group than did the perpetrator group. Finally, the level of identification with the victim intensified the observed patterns: non-Islamic people perceived the perpetrator as more typical of Islamic people, and attributed more responsibility to the Islamic group as a whole when level of their identification with the victim was greater. Regression analyses and a significant Sobel test revealed partial mediation: the link between identification and attributions to the outgroup as a whole can be partly explained by the perceived typicality of the perpetrator.

It is important to note that in this study we focused on identification with the victim. The limitation of this measure is that it was a single item, and it was a retrospective item. In the second and the third study, however, we administered a multi-item measure of level of *identification with the respondent's own group.* For reasons both theoretical (Smith 1993; Tajfel and Turner 1986) and empirical (Doosje et al. 1998, 2006; Gordijn et al. 2006; Johns, Schmader, and Lickel 2005; Mackie, Devos, and Smith 2000; Pennekamp et al. 2007) we hypothesize that identification with one's own group is likely to codetermine reactions to (harmful) behavior by members of one's group.

As in study 1, we proposed that non-Islamic people were more likely than Islamic people to attribute responsibility for the occurrence of Islamic terrorist attacks and increased intergroup tension to the Islamic group. In addition, we expect these different judgments to be related to level of ingroup identification, such that the more people identify with their group, the more likely it is that they display this intergroup attribution effect.

In addition, as in study 1, we expected that the groups might differ in the extent to which they perceive the perpetrators of attacks performed by Islamic people to be typical group members. Unfortunately, because we did not measure typicality directly, we have to rely on inferences here: when attributions of responsibility for the attacks to the perpetrators and to the whole Islamic group are positively related, we can infer a perceived typicality of the perpetrator. This idea is in line with the final findings in study 1, where we observed a negative correlation between perceived typicality and the difference between attributions to the perpetrator and the group as whole. Thus, we expected stronger relationships between attributions of responsibility for the attacks to the perpetrators and the whole Islamic group for non-Islamic than for Islamic participants.

4.1. Method

Participants

We included seventy-four non-Islamic participants and sixty-three Islamic respondents in this study, of which about two-thirds were female. They all lived in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and were approached in mosques and in their homes. Most Islamic people were of Turkish or Moroccan origin. The mean age of the non-Islamic sample was thirty-four, and of the Muslim sample twenty-five years.

Design and Procedure

The design consisted of one between-participants variable, group membership (Islamic versus non-Islamic), and one continuous variable, identification with the ingroup (either the Islamic group, or the native Dutch group). The most important dependent variables included attributions of responsibility for terrorists attacks and for increased tension between Islamic and Western world. This was done in December 2002, after the United States and Britain took control of Afghanistan but before they invaded Iraq.

Dependent Variables

All items were answered on five-point scales ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." We first measured identification with the ingroup using seven items derived from various sources (including Doosje et al. 1995; Leach et al. in press; alpha for the sample was .86). For example, one item was: "I feel a bond with Islamic people" or "I feel a bond with native Dutch." Another was "I see myself as a member of the Islamic people" or "I see myself as a member of the native Dutch." We measured attributions of responsibility of the terrorists attacks "such as in the US

and in Madrid" using two items that are similar to study 1: one is about attribution of responsibility of the perpetrators and one about "al Qaeda" (similar to "surrounding group of perpetrator" in study 1). For attributions to the "Islamic world," we used two questions: "To what extent do you perceive the *Islamic world* as responsible for the terrorist attacks" and the same question about responsibility for the increased tension between the Islamic world and the Western world (correlation r=.53, p'.001). The same two items were administered for attributions to the "Western world," replacing the italized words in the above questions with "Western world" (correlation r=.33, p'.001). Finally, we recorded participants' religion (if any), their nationality, and their parents' nationality.[2]

4.2. Results and Discussion

We performed a general linear model analysis on the attribution of responsibility items for the attacks (four, treated as a repeated measure) with group membership of participant (Islamic versus non-Islamic) and level of ingroup identification as independent variables. In terms of hypotheses, there was a strong main effect of target of attribution of responsibility, F (3, 130) = 50.41, p ' .0005, η^2 = .54, that was qualified by the expected interaction between group membership and target of attribution of responsibility, F (3, 130) = 55.37, p ' .0005, η^2 = .56. The means are depicted in table 1. Islamic and non-Islamic participants did not differently attribute responsibility to the perpetrators of the attacks. However, as expected, non-Islamic respondents attributed more responsibility to both al Qaeda and the Islamic world than did Islamic participants, whereas the opposite pattern occurred with attributions of responsibility to the Western world. Finally, the three-way interaction between group membership, attribution of responsibility, and level of ingroup identification was significant as well, F (3, 130) = 4.80, p = .003, η^2 = .10. In order to disentangle this three-way interaction, we examined the relationship (in terms of b-values) between level of ingroup identification and each attribution of responsibility, separately for Islamic and non-Islamic people (see table 1). For non-Islamic respondents, as expected, we observed positive relationships between level of ingroup identification and attributions of responsibility to al Qaeda and the Islamic world. For Islamic participants, there was the expected significant negative relation between level of ingroup identification and attributions of responsibility to the Islamic world.

In terms of correlations *between* attributions of responsibility, we observed that for non-Islamic people there was a correlation between judgments about the perpetrator and about al Qaeda (r=.36, p =.002), whereas this link was not significant for Islamic people (r=.06, p=.63). In addition, for Islamic people, there was a *negative* association between judgments about the perpetrator and about the Islamic world (r=-.33, p =.008), whereas this link was not observed for non-Islamic people (r=.06, p=.63). In both groups we observed a correlation between judgments about al Qaeda and about the Islamic world (for Islamic people r=.34, p =.008; for non-Islamic people r=.42, p = .001). Thus, for non-Islamic people, there was a link between the perpetrator and al Qaeda, and an association between al Qaeda and the Islamic world, supporting the notion that non-Islamic participants treated the outgroup targets as a homogeneous entity. In contrast, for Islamic participants, there was no link between the perpetrator and al Qaeda, even though they perceived a relation between al Qaeda and the Islamic world.

In study 2 we replicated and extended the findings of study 1. We observed a general intergroup attribution bias, according to which both Islamic and non-Islamic people attributed less responsibility for terrorist attacks and increased tension to their own group than to the outgroup. This tendency was, to some extent, strengthened through a high identification with the ingroup. In addition, for non-Islamic people, there were significant correlations between attributions of responsibility to the perpetrator and to al Qaeda, and between al Qaeda and the Islamic world. These correlations suggest that non-Islamic people

2 The nationality of the parents was not part of the statistical analysis; this question was merely asked to make sure we recruited Dutch people with Dutch parents.

have a coherent perception of the Islamic perpetrators and their group. For Islamic people, even though the attributions to al Qaeda and to the Islamic world were correlated, there was no link between attributions to the perpetrator and to al Qaeda. Moreover, there was a negative association between attributions to the perpetrator and to the Islamic world. These patterns are at least suggestive of a "black sheep effect": Islamic people do not want to consider perpetrators as real ingroup members. They do not want these members to stain the image of their group.

5. Study 3

In the third study, we set out to improve on study 2 in two respects: one was to measure perceived typicality of the perpetrators again (as we did in study 1). Secondly, so far, group membership (Islamic/non-Islamic) has been correlated with the perpetrator/victim dimension. In order to rule out possible confounding effects, we *manipulated* the perpetrator/victim group role in the third study, while still including both Islamic and non-Islamic respondents, by focusing on different real-life episodes of intergroup behavior. The specific Dutch context after the assassination of Theo van Gogh (see study 1) provided a situation in which both groups attacked each other. During the first two weeks after van Gogh's murder both churches and mosques were set on fire. Fortunately, there were no lives lost in these attacks, but the climate became very heated and confused. In that period of uncertainty, it was possible to create different images of the two groups, either as victim or as perpetrator of intergroup violence (although one could argue that an Islamic person instigated all this, and that globally speaking, Islamic terrorists receive quite a lot of attention, and thus, that our manipulation would have had to be stronger than this. We will return to this issue in the general discussion).

We aimed to replicate the intergroup attribution bias, and predicted again that this bias was stronger for people high in ingroup identification. In addition, we expected perceptions of typicality of the perpetrators to mediate this effect of identification on intergroup attribution bias. Specifically, we expected members of perpetrator groups to make black sheep of their negative group members, and do so more strongly, the more strongly they identify with their group. We predicted that members of victimized groups, however, would hold a coherent and homogeneous picture of the perpetrator group in their head, and thus perceive the perpetrators as typical members of the outgroup, and do so more strongly the more strongly they identify with their ingroup.

5.1. Method

Participants

Twenty-three male and twenty-two female Islamic respondents and thirty-one male and thirty female non-Islamic persons (plus five people who did not indicate their gender) participated in this study in November 2004. Their mean age was twenty-three years for the Islamic sample, and twenty-seven for the non-Islamic sample. Their participation was voluntary and they were informed about the purpose of the study afterwards.

Design and Procedure

The design thus consisted of two between-participants variables: perpetrator group membership (non-Islamic versus Islamic) and respondent group membership (non-Islamic versus Islamic), with ingroup identification as a continuous independent variable.

Participants were approached in public areas (e.g., trains, markets, etc.) and were asked to fill out a short questionnaire concerning the recent tension between Islamic and non-Islamic, autochthonous Dutch people. They were first asked to indicate their religion: Islamic, Christian, other, or no religion. Subsequently, we measured level of ingroup identification, using the same nine items as in study 2. (reliability coefficient .95).

Manipulation of Perpetrator or Victim Role of Group

Subsequently, participants were presented with a text describing a terrorist incident. In the Islamic [non-Islamic] perpetrator condition, we gave an account of a terrorist attack on a Protestant church [mosque] in the Netherlands, explaining that the terrorists had set the church [mosque] on fire and written anti-Christian [anti-Islamic] slogans on the building. According to the text, the attack had *not* resulted in fatalities.

Dependent Variables

Attributions of responsibility for the recent tension were

measured by two items that we used in study 2 as well: "To what extent is Islamic world [Western world] responsible for recent tension between Islamic and non-Islamic people?" answered on a seven-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much". *Perceived typicality of the perpetrators* was recorded by two items: "I perceive the perpetrators as prototypical Muslims [autochthonous Dutch]" and the measure of inclusion of the perpetrators in the perpetrator group (i.e., either Muslim or autochthonous Dutch). The latter was measured with seven increasingly overlapping circles representing the perpetrators and their group, adapted from Tropp and Wright (2001). The correlation between these two items was .36 (p'.0005).

5.2. Results and Discussion

We used a general linear model (GLM) procedure in which we treated attributions of responsibility for the attacks to the Islamic world and to the Western world as a within-participants variable (labelled "target"), and included perpetrator group membership (Islamic versus non-Islamic) and respondent group membership (Islamic versus non-Islamic) as between-participants variables, and ingroup identification as a continuous independent variable. We found significant interaction between target, perpetrator group membership, and respondent group membership, F (1, 99) = 15.82, p '.0005, η^2 = .14, as well as a four-way interaction with these variables and ingroup identification, F (1, 99) = 8.58, p =.004, η^2 = .08. In order to disentangle this four-way interaction, we decided to break it down by perpetrator group membership, enabling us to examine the relationships as a function of making salient an Islamic perpetrator group (thereby replicating studies 1 and 2) versus making salient a non-Islamic perpetrator group. All the relevant means and relationships with ingroup identification (b-values) can be found in table 1.

Examining the *Islamic perpetrator* group condition first, a GLM of the attributions of responsibility for the attacks (Islamic world and non-Islamic world) showed the expected target by respondent group membership interaction, F (1, 50) = 5.73, p '.021, η^2 = .10, illustrating the classic intergroup attribution bias. Similar to Study 1 and 2, this interaction was again qualified by a significant three-way interaction involving ingroup identification, F (1, 50) = 5.77, p '.020, η^2 = .10. There were no other significant effects. When we broke down the significant three-way interaction, we found strong support for the predicted pattern in that attributing responsibility to the perpetrator group (Islamic people) was related *negatively* with ingroup identification for Islamic participants, while this relation was *positive* for non-Islamic respondents (all relationships are given in table 1). With respect to attribution to the victimized group, there were no significant relations between ingroup identification and the attributions.

Examining the *non-Islamic perpetrator* group condition, a GLM of the attributions of responsibility for the attacks (Islamic world and Western world) showed the expected target by respondent group membership two-way interaction effect, F (1, 49) = 12.49, p '.001, η^2 = .20. Means are given in table 1. In line with the general intergroup attribution pattern, non-Islamic respondents ascribed somewhat more responsibility to the Islamic world than did Islamic respondents, whereas Islamic respondents ascribed significantly more responsibility to the Western world than did non-Islamic people. There were no other significant effects.

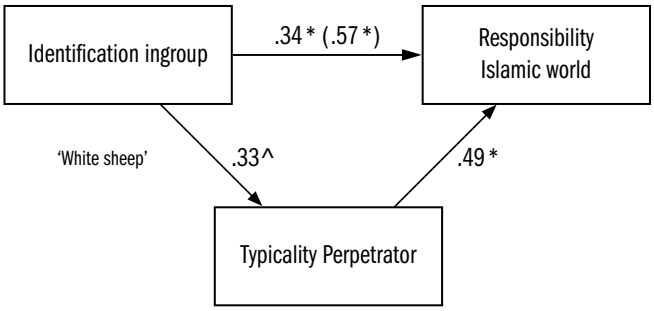
We did the same GLM analyses with respect to perceived *typicality of perpetrators* for their ingroup, and found a significant two-way interaction between perpetrator group membership and respondent group membership, F (1, 101) = 4.35, p '.040, η^2 = .04, as well as a trend for the three-way interaction with these variables and ingroup identification, F (1, 101) = 2.98, p '.087, η^2 = .03. In order to disentangle this three-way interaction, we decided to break it down again by perpetrator group membership.

Examining the *Islamic perpetrator* group condition first, a GLM of the perceived typicality of the perpetrator for the group as a whole showed the expected two-way respondent group membership by ingroup identification interaction effect, F (1, 52) = 5.30, p '.025, η^2 = .09. No other significant effects emerged. Perceived typicality of the Islamic perpetrator was related slightly negatively with ingroup identification for Islamic people, although not significantly, possibly due to the small sample, while this relationship was positive for non-Islamic people (see table 1).

Examining the *non-Islamic* perpetrator group condition, a GLM of the perceived typicality of the perpetrators showed no significant effects.

We hypothesized that when people identify with their group, they are more likely to perceive outgroup perpetrators as typical for their group, and consequently attribute more responsibility to the outgroup as a whole. We used the program EQS to assess this model, separately for the Islamic perpetrator group condition and the non-Islamic group condition, and, in both cases, separately for Islamic and non-Islamic people. Because we specified a full model, it was not possible to estimate fit indices. The structural equation models for the Islamic perpetrator conditions are presented in figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1: Study 3 Islamic perpetrators: for non-Islamic people

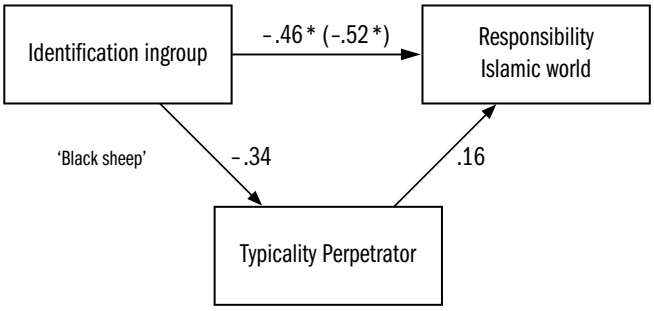


*p < .05 ^p = .08

As can be seen in figure 1, non-Islamic people perceived Islamic perpetrators as relatively typical to the extent that they identified more strongly with their group ("white sheep"). These perceptions of typicality in turn led to higher attributions of responsibility to Islamic people as a whole. In addition, there was a direct and positive path from ingroup identification to attributions of responsibility. The Sobel test did not meet conventional level of significance and showed a trend (p=.10), but this may have been caused by small size of the sample and thus larger error.

Importantly, quite a different picture emerged for Islamic people (fig. 2), where there was a direct but *negative* path from ingroup identification to attributions of responsibility. At the same time, there was a negative relation between ingroup identification and perceived typicality of the perpetrator for the ingroup. As such, they perceived the perpetrators as "Black Sheep."

Figure 2: Study 3 Islamic perpetrators: for Islamic people



*p < .05

In the non-Islamic perpetrator group condition, we observed a similar ingroup-outgroup pattern, but with notable differences. Although the relationship between ingroup identification and attributions of responsibility to the perpetrator group was, as expected, positive (.23) for Islamic participants, but it was not significant, possibly due to low cell numbers. Similarly, there was a positive and significant path from perceived typicality and attributions of responsibility to the perpetrator group (.40). These two paths were identical to the corresponding paths in the Islamic perpetrator group condition. However, in contrast to previous findings, in this case, there was no path from ingroup identification to perceived typicality (-.02).

Finally, all paths for the non-Islamic participants in the non-Islamic perpetrator group condition were all below .10, and thus not significant.

In general, the third study replicated and extended findings from studies 1 and 2, by showing the role of and links between group membership (Islamic versus non-Islamic), ingroup identification, perceived typicality of the perpetrator in explaining attributions of responsibility to the perpetrator group as a whole, when a terrorist attack points to the Islamic background of the perpetrators, as was the case in the previous two studies. We were also able to show that the traditional intergroup attribution bias is strengthened when the perpetrators are from one's own ingroup and thus the image of one's own group is threatened. However, when we make the *non*-Islamic group the salient perpetrator group, we do find the traditional intergroup

attribution bias, but find no support for the effects of perceived typicality and ingroup identification in this context.

We can think of a couple of reasons as to why this might be the case. First, we do have to acknowledge the fact that in the Netherlands, in the media and daily conversation, the role of Islamic perpetrators is much more salient than the role of non-Islamic perpetrators. As such, making salient the Islamic background of the perpetrators may have fitted in with pre-existing ideas about who is the perpetrator and who is the victim in this context, whereas the opposite manipulation may have been more difficult to integrate with pre-existing notions about victim-perpetrator group membership.

In addition, it may be possible that we observe weaker effects among Islamic people because they may feel attached to the country (the Netherlands), whereas Dutch people are less likely to identify with Islamic people. Alternatively, it might be possible to explain the differences between making salient either the Islamic or non-Islamic perpetrator in terms of the differences between the respondent groups: Islamic versus non-Islamic people, all living in the Netherlands. These groups differ in terms of a number of factors, such as group size, economic status, and political power. These factors may contribute to caution among Islamic people about attributing responsibility to the non-Islamic perpetrator. They may want to avoid possible negative sanctions for placing too much of the blame on the dominant non-Islamic group. From the present set of data, we can conclude that we do find similar patterns in terms of differences between the groups. However, we do not find strong support for the processes underlying the attributions of responsibilities in the first two studies (in terms of victim or ingroup identification, and perceived typicality), when the perpetrators of a terrorist attack are implied to be non-Islamic.

6. General Discussion

In the three studies we focused on attributions of responsibility to the perpetrator group as a whole for terrorist attacks as a function of group membership (Islamic and non-Islamic people), level of identification with the victim (study 1), or victim/perpetrator group (studies 2 and 3), and perceived typicality of the perpetrators for the group. Across the three studies, we observe the classic intergroup attribution bias when people are requested to indicate the responsibility for the terrorist attacks and the resulting tension between the Islamic and non-Islamic people. More specifically, on average, non-Islamic people perceive the Islamic group as a whole as more responsible than do Islamic people. Islamic people, on average, attribute more responsibility to the Western world than do non-Islamic people. This typical pattern of "blaming the other party" has been well-documented in other contexts (for reviews see Pettigrew 1979; Hewstone 1990), but not in the context of international terrorism.

In this article we have focused on underlying mechanisms of this phenomenon. We argue that ingroup identification intensifies the classic attribution bias. In line with Doosje and Branscombe (2003), we have observed that people display a stronger intergroup attribution bias when they identify more strongly with their own group. More importantly, in our view, we have shown that perceived typicality of the perpetrator for the group as a whole plays a partial role in this context. More specifically, we have shown that when people identify relatively strongly with the victim (study 1) or their ingroup (study 2 and 3), they are more likely (study 1) or they tend (study 3) to perceive the perpetrator as a typical outgroup member, and thus perceive a link between the perpetrator and the group, and consequently attribute responsibility to the group as a whole for the actions of its member(s). Even though the direct path from identification to attribution remained significant, perceived typicality of the perpetrator partly mediates the relationship between identification and attributions of responsibility to the perpetrator group as a whole. This is the most important lesson from our three studies combined.

What can we say about the different opinions that were expressed by non-Islamic and Islamic people in the introduction? When a non-Islamic person argues that " all they do is hate and fight," this is in line with our finding among highly identified members of the non-Islamic group: even though we have not included direct measures of perceived homogeneity, non-Islamic people tend to perceive the Islamic group as a relatively homogeneous group to which it is possible to attribute responsibility for

the actions of its members. In a similar vein, the person who said "I felt that I had to explain that the embassy burning and flag burning were in no way representative of Muslims as a whole or Islam" is most likely a person who identifies quite strongly with the Islamic ingroup, as this person tries to portray the perpetrators as "black sheep."

When taken together, these studies provide a consistent picture of how people form attributions of responsibility for harmful behavior. Members of victimized groups are more likely to perceive the perpetrator(s) as typical of the group, and attribute more responsibility to the group. This pattern becomes more pronounced as identification with the victim or victimized group increases. The psychological consequences of these tendencies point to possible stronger tensions between the Islamic and the non-Islamic world. This may feed back into more negative attitudes towards the outgroup (Doosje, Kateman, and Mathyi forthcoming), and intergroup relations may further deteriorate.

In terms of limitations, we need to acknowledge that the two groups that we compare in our research are in fact difficult to compare. For example, it might be argued that the non-Islamic category is a broad and ill-defined category, while the Islamic category is clearly defined by self-categorization as a Muslim. Similarly, the two groups are likely to differ in demographic background, for example level of education and socio-economic status. At the same time, these possible differences represent real-life differences, increasing the external validity of results. In addition, we were able to replicate most of the basic effects when we manipulated the victim-perpetrator role in study 3, lending support to the notion that this distinction is important in this context of explaining perceptions of intergroup aggression.

Why do people from victim groups make stronger attributions of responsibility to the perpetrator group as a whole? Although again we did not include such measures, one reason may lie in people's need for certainty and predictability. For example, research has shown that reminding people of terrorist attacks increases their "need for closure" (Kruglanski et al. 2006), and that "individuals would like to believe in ideas, form impressions and create categories in order to feel certain and avoid ambiguity" (Orehek et al., forthcoming). More specifically, when American citizens watch images of 9/11, they report a higher need for closure than do control participants (Orehek et al., forthcoming). This shows that people experience uncertainty due to the attacks and that they may respond by being motivated to draw clear distinctions between good and bad, between victim and perpetrator. Creating a homogeneous perception of the perpetrator group, creates certainty: "They are all responsible."

Conversely, ingroup identification is likely to lead people to view the world from their ingroup's perspective: for a real feminist, *all* men are bad. In this sense, ingroup identification may motivate people to perceive the world through a strong ingroup-outgroup categorization (Doosje et al. 1995; Turner et al. 1987). Perceiving the ingroup and the outgroup as homogeneous entities creates these strong intergroup boundaries, that make it easy to place any new social stimulus in clear categories.

These studies also provide insights into how to deal with this issue of generalization of behavior of some members to the group as whole. At the most fundamental level, ingroup identification plays a crucial role. People's identification with their group may fluctuate depending on contexts (Ellemers 1993), but it nevertheless constitutes a relatively fixed and pervasive entity (Billig, 1995). It may be more useful to think about ways to change people's perceptions of typicality of perpetrators.

One way might be to manipulate the variable of reported support for terrorist attacks among the Islamic group, in order to test the hypothesis that when (non-Islamic) people hear that the Islamic group does not support terrorists attacks, this may lead to lower estimates of typicality of the perpetrator. Another strategy that does not directly follow from these studies, but can be derived from other work (Doosje et al., forthcoming; Pysczcynski et al. 2002) might be to examine the emotional reactions to terrorism in terms of fear and anger, and to try to address these emotions in order to reduce the negative effects of the intergroup violence. A final strategy to reduce the perceived typicality of outgroup perpetrators might be through taking the perspective of the surrounding outgroup on this issue. That is, if non-Islamic people could learn how Islamic people strongly wish to disassociate

themselves from terrorists and how they perceive them as deviants (e.g., through reading the quote of the Islamic person in the introduction for example), this may reduce the perceived typicality of the Islamic perpetrators also among the perspective takers. However, previous research shows that the positive social consequences of perspective-taking for the outgroup work especially well for people who are weakly invested in their group (who are relatively flexible in their intergroup perceptions), but not among highly identified group members (Zebel, Doosje, and Spears, forthcoming). The road to intergroup harmony is difficult and uncertain.

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