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### General Description of the Literature:

Distinctiveness threat is a type of threat related to social identity. According to Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory, people seek membership in positively distinct groups and threats to in group distinctiveness are therefore aversive. Intergroup comparisons with a very similar outgroup threaten group uniqueness and distinctiveness, therefore very similar groups may prompt more competitive intergroup comparisons leading to higher levels of intergroup bias. The literature comes from psychology and provides both theoretical and empirical support for the hypothesis. Overall, the literature supporting the hypothesis is of a high quality (and quantity); it includes a meta-analysis providing support for a small effect.

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### Detailed Analyses

**160:** *Groups and individuals prefer to have an optimal level of uniqueness and distinctiveness; a group that is similar will threaten the group's distinctiveness which may prompt intergroup issues.*

**Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence:** Roccas and Schwartz (1993) manipulated the degree of intergroup similarity and found that as similarity increased, high identifying group members showed an increase in intergroup bias along dimensions relevant to the ingroup. Additionally, on some resource allocation tasks there is more discrimination against members of similar relative to dissimilar outgroups (Diehl 1988). Distinctiveness threat seems to impact highly identified ingroup members more than low identifiers. Jetten, Spears, and Manstead (2001) found that under conditions of low intergroup distinctiveness, high identifying ingroup members displayed higher intergroup bias relative to low identifiers. It seems that identification acts as a moderator of the relationship between distinctiveness and intergroup bias, such that only highly identified ingroup members are sufficiently motivated to react to low distinctiveness because the ingroup is an important part of their identity. In a meta-analysis, Jetten, Spears, and Postmes (2004) found that although threats to distinctiveness did not necessarily impact intergroup judgments, these threats did influence behavioral reactions. When intergroup distinctiveness is low and thus distinctiveness threat is high, intergroup behavioral biases (e.g., in resource allocation tasks) tend to be stronger than when distinctiveness threat is low. However, the average effect size calculated for this relationship in the meta analysis of 60 studies (a clear signal of the strength of the empirical work) was relatively small ( $r = .046$ ).

**Empirical Support Score: 8 = Multiple quantitative analyses supporting the hypothesis**

**Applicability to Influencing VEOs:** Even though most (if not all) of the studies which found support for the hypothesis were conducted with students, there is no reason to believe that the same psychological processes do not also underlie VEOs' group interactions. The contexts in which the hypothesis is supported are relatively "mild" and somewhat superficial (in the lab studies) including general ingroup favoritism among different schools and amount of intergroup stereotyping as well as behavioral measures such as resource allocation. There is no reason to expect that geographical differences may function to vary how the hypothesis will be supported. Further, time may only affect intergroup relations insofar as group distinctiveness changes; when groups are less distinct, there

should be more issues and when groups are more distinct, intergroup relations should be fewer.

**Applicability Score:** High Confidence – Similar Context: Empirical results concern a sufficiently closely related context (e.g. transnational criminal organizations) that the researcher has *high* confidence that they will also hold in the context of influencing VEOs.

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