Leadership and identity disruption: The role of social identity discontinuity in producing self-uncertainty

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

A leader's rhetoric can have profound impacts on the groups that they lead. Leaders use their words to evoke uncertainty, define group boundaries, and articulate their vision to the group. Leaders' can use rhetoric that constructs the group as facing or undergoing a rupture (i.e., social identity discontinuity) in the progression of the group's culture, values, customs, and ideals over time. Doing so may heighten uncertainty about the group's future, and thus, the part of the self-concept that is derived from group membership (Ritchie et al., 2010; van Knippenberg, 2011; Venus et al., 2019). I proposed that leader social identity discontinuity rhetoric produces heightened self-conceptual uncertainty when the leader is a non-prototypical representation of the group identity, and when group members perceive that they do not have the ability to exit their group and join a new group. The findings of the three experiments did not support my hypotheses. Instead, the results indicate that leader prototypicality and group permeability may independently moderate the relationship between discontinuity rhetoric and self-conceptual uncertainty. Moreover, that future work may examine whether leader discontinuity rhetoric produces more self-uncertainty amongst members of low permeability groups than continuity rhetoric only when the group identity is clearly defined and differentiated from outgroups. I discuss the contribution of the findings to the social identity approach to leadership.

Preface

This dissertation is an original work by Lily Syfers. The research project, of which this dissertation is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project name “Prototypicality and Discontinuity Rhetoric”, No. Pro00117696, 03-02-2023, Project name “Provincial Election Study”, No. Pro00131306, 05-16-2023. No part of this thesis has been previously published.

This work was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada., Insight Development Grant. Rast, D. I. III (PI) & Gaffney, A. M. Instigating change while maintaining the group: Identity continuity and social change (# 430-2019-0717).

Acknowledgements

Words cannot express my gratitude to my mentor, research collaborator and role model, and friend, Dr. Amber Gaffney. Your influence extends far beyond my academic career and into the person I am today. You set me off on this road to completing my PhD 8 years ago when we had some of our first hours long discussions about self-categorization theory, and the passion and excitement for research that I first discovered during those meetings has guided me ever since. Thank you for all the doors that you have shown me that I could open, and for encouraging me every step of the way.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Dr. David Rast, for his insight and support for my research and career. I am thankful for his efforts to develop my independence as a researcher. Also, for his guidance in developing my ability to use r efficiently to analyze data, which is a skill that I will likely use for a long time.

I would like to thank Dr. Sara E. Burke for her weekly stats meetings and her thoughtful contributions to my research questions and capacity for statistical thinking. Not only were stats meetings often the highlight of my week during the 2020/2021 lockdown, but I learned to understand and feel excited about statistics with more depth than I had before.

I could not have made it this far without my dear friends, who have commiserated, laughed, danced, and made lovely memories with me for the last five years. Thank you all, dearly. Thank you to Lauren for supporting me, feeding me, laughing with and at me, and for the hours of insightful conversation that I will always cherish. Thank you to Paris for being my older sister and the person who I knew would always understand.

It is impossible to write in only a few words how grateful I am to Derek for giving me the support and freedom to pursue my PhD all the way in Canada, and for never doubting me once.

Finally, I could not have done this without my parents. Thank you so, so much for being the wonderful parents that you both are.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Guy Reffitt's family noticed an extreme right-wing shift in his political views after he lost his job in Malaysia and nearly declared bankruptcy. After his family moved back to the United States, he joined the Three-Percenters, a far-right-wing militia. On January 6th, 2021, Refitt was the first pro-Trump supporter to attempt to enter the U.S. Capitol Building and is currently serving seven years in federal prison. Similarly to Refitt, Rosanne Boyland's life was turned upside down during COVID-19 lockdown prior to a far right-wing shift in her political views. She was isolated and delved into right-wing conspiracy theories. Rosanne tragically died as a pro-Trump participant during the January 6th riot (Howley, 2021). These examples illustrate how large-scale change (e.g., job loss, COVID-19) can disrupt people's sense of self-continuity, which is the ability to perceive that one's sense of self stretches temporally backwards into the past and forwards in the future (Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2013; Sadeh & Karniol, 2012). A rupture in self-continuity (i.e., self-discontinuity) is often associated with intense psychological distress (Chandler et al., 2003; Iyer & Jetton, 2011; Sedikedes et al., 2023). At the social group level, social identity discontinuity is theorized to be associated with a sense of aversive self-conceptual uncertainty (van Knippenberg, 2011; Venus et al., 2019). The potential relationship between identity continuity and self-uncertainty is important to empirically examine because self-conceptual uncertainty can motivate people to identify with politically extreme groups that have serious implications worsening political divides (Hogg, 2021, 2023), like Trump's supporters who rioted the Capitol Building on January 6th, 2021.

People who belong to groups that are high in social identity continuity perceive a sense of interconnection between the cultural norms, values and practices throughout the groups' past, present, and projected future (Sani et al., 2007; Sani et al., 2008; Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2013).

This sense of interconnection between "who we were", "who we are", and "who we will be" provides group members with a stable social identity that is used as a resource to navigate ambiguous, novel, and uncertain situations. This may be particularly important amongst people who face substantial obstacles that prevent them from exiting a group membership, which ties their self-concept to the group identity (Ellemers et al., 1993; Reynolds et al., 2004). For example, after transitioning to remote work during COVID-19 (when there were major financial and structural obstacles preventing people from seeking new employment), employees whose leaders fostered social identity continuity with their teams' practices, rituals, and activities from before COVID-19 were protected against indicators of distress and uncertainty (Krug et al., 2021).

Leaders who construct change as a progression rather than a disruption of the group's culture, norms, and practices can combat aversive uncertainty about how change might affect the future of the culture, norms, and practices that define a group of people (Obradovic & Howarth, 2018; Syfers et al., 2023c; Venus et al., 2019; van Knippenberg et al., 2008). Because people define their self-concepts in part by the groups to which they belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987), perceptions of social identity continuity may also protect people from experiencing uncertainty about their own self-concept. Thus, groups desire leaders who will defend their group from unwanted changes that could threaten their social identity continuity (Selvanathan et al., 2022).

However, leaders may strategically invoke threats to their group's social identity continuity as a strategy to mobilize the group against unwanted change. Trump and his political allies used rhetoric leading up to the January 6th Capitol Riot that constructed American and Republican identity as facing a social identity discontinuity threat caused by Biden's (at the time)

possible election to President. Social identity discontinuity is the perception of a break or rupture in the interconnection between the past, present, and future of a group's identity (Sani et al., 2007; van Knippenberg et al., 2008). During the 2020 Republican National Convention, speeches framed the upcoming Presidential election as "the decision between preserving America as we know it and eliminating everything that we love," and "…this election will decide whether we defend the American way of life or allow a radical movement to completely dismantle and destroy us" (Charlie Kirk and Donald Trump, respectively – Wehner, 2020). Two weeks before the riot, Trump tweeted that if Republican senators didn't fight for him, there would not "be a Republican Party anymore" (Sherman, 2021). Trump's message that a Biden electoral victory would disrupt the progression of the cherished values, practices, and culture of the American and Republican identity (as defined by Trump and his supporters) into the post-election future may have produced an uncomfortable sense of self-conceptual uncertainty amongst his supporters, like Guy Refitt and Rosanne Boyland. This uncertainty may have been particularly strong for people who felt that it was impossible or extremely difficult to leave the United States or the Republican party, and thus, could not escape the uncertainty about these identities from permeating their self-concept.

Trump was viewed by his dedicated supporters as a legitimate and oftentimes idealistic representation of what it meant to be an American and Republican (Haslam et al., 2022), i.e., Trump's supporters perceived him to be a group prototypical leader. A leader is deemed group prototypical to the extent that they embody the core attributes (e.g., norms, behaviors, attitudes) that best represent the group identity and interconnect the group's past, present, and future (van Knippenberg, 2011; van Knippenberg et al., 2008; Hogg et al., 2012). Leader prototypicality is a key predictor of follower support and trust in their leader, and leaders' abilities to shape the

attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of their followers (Platow et al., 2006; Steffens et al., 2021). Prototypical leaders are trusted to protect the defining characteristics of the group and expand them into the future, such that perceptions of leader prototypicality naturally flow into perceptions of social identity continuity (Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003; van Knippenberg, 2011; van Knippenberg et al, 2008). Social identity discontinuity rhetoric may have a weaker relationship with self-conceptual uncertainty when the leader imparting the rhetoric is group prototypical, because perceptions of leader prototypicality buffer against perceptions of social identity discontinuity. This theoretical proposition is important to examine because group prototypicality is deeply connected with the success and influence of powerful leaders (Haslam et al., 2021; Reicher & Hopkins, 2000), so it is valuable for leadership researchers to understand whether perceptions of leader prototypicality weaken the relationship between social identity discontinuity rhetoric and self-conceptual uncertainty.

The rhetoric that leaders use to communicate with their groups is not independent of the broader context in which the group exists. Societies and organizations are composed of complex networks of groups that are characterized by varying degrees of ease with which a person may exit one group to join another (Armenta et al., 2017; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which is referred to as “group permeability.” People like Guy and Rosanne may have perceived that moving out of America or changing their political stance to join the Democrat Party would be extremely challenging or impossible, even though it is structurally possible to move to a new country or switch political parties. Belonging to a group that one feels is impermeable with respect to their ability to exit the group and join a new group within the same dimension (for example, social class, political party membership, country of residence) can enforce that group membership as a chronically accessible and central part of a person’s self-concept (Ellemers et al., 1990; Reynolds

et al., 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Being a member of an impermeable group ties the fate of the individual to the fate of their entire group, which may accentuate the self-conceptual uncertainty that arises from their leaders' social identity discontinuity rhetoric.

This thesis presents three experiments that examine the relationship between leader (dis)continuity rhetoric and leader prototypicality in predicting self-uncertainty (Study 1), group permeability as a moderator of the relationship between leader (dis)continuity rhetoric and leader prototypicality onto self-uncertainty (Studies 2 and 3). Social identity discontinuity and self-uncertainty are theoretically related (van Knippenberg, 2011; Venus et al., 2019), but there is no published research that has examined whether there is a causal relationship between social identity discontinuity and self-uncertainty. This thesis contributes to that gap in the literature and contextualizes the relationship by considering how prototypical the leader who imparts the rhetoric is perceived to be, and the ease with which members perceive they can exit a group that is high in social identity discontinuity.

Social identity and continuity

In the following two sections, I will describe the fundamental principles of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), and how perceptions of social identity continuity are embedded in social identity and self-categorization processes. Social identity is defined as a person's knowledge of themselves as a member of certain social groups, in tandem with the emotional value and significance they attach to their belonging to those groups. Social identity refers to the part of an individual's self-concept that is derived from social group memberships and thus shared in common with fellow ingroup members, in contrast to the parts of the self-concept that define someone as a unique individual that separates them from other individuals. People often have numerous social identities that

range from highly meaningful and precisely defined (e.g., U.S. Marines), to abstract and loosely defined (e.g., Canadians). Perceptions of social identity and people's reactions to threats to their social identities are dependent on the social context, including sociostructural variables that characterizes relationships between groups in societies (group permeability, legitimacy of status relations between groups, and stability of status relations between groups). When people are committed to their group due to psychological (e.g., high identification) and sociostructural factors (e.g., low group permeability), their perceptual, affective, and behavioral response will be aimed at protecting their social identity from threats to its distinctiveness from other groups or positive value in relation to other groups (e.g., Ellemers et al., 2002).

The social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) assumes that people have an intrinsic drive to achieve and maintain a positive self-concept, and thus, strive for positive social identities. Perceptions of social identity continuity can maintain connection to events from the group's past that contribute to a positive social identity in the present (Roth et al., 2017; Obradovic & Bowe, 2020). The only conditions where social identity continuity contributes negatively to a group's social identity is when the continuity connects the group to negative events from the past that lower the value of the group's present day social identity (e.g., present day Germany's relationship to the Holocaust – Bilewicz, 2007; Sahdra & Ross, 2007; Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2015). Accordingly, social identity discontinuity can contribute positively to the present-day group identity by disconnecting the group from negative or shameful past events (Roth et al., 2017). Because this thesis is examining the effect of social identity discontinuity rhetoric onto aversive self-uncertainty, I focus on experiences of social identity discontinuity that are threatening for the group. This conceptualization is consistent with research that demonstrates that social identity discontinuity is often experienced as an identity threat and that

groups seek to defend themselves against change that may produce social identity discontinuity (Giessner, 2011; Giessner et al., 2016; Lupina-Wegener et al., 2014; Jaskiewicz et al., 2021; Jetten & Wohl, 2012; Maoulida et al., 2021; Sani, 2005; Sani & Reicher, 1999; Sani & Reicher, 2000;; Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2013, 2015).

Self-categorization into social identities

Self-categorization theory outlines the cognitive processes through which people come to think, feel, and behave as a group (see Oakes et al., 1991; Turner et al., 1987). For self-categorization processes to occur, a person needs to psychologically identify with the group (Hogg & Hardie, 1992; Hogg & Hains, 1996; Hogg et al., 1995; Hogg et al., 1993; Turner & Reynolds, 2010). Identification involves the centrality of the social identity to a person's self-concept, the affect associated with the social identity, and their ties to other ingroup members (although, people can strongly identify with large groups like political groups where fostering ties with other group members is not always possible) (Cameron, 2004).

People in a social context will psychologically categorize themselves and others into the distinct group categories that best maximize the similarities between members of a common group and maximize the differences between members of different groups (Hogg & Turner, 1987; Oakes et al., 1991; Turner et al., 1987). Group identities are cognitively defined by the group prototype. The group prototype is a schematic network of attributes that are normative of the group. Prototypes are composed of attitudes, beliefs, values, feelings, behaviors, etc. that meaningfully define group membership and distinguish ingroup members from outgroups. Once a person is aware of themselves as a member of a certain group (which varies depending on the specific group memberships that are contextually salient across different social contexts), they engage in the automatic process of 'depersonalization' which transforms their sense of self to be

defined primarily through the group prototype of their respective groups. Depersonalized individual group members assign group prototypical norms as the basis for self-definition and thus their perceptions and behaviors are influenced by the group prototype, even when group membership is made salient without the actual presence of ingroup and outgroup members (e.g. Hogg & Turner, 1987; Reicher, 1984, b; Terry & Hogg, 1996). Consequently, group prototypes are central sources of influence within the group – group members strive to conform to group prototypical norms and those who are more group prototypical in relation to others are looked towards as information sources on how to think and behave, and accordingly, are socially attractive and influential within the group (Turner, 1991; Turner et al., 1987). This is precisely why group prototypical leaders are liked, trusted, and deemed effective by their group members (1) group members feel favorably toward the group prototype and thus their leaders who embody it (2) prototypical leaders are a legitimate source of group normative information. Therefore, the emergence of the most influential group members, i.e., leaders, is rooted in basic self-categorization principles (Haslam et al., 2020; Hogg, 2001; Hogg et al., 2012).

Furthermore, self-categorization processes are fundamental to self-conceptual uncertainty reduction. People are motivated to feel certain enough about their beliefs, attitudes, and feelings about the world that they can make accurate predictions, know who to trust, and know how to behave (Hogg, 2007). Uncertainty about important aspects of the self-concept is disruptive because it undermines people's ability to know how to think, feel, and act. Consequently, people tend to experience self-conceptual uncertainty regarding important identities as aversive, and it is the aversive feelings that motivate a desire to reduce the uncertainty (Hogg, 2007; Hogg, 2020; Hogg, 2021). Accordingly, self-uncertainty is often a threatening experience (Blascovich et al., 2003; Blascovich & Tomaka, 1996; Hogg, 2021, 2023) that is associated with feelings of

anxiety, fear, and anger (Jonas et al., 2014) and physical indicators of stress response (Brown et al., 2021). Self-conceptual uncertainty can be caused by uncertainties regarding personal (what makes me unique apart from all other individuals), relational (who I am in relation to interpersonal roles with others), and collective levels of self (social identities) (Hogg & Mahajan, 2018; Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Although self-uncertainty can be experienced in response to disruptions in personal, relational, and social identities, these uncertainties all relate to the self-concept and can bleed into one another (Hogg & Mahajan, 2018). This thesis conceptualizes self-conceptual uncertainty as the degree of uncertainty people feel about their self-concept in general (rather than specific personal, relational, or social identities), and their uncertainty about their future. This is a common conceptualization of self-conceptual uncertainty that has been used in many studies to examine the relationship between self-uncertainty and group identification, leadership selection and emergence, and intergroup relations (e.g., Choi & Hogg, 2020; Rast et al., 2012; Rast et al., 2013; Sherman et al., 2009).

Self-conceptual uncertainty is reduced through depersonalization of the self-concept into the group prototype of a salient group membership. Depersonalization establishes the ingroup prototype as the governing self-concept, which in itself reduces self-conceptual uncertainty because the group prototype prescribes and describes a consensual, socially validated lens to understand and predict the world (Hogg, 2000, 2007, 2021, 2023). Self-categorization transforms one's sense of self so that it is governed by a socially shared and personally internalized framework that delineates identity-consistent cognition, feelings, and behaviors. Accordingly, as self-conceptual uncertainty increases, both the strength of identification with existing group memberships and identification with new groups increases (Choi & Hogg, 2020; Hogg et al., 1998; Hogg et al., 2010; Hogg et al., 2007; Grieve & Hogg, 1999; Mullin & Hogg, 1998; Hogg

& Mahajan, 2018; Grant & Hogg, 2012; Hohman & Hogg, 2015). Self-uncertain individuals prefer groups with high epistemic value – i.e., groups that have properties that effectively reduce self-uncertainty. Groups that are entitative have clearly defined group prototypes that are distinctive from outgroups and provide unambiguous information about the group identity. Unsurprisingly, self-uncertain individuals prefer to identify with entitative groups (e.g., loosely defined, ambiguous prototypes) over non-entitative groups (Hogg, 2021; 2013; Hogg et al., 2004, Hogg, 2014). Social identity continuity may also contribute to a group's epistemic value because the perception that the group prototype expands into the future means that group members can rely on the group prototype as a source of self-uncertainty reduction that stretches into their future self-concept (Venus et al., 2019).

Social identity continuity and uncertainty reduction

Relevant social identity literature has employed several different conceptualizations of social identity continuity (e.g., Haslam et al., 2008; Chandler et al., 2003; Lupina-Wegener et al., 2014; Sani et al., 2007; Sindic & Reicher, 2009; Sani, 2005). A common conceptualization in social psychological literature is collective identity continuity, as defined by Sani and colleagues (2007; see also, Jetten & Wohl, 2012; Sani et al., 2008; Syfers et al., 2023c; Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2013, 2014; Smeekes et al., 2018; Obradovic & Howarth, 2017). Collective identity continuity consists of two constructs. Historical continuity is the perception that notable events in a group's history form a consistent and meaningful narrative, and cultural continuity is the perception that core customs, practices, and values are, and will continue to be, transmitted from generation to generation. Perceptions of cultural continuity are better at satisfying group members' needs for continuity than perceptions of historical continuity because shared beliefs, values, and practices generate a stronger sense of connection to group members throughout time

and provides a roadmap for envisioning the groups' future (Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2014). The social identity continuity conceptual operationalization for this thesis is rooted in the concept of cultural identity continuity. However, cultural identity continuity is typically measured or manipulated in groups for whom their culture is a particularly important attribute, such as national and ethnic identities (Sani et al., 2007; Sani et al., 2008; Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2013). This thesis conducted research on university undergraduates and residents of the Canadian province of Alberta. Thus, while the conceptualization of social identity continuity in this thesis is based on cultural continuity in terms of the stability of core group norms over time, I did not include language that stresses the cultural identity of the groups and instead focused on the stability and temporal expansion of prototypical group norms.

Belonging to a group wherein members can project the group prototype into the future may preserve the ability for members to turn toward the group prototype to reduce self-conceptual uncertainty that arises during large-scale change or upheaval to the group (Venus et al., 2019). The relationship between self-conceptual uncertainty and social identity continuity is precisely that, in contexts where major change to the group is has or will occur, the ability to project the group prototype into the future means that the part of the self-concept derived from group membership can continue to guide group members' attitudes, beliefs, and actions through the change. Without the ability to rely on the group prototype as a roadmap to provide a degree of certainty about who they will be in the future, the group membership should not be able to effectively reduce self-conceptual uncertainty. Indeed, Chandler and colleagues (2003) posited and found support for their proposition that cultural identity continuity situates the person within a clear past and future for their group and without cultural continuity, a person will not experience themselves as a clear and continuous psychological entity. Venus and colleagues

(2019) theorized that during organizational change, employees or students who were high in uncertainty relating to their organizational identity would only support the change if their leader constructed a sense of social identity continuity between the pre and post change identity, presumably because continuity maintained the uncertainty reducing function of their organizational identity. This proposition was supported, which indicates that perceptions of social identity continuity may provide an uncertainty reducing function for people who are high in uncertainty. However, a direct test of the relationship between social identity (dis)continuity and self-uncertainty has not yet been published.

I propose that the lack of social identity continuity, i.e., *social identity discontinuity,* will produce self-conceptual uncertainty amongst group members. Social identity discontinuity (as rooted in the cultural continuity conceptualization) is the perception that there is a rupture in the temporal progression of the group's values, practices, attitudes, customs, etc. such that these important prototypical group attributes will not be transmitted into the future (Sani et al., 2007). Perceptions of social identity discontinuity are typically generated from large-scale changes that have substantial implications for the group's collective self-definition. For example, French Ambassador to the United States, Gérard Araud, described the impact of the burning of Notre Dame Cathedral and its relationship to his personal and national identity, "It's 1,000 years of my history, of – it's our national identity, which is burning." However, leaders can also purposefully construct events as creating discontinuity, such as Donald Trump's rhetoric leading up to the U.S. 2020 Presidential Election. Thus, the relationship between social identity discontinuity and self-uncertainty must consider how prototypical the leader who imparts the rhetoric is perceived to be. The next section will describe the core propositions of the social identity approach to

leadership (Haslam et al., 2020; Hogg, 2001; Hogg et al., 2012) and the relationship between perceptions of leader prototypicality and perceptions of social identity continuity.

Prototypical leaders as "agents of continuity"

The social identity theory of leadership (Hogg, 2001; Hogg et al., 2012) views leadership as a group-based process through which leadership emergence and perceptions of their effectiveness hinges on perceptions of the leader as a highly prototypical group member. The basic hypothesis is that as group members' identification with their ingroup increases, perceptions of their ingroup leaders' group prototypicality becomes an increasingly important basis for perceived leader effectiveness and leader endorsement. Prototypical group members are distinctive and provide socially attractive information sources about the group's prototypical norms. People tend to attribute behavior of distinctive people to underlying internal attributes, which can lead other group members to construct a charismatic personality for highly prototypical group members (van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). Highly prototypical group members also tend to be strongly identified with the group and committed to working for the group's best interests (Barreto & Hogg, 2017; Hogg, 2001; Hogg, 2012). All factors combined, highly prototypical group members are focal points of attention in their group, which increases their popularity, capacity for influence within the group, and establishes a foundation for assuming formal leadership roles in the group.

A key impetus for prototypical leaders' success is that perceived leader prototypicality is associated with a sense of trust that the leader holds the group's best interests at heart (for a review see van Knippenberg, 2011). In kind, prototypical leaders are trusted even after failing to achieve ideal goal standards (Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008; Giessner et al., 2009), and after failure to benefit the group by succeeding in an outgroup negotiation (Giessner et al., 2003).

Prototypical leaders are naturally (by virtue of their prototypicality) considered to be more effective, trustworthy, and fairer leaders than their non-prototypical counterparts (Barreto & Hogg, 2017; Platow et al., 2006; Steffens et al., 2021). To reach comparable standards, non-prototypical leaders must clearly demonstrate group benefitting behavior, such as leader self-sacrifice, leader accountability, and strong group commitment (e.g., Giessner et al., 2013; Kalshoven & den Hartog, 2009; Steffens et al., 2015; Steffens et al., 2021; van Knippenberg, 2011; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005a).

Prototypical leaders (and non-prototypical leaders who wish to build their group prototypicality) must engage in an active process called 'identity entrepreneurship' - defining, representing, and advancing a sense of "we" that is rooted in shared beliefs, values, and behaviors and coheres followers around a shared cause. Identity entrepreneurship emphasizes the active role of a leader in defining the parameters, inclusivity, and normative content of the social category that they represent (Haslam et al., 2020; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a; Reicher & Hopkins, 2000; Reicher et al., 2005). Leaders who act as "entrepreneurs of identity" position themselves as legitimate and thus prototypical representations of their group by defining an inclusive social category that captures all would-be followers (Hogg & Reid, 2006; Reicher et al., 2005; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a; Reicher & Hopkins, 2000). Leaders can do this by reinforcing existing group prototypes (Joe Biden reinforced Democratic centrism in comparison to further left 2020 Presidential candidates like Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren), modifying existing group prototypes (Marjorie Taylor Greene reinforced and then further polarized existing Trumpian prototypical attributes by introducing more conspiratorial thinking – Gross, 2022) or define a new group prototype that is contextually novel (Lula da Silva lead the formation of Brazil's Workers Party). Once leaders are established as group prototypical, people

look to them to prescribe group norms and provide a literal, and often ideal, representation of the group identity. Somewhat paradoxically, leader prototypicality is a key impetus for social identity change because prototypical leaders are granted license to reinforce or redefine the parameters of the group identity, including who constitutes a group member, who the important outgroups are, and which beliefs, values and behaviors are most important for collective self-definition (Reicher & Hopkins, 2000; Reicher et al., 2005; Steffens et al., 2013).

One method through which leaders reinforce, modify, or change existing group prototypes is by drawing on selective representations of their collective past to legitimize their vision for the group's future. For example, Mols and Jetten (2014) demonstrated that right-wing populist French leaders invoked representations of France's "glorious past" (e.g., the Battle of Valmy, the Thirty Glorious Years) to construct themselves as prototypical leaders who would defend France's glory from potential threats and lead France into a glorious future. Thus, leaders can draw on historical narratives to furnish their platforms with legitimacy and establish themselves as defenders of social identity continuity (Obradovic & Howarth, 2018; Reicher & Hopkins, 2000). In this way, perceptions of leader prototypicality and social identity continuity are deeply intertwined: perceptions of leader prototypicality are invested with trust that a prototypical leader will expand group prototypical features into the future (van Knippenberg, 2011; van Knippenberg et al., 2008). As perceptions of leader prototypicality invests the leader with the group's trust that they will protect and promote continuity (Hogg et al., 2012; Steffens et al., 2021; van Knippenberg, 2011; van Knippenberg et al., 2008), it follows that perceptions of leader prototypicality may buffer against the impact of that leader's social identity discontinuity rhetoric onto follower self-uncertainty. Thus, social identity discontinuity rhetoric may produce

more self-uncertainty compared to social identity continuity rhetoric when the leader is non-prototypical, but not prototypical.

Discontinuous and impermeable groups

Social identity theory provides an analysis of how people react to the status hierarchies in which they are members of a variety of groups that have low or high status in relation to one another. Social identity theory uses people's subjective perceptions of socio-structural variables that characterize the relationship between their social group in question and relevant outgroups to predict how people may think, feel, and act toward their own group and outgroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Reynolds, 2004). Group permeability beliefs refer to the ease with which people believe they can exit one group and enter another group in the same domain (social class, country of residence, sports teams). Tajfel and Turner traditionally conceptualized group permeability beliefs as the perception that low status group members could individually exit their group on the basis of hard work, talent, or merit, and successfully enter a higher status group. On the other hand, impermeable group boundaries exist when people believe that no amount of effort or merit guarantees them access to a higher status group membership. Impermeable group boundaries are associated with stronger group identification and collective action aimed at creating social change (Boen & Vanbeselaere, 2000; de Weerd & Klandermans, 1999; Ellemers, 1993; Lalonde & Silverman, 1994). This is because beliefs that group boundaries are impermeable engender the sense that one's individual fate is tied to the fate of their entire group and produces high identification with the group than groups that are low in group permeability (Armenta et al., 2017; Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers et al., 1988; Reynolds et al., 2004; Tajfel &Turner, 1979). In conditions of low group permeability, one cannot improve their own situation without the situation of the group as a whole being improved.

More recent work has differentiated between status-based group permeability beliefs and the degree of ease with which one believes they can successfully exit a current group, without considering status perceptions and whether exit is an attempt at upward social mobility (Armenta et al., 2017). Armenta and colleagues defined the latter as "member permeability." While status perceptions are deeply intertwined with social identities and are constantly negotiated by leaders to further their political agendas (e.g., Trump's brand of populism that asserts his supporters are being oppressed by societal elites), it is out of the scope of this thesis to introduce status perceptions as a fourth independent variable. Therefore, the present work applies a definition of group permeability beliefs that is consistent with Armenta et al.'s member permeability.

The belief that one belongs to a group with impermeable boundaries focuses attention onto the group prototype as a salient part of the self-concept (Reynolds et al., 2004). When the self-uncertainty reducing value of a group identity is threatened by social identity discontinuity, the degree to which someone believes they can exit their group and enter a new group should influence the degree to which they feel self-uncertain. The perceived inability for members to exit the group may enhance the salience of the temporally discontinuous group prototype for participant's self-definition (Armenta et al., 2017; Ellemers et al., 1988; Reynolds et al., 2004; Tajfel &Turner, 1979), meaning self-uncertainty that results from a leader's social identity discontinuity rhetoric may be more pronounced than when group members believe that they can successfully exit the group. Even in conditions of low group permeability, having a prototypical leader at the helm of the group should invest members with the perception that the group prototype will be expanded into the future, and buffer against feelings of self-uncertainty that could arise from social identity discontinuity rhetoric (Platow et al., 2006; van Knippenberg, 2011; van Knippenberg et al., 2008; Steffens et al., 2021; Syfers et al., 2023c). In contrast, a non-

prototypical leader cannot be trusted to continue the future progression of group prototypical attributes that they do not possess themselves. This undermines the self-uncertainty reducing value of the group prototype in the face of leader social identity discontinuity rhetoric. When the group is low in permeability, the effect of social identity discontinuity rhetoric imparted by a non-prototypical leader onto self-uncertainty should be stronger because the socially discontinuous identity should be a salient and accessible part of the self-concept compared to when the group is high in permeability.

Secondary Dependent Variables

There are three variables that are related to the self-uncertainty reducing value of the group prototype that I will also examine as secondary dependent variables. The first variable is social identity uncertainty (Wagoner et al., 2017), which is comprised of two related facets (1) uncertainty about the definition of the group identity (2) uncertainty about whether one is a good representation of what it means to be a group member, i.e., group prototypical. Social identity uncertainty is one of the multiple distinct forms that self-concept related uncertainty group members can experience (Hogg & Mahajan, 2018). The theoretical argument for why leader social identity discontinuity rhetoric may produce feelings of self-conceptual uncertainty is also relevant for perceptions of social identity uncertainty: social identity discontinuity may also heighten uncertainty about the definition of the group's identity (see van Knippenberg, 2011).

The second variable of interest is theoretically related to social identity uncertainty because it captures the degree to which a group is perceived to be a clear, cohesive and distinctive unit, i.e., group entitativity. Perceptions of group entitativity underscore the perception of a group as a distinct and cohesive psychological entity (Lickel et al., 2000). Entitative groups are preferred by self-uncertain individuals due to their self-uncertainty

reducing properties. Entitative group prototypes provide clear and unambiguous identity information (Hogg, 2004, 2021, 2023; Hogg et al., 2007), and group entitativity is associated with perceptions of social identity continuity (Sani et al., 2007; Sani et al., 2008). Thus, it is useful to examine whether conditions that heighten self-uncertainty also reduce perceptions of group entitativity.

Lastly, Study 2 examines leader support as the fourth dependent variable. The majority of experimental research on social identity (dis)continuity and leadership is in the context of change support (see van Knippenberg et al., 2008; Venus et al., 2019; Giessner et al., 2011). In uncertain contexts, support for a leader indicates that group members are turning toward their leader to provide identity relevant information and a direction through the uncertainty (Rast et al., 2012). Therefore, it is important to examine whether conditions that I hypothesize to produce more self-uncertainty than others (e.g., a non-prototypical leader that uses social identity discontinuity rhetoric, particularly under conditions of low group permeability) influence the group's support for their leader.

Social identity uncertainty

Social identity uncertainty is a type of self-conceptual uncertainty that is specific to the collective level of a person's self-concept and refers to how uncertain people are about the definition of a social identity and their level of uncertainty about their prototypic fit to the group (Wagoner et al., 2017; Hogg & Mahajan, 2018). Identity uncertainty refers to feelings of uncertainty about the prototypical attributes that define the social identity and distinguish it from outgroups. Member uncertainty refers to group members' feelings of uncertainty about their relationships with other group members and whether they will be recognized as group members (Wagoner et al., 2017). Social identity uncertainty has a negative relationship to group

identification that is a source of the social identity uncertainty because group members must look toward alternative group memberships for self-uncertainty reduction (Choi & Hogg, 2020; Jung et al., 2016; Wagoner & Hogg, 2016; Wagoner et al., 2017). It is of interest to examine whether leader social identity discontinuity rhetoric produces social identity specific self-conceptual uncertainty because of the theoretical relationship between social identity discontinuity and uncertainty about the future of the group identity (van Knippenberg, 2011; Ullrich et al., 2005), particularly because leaders who attempt to invoke social identity discontinuity rhetoric as a strategy to mobilize their group against a perceived threat may actually backfire because they are creating conditions that are conducive to psychological disidentification with the group (Choi & Hogg, 2020). Because social identity uncertainty is a subcategorization of self-conceptual uncertainty (Wagoner et al., 2017), I hold the same predictions for social identity uncertainty that I do for self-conceptual uncertainty. Specifically, that social identity uncertainty will be higher when a non-prototypical leader uses social identity discontinuity compared to continuity rhetoric (Study 1), and that this relationship will be stronger when group boundaries are impermeable rather than permeable (Studies 2 and 3). I expect that both facets of social identity uncertainty will be affected by these relationships because the clarity of the definition of the group's identity should be undermined, which should also correspond to lower clarity in how one fits to the group prototype.

Group entitativity. Perceptions of group entitativity underpin the perception of a collection of people as a distinct and cohesive psychological group (Yzerbyt et al., 2000; Hogg, 2023) and is associated with essentialist beliefs about social categories (Haslam et al., 2000; McGarty et al., 1995). Perceptions of entitativity are influenced by the degree of similarity between group members, clear intergroup boundaries, a high level of interaction and

interdependence between group members, low (vs. high) permeability, high member investment, common goals, a shared common fate between group members, and difficulty exiting or entering the group. The large groups like universities and provinces that is are used in the present research cannot have high levels of interaction and interdependence between all group members but can be characterized as entitative on the basis of member similarity, shared fate, high member investment in the group, and low permeability (Lickel et al., 2000; Campbell, 1958; Sani et al., 2005; see also Gaffney & Hogg, 2022). Entitative group prototypes prescribe and describe clear and unambiguous information on how to think, feel, and act.

Accordingly, self-uncertain individuals are more likely to identify with entitative than non-entitative groups (Hogg, 2004, 2021, 2023; Hogg et al., 2007). The relationship between group entitativity and uncertainty reduction is precisely what makes self-conceptual uncertainty a risk factor for worsening political divides and conflict-ridden relationships between groups: Politically extreme groups are by nature, entitative. Extremist groups are insular, which means that their members only expose themselves to the opinions of other members. Extremist groups are also characterized by the presence of a strong, authoritative leader, and strict adherence to ingroup norms, customs, and traditions that are clearly juxtaposed against those of a common outgroup enemy (e.g., "weak" Republicans or Democrats, if you were a January 6th rioter). Accordingly, the features that characterize extremist groups are highly conducive to reducing self-conceptual uncertainty because of clear and distinctive information people derive about themselves from extremist groups (Hogg, 2023). Therefore, it is important to understand whether leader social identity discontinuity rhetoric (which is used frequently by leaders on the politically right-wing extreme fringes – e.g., Mols & Jetten, 2014) influences group members' perceptions of their group entitativity.

Social identity discontinuity rhetoric should, in general, reduce perceptions of group entitativity because social identity continuity is considered an antecedent to group entitativity. In other words, the perception that the group identity stretches backwards and forwards in time is an antecedent to perceiving the group as a distinct and cohesive psychological entity. This proposition is supported by correlational research demonstrating that perceptions of social identity continuity predict perceptions of group entitativity (Sani et al., 2007; Sani et al., 2008), which indicates that social identity discontinuity should lower perceptions of group entitativity.

I predict this relationship will be moderated by perceptions of leader prototypicality. When group membership is salient, members look to their leaders to define and communicate information about the group identity, which prescribes how group members should think, feel, and behave (Reid & Hogg, 2006; Voci, 2006). The extent to which a leader conveys that their followers share important similarities, a common fate, a sense of cohesion, and clear differences from outgroups should contribute to group members' perceptions of entitativity in a deductive, "top-down" process (Blanchard et al., 2022; Brewer & Harasty, 1996; Haslam et al., 2011; Hogg et al., 2012; Steffens et al., 2021; Postmes et al., 2005). By definition, prototypical leaders perform this identity function for their group members through the self-categorization process (Hogg et al., 2012; Turner et al., 1987). Consequently, social identity discontinuity rhetoric imparted by a non-prototypical leader should lower perceptions of entitativity compared to when the leader uses social identity continuity rhetoric. When the leader is prototypical, however, perceptions of group entitativity should be protected from the negative impact of social identity discontinuity rhetoric.

Group permeability is negatively associated with perceptions of entitativity (Lickel et al., 2000) which indicates that conditions of group impermeability may be associated with perceptions of group entitativity in some conditions. In the context of social identity discontinuity, however, I predict that conditions of group impermeability will influence

perceptions of entitativity similarly to perceptions of self and social identity uncertainty. Thus, I predict that group entitativity will be lower when a non-prototypical leader uses social identity discontinuity compared to continuity rhetoric under conditions of low group permeability.

Leader support

Leader support is a primarily exploratory variable that I only included in Study 2. Prior research on leader prototypicality and (dis)continuity rhetoric using the same university sample in Study 1 and 3 did not yield any significant findings on leader support (see Syfers et al., 2023c). I included this variable in Study 2 because the study context allowed participants to evaluate real political leaders, rather than leaders who were made up for the purposes of the experiment (Studies 1 and 3).

In line with years of prior research (see Barreto & Hogg, 2017; Hogg et al., 2012; Steffens et al., 2021), leader support should be strongly positively predicted by perceptions of leader prototypicality. This is the only directional prediction that I have for leader support. I do have theoretical questions that may be answered by the exploratory three-way interaction of leader prototypicality, leader rhetoric, and group permeability onto leader support.

An integration of the uncertainty-identity theory and the social identity theory of leadership predicted and found that the drive to reduce self-uncertainty would lead self-uncertain group members to support any available leadership option, regardless of whether the leader was group prototypical or non-prototypical (Rast et al., 2012). At a fundamental level, both a prototypical and non-prototypical leader can provide identity information that group members can rely upon to reduce their self-uncertainty. The implication of this proposition for the present research is whether the conditions where self-uncertainty should be the highest (e.g., social identity discontinuity rhetoric imparted by a non-prototypical leader under conditions of group

impermeability) would also be conditions where people exhibit more support for their leader. Examining the two-way and three-way interactions of leader rhetoric, leader prototypicality, and group permeability as an exploratory analysis may reveal answers to this theoretical question.

Chapter II: Study 1

The aim of Study 1 was to investigate the effects of leader discontinuity rhetoric and perceptions of leader prototypicality on feelings of self-uncertainty, social identity uncertainty, and perceptions of group entitativity. Study 1 was a between subjects' experiment that manipulated leader continuity rhetoric (discontinuity vs. continuity) and leader prototypicality (prototypical vs. non-prototypical) and measured self-uncertainty, social identity uncertainty, and group entitativity as dependent variables. Study 1 was designed to test three hypotheses, (H1) self-uncertainty will be higher when the non-prototypical leader uses discontinuity rhetoric compared to continuity rhetoric (H2) social identity uncertainty will be higher when a non-prototypical leader uses discontinuity compared to continuity rhetoric (H3) group entitativity will be lower when a non-prototypical leader uses discontinuity compared to continuity rhetoric.

Method

Design

Study 1 is a 2 (Continuity rhetoric vs. Discontinuity rhetoric) x 2 (Prototypical leader vs. Non-prototypical leader) between-subjects experimental design with leader rhetoric and leader prototypicality as manipulated independent variables, and self-uncertainty, social identity uncertainty and group entitativity as the dependent variables. Data collection occurred in person via Qualtrics on lab computers in the Group Processes and Leadership lab at the University of Alberta.

Participants

I recruited 373 participants from the Psychology Research Participation Pool at the University of Alberta (women = 221, men = 138, non-binary = 6, genderfluid = 3, prefer not to say = 5) with an average age of 19.57(5.20) that ranged from 17-55. The majority of participants

were in their first year of university (n = 248) and second year (n = 84). Participants received partial course credit for participating in the study.

Sensitivity power analysis. I conducted a sensitivity power analysis using G*Power. The minimum effect size for N = 373, at $\alpha = 0.05$ with two fixed factors at 80% power is $\eta_p^2 = .03$. The analysis indicates this study has sufficient power to detect a small medium effect size comparable to those found in similar research (e.g., Venus et al., 2019; van Knippenberg et al., 2008; Smeekes et al., 2023).

Materials

See Table 1 for descriptive statistics for the key study variables.

Leader prototypicality manipulation. Leader prototypicality was manipulated using a vignette adapted from Rast and colleagues (2012). Participants were told they were reading feedback given from other students who had worked with a student leader in the Student's Union. The Student's Union is a legal body composed of undergraduates at the University of Alberta who represent and advocate for undergraduate student interests. Participants read a third person description of the student leader which described the student as being prototypical or non-prototypical of University of Alberta students. See Appendix A for the full text vignettes.

Leader rhetoric manipulation. Leader continuity and discontinuity rhetoric was manipulated using vignettes (adapted from Syfers et al., 2023; Venus et al., 2019; Wohl & Jetten, 2012). Participants were told that they were selected to read a draft of a letter to students from the Students Union leader whom they had just read about in the leader prototypicality manipulation. The letter was described as containing important information about the current student body. In the discontinuity condition, the leader described how budget cuts and COVID-19 remote learning had created so much change that the current student body's identity was

discontinuous with the pre-change university identity. In the continuity condition, the leader described how despite budget cuts and COVID-19, the undergraduate student body's identity was continuous with its pre-change identity. See Appendix B for the full text vignettes.

Social identity discontinuity. Perceptions of social identity discontinuity were measured using a four-item measure on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 9 = strongly agree) (adapted from Smeekes et al., 2023). Items included "The UofA identity is no longer what it used to be in the past", "The UofA identity has undergone a lot of changes", "Many UofA values and ideals have been lost over time", and "The future of the UofA has no connection to the UofA's past."

Leader prototypicality. Perceptions of leader prototypicality were measured using a four-item measure on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 9 = strongly agree) (adapted from van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005). Items included "Leader A represents what is characteristic about the University of Alberta", "Leader A is a good example of what it means to be part of the University of Alberta", "Leader A stands for what people at the University of Alberta have in common", and "Leader A is very similar to most people at the University of Alberta."

Self-uncertainty. Feelings of self-uncertainty were measured with 7 items on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 9 = strongly agree) (adapted from Rast et al., 2012). Items included "I am uncertain about myself", "I am uncertain about my future", "I am concerned about my future", "I am worried about my future", "I am uncertain about my place in the world", "I am worried about my place in the world", and "I am concerned about my place in the world."

Entitativity. Perceptions of undergraduate group entitativity were measured with 4 items on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 9 = strongly agree) (adapted from Lickel et al..

2000). Items included “There are strong ties among UofA students”, “UofA students are a cohesive group”, “UofA students are similar to one another”, “UofA students share a common sense of fate.”

Social identity uncertainty. Feelings of uncertainty about the University of Alberta social identity were measured using 12 items on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 9 = strongly agree) (adapted from Wagoner et al., 2017). Items included “I feel that the definition of the UofA’s identity is unclear”, “I feel uncertain about the characteristics that define being a UofA student”, and “I feel uncertain about what it means to be a UofA student.” See Appendix C for a list of all 12 items. The scale is composed of two subscales. The identity uncertainty subscale comprises the first six items and measures respondents’ degree of uncertainty about the definition of their social identity. The member uncertainty subscale comprises the last six items and measures respondents’ degree of uncertainty about their prototypicality as a group member. See Appendix C for the full list of items.

University identification. Identification with the University of Alberta was measured using 6 items on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 9 = strongly agree) (Hogg & Hains, 1996). Items included “Being a University of Alberta student is important to my self-concept”, “I often think about myself as a student at the University of Alberta”, “My identity as a University of Alberta student influences my life choices”, I am often aware of myself as a University of Alberta student”, I am proud to be a University of Alberta student”, “My self-concept is closely tied to being a University of Alberta student.” I only measured identification so that I could examine whether students averaged high or low identification with the university. If students exhibited low identification overall, this could undermine the effectiveness of the experimental manipulations and theoretical test of the hypotheses.

Demographics. I asked participants to report their gender, age, and year in school. Participants identified their gender by the item "How do you identify your gender?" with the options man, woman, non-binary, gender fluid, and prefer not to say. Participants identified their age by the item "How old are you?" and typed in their age using numbers. Participants identified their year in school by the item "What year in school are you?" with the options first, second, third, fourth (or beyond, but not graduate student), and graduate student.

Procedure

Participants enlisted through the Psychology Research Participation Pool. Data collection occurred in person in the Group Processes and Leadership Lab. Participants were seated at separate computer cubicles by research assistants and given instructions that included the predicted duration of the study and their rights as participants. Participants first read the informed consent and indicated their consent to participate in the study before being directed to a page where they identified their gender, age, and year in school. Next, participants responded to the measure of group identification before reading the cover story for the leader prototypicality manipulation. Participants read that the next page contained a description of a student leader from the Student's Union, which was described as "the official body that represents the interests and needs of the undergraduate student body. The SU acts as advocates for students at the UofA and are undergraduates themselves." Then, participants were randomly assigned to read the prototypical or non-prototypical leader vignette using the Qualtrics randomizer function. On the next page, participants were informed that they were about to read a letter addressed to undergraduate students that was written by the SU leader that they just read about. Participants read that "This letter includes important information about the current student body. Please read this letter and provide your feedback when prompted." Participants were randomly assigned

using a randomizer function to either the leader continuity rhetoric or discontinuity rhetoric conditions. Afterwards, participants filled out the self-uncertainty, group entitativity, and social identity uncertainty measures. Lastly, to assess the effectiveness of the manipulated variables, participants responded to the leader prototypicality and social identity discontinuity measures.

Results

Manipulation checks. A one sample *t*-test found that mean university identification (M = 6.40; SD = 1.35) was significantly greater than the midpoint of scale (midpoint = 5), $t(371) = 19.98$, $p < .001$, which indicates that, in general, participants identified somewhat strongly with the University of Alberta.

Both manipulation check measures were submitted to a two-way ANOVA examining the main effects of leader prototypicality and leader rhetoric and their two-way interaction. The two-way ANOVA onto perceptions of leader prototypicality yielded only a significant main effect of the leader prototypicality manipulation, $F(1, 368) = 13.19$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, such that perceptions of leader prototypicality were greater in the prototypical leader condition (M = 6.07, SD = 1.29) than the non-prototypical leader condition (M = 5.49, SD = 1.28). The main effect of leader rhetoric and the two-way interaction between leader rhetoric and leader prototypicality did not reach significance. The two-way ANOVA on perceptions of social identity discontinuity yielded only a significant main effect of the leader rhetoric manipulation, $F(1, 368) = 38.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$, such that perceptions of social identity discontinuity were higher in the discontinuity leader rhetoric condition (M = 5.33, SD = 1.28) than in the continuity rhetoric condition (M = 4.23, SD = 1.25). The main effect of leader prototypicality and the two-way interaction between leader rhetoric and leader prototypicality did not reach significance.

Self-uncertainty. Hypothesis 1 states that social identity discontinuity rhetoric will affect self-uncertainty only when the leader is non-prototypical, such that self-uncertainty will be higher when a non-prototypical leader uses discontinuity compared to continuity rhetoric. Self-uncertainty was submitted to a two-way factorial ANOVA that examined the main effects of leader prototypicality and leader rhetoric and their two-way interaction. There were no other statistically significant main effects. The predicted interaction between leader prototypicality and leader rhetoric onto self-uncertainty did not reach statistical significance, $F(1, 369) = 1.73$, $p = .19$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$.

Social identity uncertainty. Hypothesis 2 states that social identity discontinuity rhetoric will affect social identity uncertainty only when the leader is non-prototypical, such that social identity uncertainty will be higher when a non-prototypical leader uses discontinuity compared to continuity rhetoric. Social identity uncertainty was submitted to a two-way ANOVA that examined the main effects of leader prototypicality and leader rhetoric and their two-way interaction. There were no significant main effects. The interaction between leader prototypicality and leader rhetoric onto social identity uncertainty was non-significant, $F(1, 367) = .001$, $p = .97$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$. The results did not support Hypothesis 2.

As an exploratory analysis, I conducted the same analysis separately onto the identity uncertainty and member uncertainty subscales. There were no significant main effects or interactions onto identity uncertainty or member uncertainty.

Entitativity. Hypothesis 3 states that social identity discontinuity rhetoric will affect perceptions of group entitativity only when the leader is non-prototypical, such that group entitativity will be lower when a non-prototypical leader uses discontinuity compared to continuity rhetoric. Perceptions of group entitativity were submitted to a two-way ANOVA that

examined the main effects of leader prototypicality and leader rhetoric and their two-way interaction. There were no significant main effects. The predicted two-way interaction was not significant, $F(1, 368) = .09$, $p = .77$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$.

Discussion

The three hypothesis were not supported in the data. There were no statistically significant two-way interactions between leader rhetoric and leader prototypicality onto feelings of self or social identity uncertainty or perceptions of group entitativity, nor were there any significant main effects.

There are several limitations to Study 1 that may lend some explanation to the lack of statistically significant findings. Firstly, mean perceptions of social identity discontinuity were only slightly above the midpoint of the scale in the discontinuity rhetoric condition ($M = 5.33$). Thus, perceptions of social identity discontinuity in discontinuity rhetoric condition averaged closer to apathetic responses (5 = neither agree nor disagree) than responses that indicated agreement with scale items (e.g., 6 and above). Even though average perceptions of discontinuity were statistically significantly higher in the discontinuity than continuity rhetoric condition, I consider the effectiveness of the rhetoric manipulation to be low in this experiment because it did not produce moderate or strong average perceptions of social identity discontinuity. Similarly, the average perception of prototypicality for the non-prototypical leader averaged closer to apathetic midpoint responses ($M = 5.49$) instead of disagreement with scale items (e.g., 4 and below). An effective and valid test of the Study 1 hypotheses requires that the manipulations produce consensus amongst participants that a leader is non-prototypical, and that the university identity is discontinuous. Responses that average close to the midpoint of the scale do not present strong evidence that the manipulations were effective in producing perceptions of leader non-

prototypicality and university identity discontinuity that were strong enough to exert influence on the dependent variables.

A second methodological factor that may contribute to the lack of findings is that university students are a convenience sample, and creating psychological realism for university students using a fabricated experimental context is challenging. The cover story anonymously described the leader as a student leader in the Student's Union and referred to the leader as Leader A. This was to avoid any biases based on the gender and ethnicity inferred by giving the leader a name. However, participants may not have perceived that this leader was their leader, and thus the effect of the leader's prototypicality and their (dis)continuity rhetoric was not as potent as it would be in a real-world context where people perceived that the leader in question is actually their leader. Second, the social identity invoked by the leader prototypicality, and leader rhetoric manipulations was the undergraduate University of Alberta social identity. Given the large size of the undergraduate student body, this may not be a social identity with a clear and well-defined group prototype.

These factors may reduce the psychological realism of the experimental context and weaken the effects of the manipulations onto the dependent variables. It is also possible, of course, that leader rhetoric and leader prototypicality do not interact onto self-uncertainty, group entitativity or social identity uncertainty. As the manipulation checks indicated that the leader rhetoric and prototypicality manipulations were effective, it may be that my hypotheses are incorrect. I designed Study 2 to address the methodological limitations of Study 1. Doing so will allow me to gather more context for interpreting the lack of statistically significant findings in Study 1.

To address the weak manipulations and lack of psychological and leadership realism in Study 1, I designed Study 2 to use the context of the 2023 Albertan Provincial election. A sample of Albertan registered voters took the study within one week before the election results. I chose this time period because the salience of election and thus people's identities as Albertans may be more accessible and salient during this time (Oakes et al., 1991) (as opposed to collecting data one month before the election, for example) due to heavy news coverage of the election in Alberta and the soon approaching day of the election results. Using a real-world election context meant that the leader in the experiment was a real leader and likely one that participants perceived to be "their" leader.

To address the potential weakness of a leader prototypicality manipulation, I chose to use a measurement rather than manipulation of leader prototypicality because manipulating perceptions that one's political leader is non-prototypical in election contexts is extremely challenging due to ceiling effects in leader support and prototypicality measures during elections (e.g., Syfers et al., 2021; Alabastro et al., 2013). I used several strategies to strengthen the effectiveness of the leader rhetoric manipulations. I manipulated leader continuity and discontinuity rhetoric using rhetoric derived from qualitative analyses of continuity and discontinuity themes in leaders' political rhetoric (Haslam et al., 2022; Mols & Jetten, 2014; Obradovic & Howarth, 2018). The rhetoric manipulations presented a fabricated statement given by the leader that discussed the impact of an outgroup electoral victory on Albertan social identity. The discontinuity rhetoric condition used language that constructed an outgroup electoral victory as creating a discontinuous Albertan social identity, whereas the continuity rhetoric condition emphasized that even in the event of an outgroup electoral victory, Albertan identity continuity would be maintained. The opposing political party winning the election was a

real possibility for Albertan voters and the "future" of Albertan identity was discussed frequently in major Canadian media articles about the impact of different election outcomes and the ways in which the major candidates would depict each other and their respective parties as major threats to the province (e.g., Black, 2023; Markusoff, 2023). I chose to mirror this real-world phenomenon by manipulating the discontinuity threat to be the real possibility of an outgroup party victory and the major implications of that for Alberta's social identity (dis)continuity.

In addition to addressing the methodological limitations of Study 1, I also designed Study 2 to theoretically extend Study 1 by including group permeability as a second moderator. I proposed that the expected two-way interaction in Study 1 may be influenced by a second moderator: group permeability. I theorized that belonging to a group that members believe is challenging or impossible to exit (i.e., low group permeability) would heighten the salience of the present group membership as a basis for self-definition. Thus, social identity discontinuity rhetoric imparted by a non-prototypical leader should have a stronger effect on feelings of self-uncertainty, social identity uncertainty, and group entitativity when group permeability is low rather than high.

Chapter III: Study 2

Study 2 was designed to address methodological limitations in Study 1 and to build upon the theoretical proposition in Study 1 by including perceptions of group permeability as a third independent variable. Study 2 data was collected one week before the Alberta Provincial Election in May 2023. Study 2 was a quasi-experimental design with leader rhetoric as the manipulated variable (discontinuity vs. continuity rhetoric), and leader prototypicality and group permeability as measured independent variables. The dependent variables were self-uncertainty, social identity uncertainty, group entitativity, and leader support.

Study 2 was designed to test three main hypotheses: (H1) When group permeability is low, self-uncertainty will be higher when a non-prototypical leader uses discontinuity rather than continuity rhetoric (H2) When group permeability is low, social identity uncertainty will be higher when a non-prototypical leader uses discontinuity rather than continuity rhetoric under conditions of low group permeability (H3) When group permeability is low, perceived group entitativity will be higher when a non-prototypical leader uses continuity rather than discontinuity rhetoric under conditions of low group permeability.

Method

Design

Study 2 is a between-subjects experimental design with leader (dis)continuity rhetoric as the only experimentally manipulated independent variable (continuity vs. discontinuity rhetoric). Leader prototypicality and group permeability were measured independent variables. Self-uncertainty, group entitativity, social identity uncertainty, and leader evaluations are the dependent variables. Data was collected online through RexDirect survey panels, and the study was hosted on Qualtrics.

Participants. I recruited 638 participants (Danielle Smith/UCP voters = 303; Rachel Notley/NDP voters = 335) using RexDirect survey panels. Participants were adults above the age of 18 and registered to vote in the Albertan election.

Compensation. Participants were paid $3.50 CAD for completing the study. Completion of the study requires participants to complete all measures and advance past the debriefing page to be redirected to RexDirect. Participants who ended the study earlier than this did not receive compensation. These rules for compensation are set by RexDirect.

Sensitivity power analysis. I conducted a sensitivity power analysis using G*Power. The minimum effect size for $N = 388$ at $\alpha = 0.05$ with 80% power is Cohen's $f = .017$. This analysis indicates that this study has sufficient power to detect a small medium effect size comparable to those found in similar research (e.g., Venus et al., 2019; van Knippenberg et al., 2008; Smeekes et al., 2023; Ellemers et al., 1993).

Materials

Leader vote. One item examined which of the two main candidates running in the election each participant planned to vote for. The item asked, "Of the two main candidates in the upcoming election, which one are you most likely to vote for?" The options were, "Rachel Notley," "Danielle Smith," and "Neither."

Leader rhetoric manipulation. Leader continuity and discontinuity rhetoric was manipulated using vignettes (adapted from Syfers et al., 2023; Venus et al., 2019; Wohl & Jetten, 2012). Participants read that they were going to read a brief statement given to CBC the prior week by Danielle Smith or Rachel Notley (depending on which leader they selected in response to the leader vote item) that "highlighted the drastic choices that each Albertan must make with

their vote." The discontinuity rhetoric condition was 178 words, and the continuity rhetoric condition was 177 words. The full text for both conditions can be found in Appendix D.

The leader rhetoric variable was dummy coded for all statistical analyses such that the discontinuity rhetoric condition = 0 and the continuity rhetoric condition = 2.

Social identity discontinuity. The effectiveness of the leader rhetoric manipulation was evaluated with a 6-item measure adapted from the same measure used in Study 1. The measure included the same 4-items from Study 1 that were adapted for the Albertan context (e.g., "Albertan identity may no longer be what it used to be in the past"). Two new items constructed for the purposes of this study included, "Alberta's future could be a drastic departure from Alberta as we know it" and "Alberta could feel like an entirely different place in the near future." I constructed these items based on the items already present in the 4-item measure and based on wording used in experimental manipulations of social identity discontinuity in previous literature (Jetten & Wohl, 2012). In Studies 1 and 3 rhetoric manipulations, the events that created discontinuity had already occurred. The event that created the discontinuity in Study 2 has not yet occurred. The upcoming possible outgroup election victory was used as the large-scale change that posed that a threat to Albertan social identity continuity. Therefore, I wanted to include two additional items that explicitly captured the future threat of Albertan identity discontinuity.

Perceived leader prototypicality. I used the same 4-item leader prototypicality measure (adapted from van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005) as used in Study 1 to check the effectiveness of the leader prototypicality manipulation.

Group permeability. Perceptions of group permeability were measured with one item that I created for the purposes of this study with reference to operationalizations of group

permeability in social identity literature (see Ellemers et al., 1993). The item asked, “Are there many obstacles (financial, personal, family, etc.) preventing you from leaving Alberta, even if you wanted to?”, and was scored on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 9 = strongly agree). This item was scored such that higher values indicated lower perceptions of group permeability. Thus, it is important to note that when decomposing statistically significant interactions, -1SD corresponds to high perceptions of group permeability, whereas +1SD corresponds to low perceptions of group permeability.

Self-uncertainty. I used the same measure of self-uncertainty as in Study 1.

Group entitativity. I used the same measure of group entitativity as in Study 1 with the first item adapted for the provincial election context, “There are strong ties among Albertans.”

Social identity uncertainty. I used a shortened 7 item measure from the measure used in Study 1, with items including “I feel that the definition of Alberta’s identity is unclear”, “I feel uncertain about what it means to be an Albertan”, “I feel uncertain about the characteristics that define being an Albertan”, “I feel uncertain about what values and ideals Alberta stands for”, I feel uncertain about who I am as an Albertan”, “I feel uncertain about what it will mean to be an Albertan in the future”, “I feel uncertain about what values and ideals Alberta will stand for in the future.”

Leader evaluation. Participants evaluated their trust and support for their leader on a 11-item measure (adapted from Rast et al., 2012) on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 9 = strongly agree). Items included, “[Leader] is a very effective leader”, “[Leader] will represent the interests of Albertans very well”, “I will trust [Leader] as Premier”, “I will be a strong supporter of [Leader] as Premier”, “I think [Leader] does the right things”, “I think [Leader] is trustworthy”, “[Leader] is very committed to Albertans”, “[Leader] wants the best for

Albertans", "[Leader] aims to gain benefits for all Albertans", "[Leader] would be a good Premier", "[Leader] leads in a way which motivates other Albertans."

Procedure.

Participants were recruited through RexDirect survey panel and completed the study online at their discretion. After reading the informed consent page and selecting the consent option, participants were asked which candidate (Danielle Smith or Rachel Notley) they would vote for as Alberta Premier. The leader that participants selected in this question would be the leader whom they will evaluate throughout the study and whom they were told gave the speech that was used as the rhetoric manipulation. Next, participants responded to the measure of group identification with Alberta. Then, participants indicated how prototypical of Alberta their leader was. To measure perceptions of group permeability, participants responded to the item asking how easy or difficult it would be to leave Alberta and live elsewhere. Participants were then randomly assigned using the Qualtrics randomizer function to the continuity or discontinuity rhetoric condition. They read that their leader had spoken to CBC about the importance of voting in Alberta's upcoming election and the drastic choices that each Albertan must make with their vote, and then were directed to the page hosting the rhetoric manipulation vignettes. Next, participants responded to the self-uncertainty, group entitativity, group identity uncertainty, leader evaluation and protest intention measures before responding to the social identity discontinuity and leader prototypicality manipulation checks. Lastly, participants were directed to the debriefing page.

Results

Data preparation. I z-scored all continuous independent variables (leader prototypicality, group impermeability) and dependent variables (self-uncertainty, social identity

uncertainty, group entitativity, leader evaluation). Leader rhetoric was dummy coded so that discontinuity = 0 and continuity = 2 (these values were chosen for ease of graphing significant interactions).

Manipulation check. Participants exhibited relatively high levels of group identification (M = 6.90, SD = 1.86) that were significantly higher than the midpoint of the scale, $t(637)$ = 25.29, $p < .001$. Perceptions of social identity discontinuity were submitted to a three-way regression model to examine the main effects and possible two- or three-way interactions of leader rhetoric, leader prototypicality, and group permeability, $R^2_{adjusted} = .07$, $F(7, 620) = 8.18$, $p < .001$. There was a significant negative main effect of leader rhetoric, β = -.15, SE = .04, t = -3.83, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.22, -.07], demonstrating that perceived Albertan discontinuity was significantly higher in the discontinuity rhetoric (M = 6.18, SD = 1.81) compared to continuity rhetoric condition (M = 5.63, SD = 1.88). Leader prototypicality also positively predicted perceptions of Albertan identity discontinuity, β = .26, SE = .05, t = 4.72, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.15, .37] and group permeability positively predicted perceptions of Albertan identity discontinuity, β = .11, SE = .045 t = 2.11, p = .04, 95% CI [.007, .22]. There were no significant two- or three-way interaction effects on perceptions of social identity discontinuity.

Self-uncertainty. In step 1 of the model, I examined the main effects of leader rhetoric, leader prototypicality and group permeability onto self-uncertainty, $R^2_{adjusted} = 0.03$, $F(3, 621) = 8.17$ $p < .001$. There was no significant main effect of leader rhetoric, β = -.05, SE = .06, t = -1.19, p = .24, 95% CI [-.12, .03], or leader prototypicality, β = .03, SE = 0.04, t = .71, p = .48, 95% CI [-.05, .11]. There was a significant main effect of group permeability such that the more impermeable people perceived Albertan group boundaries to be, the more self-uncertain people felt, β = .19, SE = 0.04, t = 4.82, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.11, .27].

I included the three two-way interactions in step 2, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $F(6, 618) = 5.84$, $p < .001$. The two-way interaction between leader rhetoric and leader prototypicality was statistically significant, $\beta = -0.08$, $SE = .04$, $t = -2.08$, $p = .04$, 95% CI [-.15, -.004]. The interaction between leader rhetoric and group permeability was also significant, $\beta = -.09$, $SE = .04$, $t = -2.24$, $p = .03$, 95% CI [-.17, -.01].

In step 3, I included the three-way interaction between leader rhetoric, leader prototypicality, and group permeability, $\Delta R^2 < .001$, $F(7, 617) = 5.01$, $p < .001$. The three-way interaction was not statistically significant, $\beta = -.01$, $SE = .04$, $t = -.23$, $p = .82$, 95% CI [-.08, .06]. There was no support for Hypothesis 1.

I decomposed the statistically significant two-way interactions, beginning with the interaction between leader rhetoric and leader prototypicality. Leader rhetoric did not significantly predict self-uncertainty when leader prototypicality was low, $\beta = .03$, $SE = .06$, $t = 0.59$, $p = .55$, 95% CI [-.08, .14]. When leader prototypicality was high, self-uncertainty was higher when the leader used discontinuity rhetoric compared to continuity rhetoric, $\beta = -.13$, $SE = 0.11$, $t = -2.53$, $p = .02$, 95% CI [-.24, -.02]. See Figure 1. Breaking down the two-way interaction between leader rhetoric and group permeability revealed that, when group permeability was low, self-uncertainty was higher when the leader used discontinuity rhetoric compared to continuity rhetoric, $\beta = -.14$, SE = .06, $t = -2.45$, $p = .02$, 95% CI [-.24 -.03]. When group permeability was high, leader rhetoric did not significantly predict self-uncertainty, $\beta = .04$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = .68$, $p = .50$, 95% CI [-.07 .15]. See Figure 2.

Social identity uncertainty. In step 1 of the model, I examined the main effects of leader rhetoric, leader prototypicality and group permeability onto self-uncertainty, $R^2_{adjusted} = 0.03$, $F(3, 619) = 6.64$, $p < .001$. There was no significant main effect of leader rhetoric, $\beta = -.05$, $SE = .04$,

t = -1.27, p = .20, 95% CI [-.13, .03], or leader prototypicality, β = .03, SE = 0.04, t = -.72, p = .47, 95% CI [-11, .05]. Group permeability positively predicted social identity uncertainty, β = .17, SE = 0.04, t = 4.27 p < .001, 95% CI [.09, .25], such that the impermeable group boundaries were perceived to be, the more participants reported social identity uncertainty. I included the three two-way interactions in step 2, ΔR^2 < .001, $F(6, 616) = 3.85$, p < .001. None of the two-way interactions were statistically significant.

In step 3, I included the predicted three-way interaction between leader rhetoric, leader prototypicality, and group permeability, ΔR^2 < .001, F(7, 617) = 5.01, p < .001. The three-way interaction was not statistically significant, β = -.02, SE = .04, t = -.59, p = .56, 95% CI [-.09, .05]. There was no support for Hypothesis 2.

Group entitativity. In step 1, I entered the main effects of leader rhetoric, leader prototypicality, and group permeability onto group entitativity, R^2_{adjusted} = .13, $F(3, 617) = 31.03$, p < .001. There was a marginally significant main effect of leader rhetoric, β = -.07, SE = 0.04, t = -1.83, p = .07, 95% CI [-.14, .01]. Leader prototypicality positively predicted perceptions of group entitativity, β = -.07, SE = 0.04, t = -1.83, p = .07, 95% CI [-.14, .01].

In step 2, I included the three two-way interactions, ΔR^2 < .001, $F(6, 614) = 15.94$, p < .001. None of the three two-way interactions reached statistical significance.

In step 3, I included the three-way interaction, ΔR^2 < .01, $F(7, 613) = 7.62$, p < .001, which improved model fit. The three-way interaction between leader rhetoric, leader prototypicality, and group permeability was significant, β = .08, SE = .04, t = 2.33, p = .02, 95% CI [.02, .15].

Simple slopes tests decomposed the three-way interaction. When group permeability was high, there was no significant difference between leader rhetoric conditions when the leader was

low in prototypicality, β = .10, *SE* = .08, *t* = 1.36, *p* = .17, 95% CI [-.05, .25]. When leader prototypicality was high, perceptions of group entitativity were higher when the leader used discontinuity compared to continuity rhetoric, but this effect was marginally significant, β = -.13, *SE* = .07, *t* = -1.85, *p* = .06, 95% CI [-.27 .008]. See Figure 3.

When group permeability was low and the leader was low in prototypicality, participants perceived more group entitativity in the discontinuity compared to continuity rhetoric condition, β = .17, *SE* = .08, *t* = -2.21, *p* = .03, 95% CI [-.32, -.02]. When leader prototypicality was high, however, there was not a statistically significant difference in group entitativity between the discontinuity and continuity rhetoric conditions, β = -.08, *SE* = .08, *t* = -1.03, *p* = .31, 95% CI [-.22, .07]. See Figure 4.

Leader support. The only expected finding I had for leader support was that perceptions of leader prototypicality would strongly positively predict leader support. I examined the roles of group permeability and leader rhetoric and the possible two- and three-way interactions exploratorily.

I entered the main effects and interactions simultaneously, $R^2_{\text{adjusted}} = 0.58$, $F(7, 607) = 120.16$, $p < .001$. There was a main effect of leader prototypicality onto leader support, β = .65, *SE* = .10, *t* = 6.79, *p* = < .001, 95% CI [.46, .84]. Perceptions of leader prototypicality were strongly associated with leader support, replicating the core hypothesis of the social identity theory of leadership (see Barreto & Hogg, 2017). There were no other significant main effects or interactions.

Study 2 Discussion

The findings of Study 2 were largely surprising. Firstly, there were no significant interactions between the independent variables onto social identity uncertainty or leader support.

There was a main effect such that lower perceptions of group permeability were associated with more social identity uncertainty, and perceptions of leader prototypicality were associated with stronger leader support. The latter finding is in line with prior work on the social identity approach to leadership (e.g., Barreto & Hogg, 2017; Hogg et al., 2012; Steffens et al., 2021). The main effect of group permeability on social identity uncertainty potentially indicates that low group permeability may enhance the salience of existing threats to the clarity of the group identity, although there is no evidence in the present experiment that the leader rhetoric conditions or low perceptions of leader prototypicality contributed to this effect.

The most surprising findings regarded the two- and three-way interactions onto self-uncertainty and group entitativity. Social identity discontinuity rhetoric predicted greater self-uncertainty compared to continuity rhetoric only when the leader was perceived to be high in prototypicality. For those whom Rachel Notley or Danielle Smith was a prototypical representation of Alberta, Notley/Smith herself represented the progression of Albertan culture, values, and ideals into Alberta's post-election future (Hogg et al., 2012; Reicher et al., 2005). The possibility of an outgroup electoral victory may inherently threaten the progression of Albertan identity, as represented by a prototypical leader, into the future. Discontinuity rhetoric imparted by a prototypical leader may emphasize an already present Albertan identity discontinuity threat and contribute to greater feelings of self-uncertainty than rhetoric that promotes a sense of continuity between pre- and post-election Alberta, even in the event of an outgroup victory. This proposition is supported by the relatively high perceptions of a social identity discontinuity threat in the continuity rhetoric condition ($M = 5.63$) and discontinuity rhetoric condition ($M = 6.18$) in Study 2 compared to Study 1. This an interesting finding in

relation to the literature on leader prototypicality and perceptions of continuity in collective change contexts.

Prior research demonstrated that perceptions of leader prototypicality "substitute" for continuity rhetoric that constructs organizational change as a progression of the organization's culture, values, and ideals. This research finds that change support remains stable and high when the change leader is group prototypical regardless of whether the leader uses continuity or discontinuity rhetoric to describe a change initiative that presumably is a threat to the organization's identity continuity (Syfers et al., 2023c; van Knippenberg et al., 2008). Resistance to organizational change is often rooted in discontinuity threats, which create uncertainty about the impact of change on the organizational identity. Change support can indicate that follower self-uncertainty is being successfully managed or resolved by perceptions of social identity continuity (Venus et al., 2019). Thus, I did not test predictions for prototypical leaders because this prior work postulates that perceptions of leader prototypicality are relied upon to foster perceptions of social identity continuity in contexts where change threatens social identity continuity. Leader prototypicality itself should be sufficient to resolve follower self-uncertainty that arises in the face of discontinuity threats, even those communicated by the leader. The finding that follower self-uncertainty was higher when a prototypical leader used discontinuity compared to continuity rhetoric texturizes this theoretical proposition. Political elections are highly unique change contexts because leaders often engage in identity destabilization techniques, wherein leaders will position their opponent as "defiling, devaluing, dividing, and destroying" the legitimate group identity (Maskor et al., 2021, pp. 1). Political leaders may construct group prototypes in election contexts to prescribe the normative perception that the presence of political opponents is an inherent threat to the group's identity continuity. In this

way, perceptions of leader prototypicality may contribute to the acceptance of a leaders' discontinuity rhetoric as a legitimate representation of reality, thus fueling feelings of self-uncertainty.

The two-way interaction between leader rhetoric and group permeability provided partial support for Hypothesis 1, because leader discontinuity rhetoric produced more self-uncertainty than continuity rhetoric only when Albertans perceived low group permeability. I postulated that low group permeability (compared to high) would enhance the salience of the group identity as a defining feature of the self-concept (Reynolds et al., 2004). If the group identity is perceived to be high in social identity discontinuity, then resulting self-uncertainty should be higher when group members perceive low than high group permeability. This theoretical proposition was supported. I had expected that this relationship would only be statistically significant for a non-prototypical leader. Instead, leader prototypicality and group permeability separately interacted with leader rhetoric to predict self-uncertainty. It is entirely possible that leader prototypicality and group permeability do not interact together with leader rhetoric to predict self-uncertainty. It is also possible that because leader prototypicality positively predicts perceptions of entitativity, that perceptions of group permeability are influenced by perceptions of entitativity (e.g., Lickel et al., 2000). Thus, leader prototypicality may not interact with group permeability to predict self-uncertainty/entitativity/social identity uncertainty because the positive association between leader prototypicality and group entitativity makes Alberta seem less permeable overall when the leader is perceived to be highly prototypical. However, I do not have a strong frame of reference to support or refute these possibilities because Study 1 had null findings. One possibility is that the measure of group permeability in Study 2 is relatively imprecise being that it is only one

item. Therefore, I manipulated group permeability in Study 3 so that the obstacles to exiting group membership were clearly articulated and would be consistent across participants.

The most surprising findings came from decomposing the three-way interaction between leader rhetoric, leader prototypicality, and group permeability onto perceptions of group entitativity. When group permeability was high and the leader was high in prototypicality, perceptions of entitativity were higher when the leader used discontinuity than continuity rhetoric. When group permeability was low, discontinuity rhetoric used by a leader low in prototypicality actually predicted greater perceptions of group entitativity than continuity rhetoric. I did not expect that perceptions of group entitativity would be higher in conditions where leaders used discontinuity compared to continuity rhetoric, particularly because perceptions of continuity positively predict perceptions of group entitativity (Sani et al., 2007; Sani et al., 2008). Thus, group permeability appears to have some influence on the epistemic value of the group, i.e., the ability of the group to be relied upon for clear and unambiguous information about the self, in contexts where leader rhetoric emphasizes a social identity discontinuity threat.

It is unexpected that group entitativity is higher when non-prototypical and prototypical leaders use discontinuity rhetoric (depending on high or low group permeability, respectively). It is possible that my hypothesis that a non-prototypical leader who used discontinuity rhetoric compared to continuity rhetoric would reduce perceptions of group entitativity is incorrect. Perhaps in an election context with a looming social identity discontinuity threat (i.e., possible outgroup electoral victory), group members do not trust that a non-prototypical leader can defend their group's continuity even when the leader uses continuity rhetoric. Continuity rhetoric in this context may, in fact, call attention to the inability of a low prototypicality leader to properly lead

the group into a future where the core culture, values, and ideals of the group remain intact, particularly so when group members perceive that group permeability is low. If this is the case, continuity rhetoric may not be a reliable strategy for non-prototypical leaders to demonstrate that they can maintain or enhance factors, like entitativity, that contribute to the epistemic value of the group outside of organizational change contexts.

It is challenging to discuss possible theoretical explanations for these unexpected findings without being able to compare findings to those of similar studies. Election contexts have unique sociopolitical factors that are not easily reproducible in future elections or in the laboratory (see Syfers et al., 2021). The surprising findings may in part be due to factors that were unique to the 2023 Alberta Provincial Election. I designed Study 3 to manipulate all three independent variables in the same university context as Study 1. Manipulating group permeability in Study 3 will also allow me to improve upon the construct validity of the measure used in Study 2 by having a more precise definition of low and high permeability. Moreover, examining these relationships in a non-election university context will remove any unique sociopolitical factors that I did not account for that may have influenced Study 2's results.

Chapter IV: Study 3

Study 3 is a between subjects' experimental design with three manipulated independent variables: leader rhetoric (continuity vs. discontinuity), leader prototypicality (prototypical vs. non-prototypical), and group permeability (low vs. high). I designed Study 3 to test three hypotheses: (H1) When group permeability is low, self-uncertainty will be higher when a non-prototypical leader uses discontinuity rather than continuity rhetoric (H2) When group permeability is low, social identity uncertainty will be higher when a non-prototypical leader uses discontinuity rather than continuity rhetoric under conditions of low group permeability (H3) When group permeability is low, perceived group entitativity will be higher when a non-prototypical leader uses continuity rather than discontinuity rhetoric under conditions of low group permeability.

Method

Design

Study 3 is a 2 (Continuity rhetoric vs. Discontinuity rhetoric) x 2 (Prototypical leader vs. Non-prototypical leader) x 2 (Low group permeability x High group permeability) between-subjects experimental design with leader rhetoric and leader prototypicality as manipulated independent variables, and self-uncertainty as the main dependent variable. Group entitativity and group identity uncertainty are exploratory dependent variables. I collected the data via Qualtrics on lab computers in the Group Processes and Leadership lab at the University of Alberta.

Participants

I recruited 326 participants (man = 115; women = 207; non-binary = 2; gender fluid = 1; prefer not to say = 1; M_{age} = 19.25) through the Psychology Research Participation Pool. The

majority of participants were first (n = 215) and second (n = 68) year students (M_{age} = 19.24, SD_{age} = 2.26).

Materials

The only difference from Study 1 was the addition of the group permeability manipulation. Otherwise, the leader rhetoric and leader prototypicality manipulations were identical to Study 1. The measurement of self-uncertainty, social identity uncertainty, and group entitativity were also identical to Study 1.

Group permeability manipulation. Group permeability was manipulated using a vignette that was a fabricated article excerpt from The Edmonton Journal, a news outlet that is local to residents of the city in which the University of Alberta resides (adapted from Dechesne et al., 2000). The article excerpt ostensibly reported research from the Canadian University Research Council (a fabricated group) that concluded that once a student is enrolled in a four-year degree program, that it is extremely difficult (low permeability) or extremely easy (high permeability) to transfer to a different university to complete their degree. See Appendix E for the full text manipulations.

Procedure

The procedure was identical to Study 1, except that students were exposed to group permeability manipulation after indicating their level of identification with the university and directly before being exposed to the leader prototypicality manipulation.

Sensitivity power analysis. I conducted a sensitivity power analysis using G*Power. The minimum effect size for N = 326 at α = 0.05 with 80% power is η_p^2 = .04. This analysis indicates that this study has sufficient power to detect a small medium effect size comparable to those

found in similar research (e.g., Venus et al., 2019; van Knippenberg et al., 2008; Smeekes et al., 2023).

Results

Manipulation checks. A one sample *t*-test found that mean university identification (M = 6.55, SD = 1.31) was significantly greater than the midpoint of the scale (midpoint = 5), t(325) = 21.32, $p < .001$. Perceptions of social identity discontinuity were submitted to a three-way regression examining the main effects, two-way interactions and three-way interaction between leader rhetoric, leader prototypicality, and group permeability. There was one significant main effect of leader rhetoric, such that perceptions of discontinuity were higher when the leader used discontinuity rhetoric (M = 5.94, SD = 1.21) compared to continuity rhetoric (M = 3.83, SD = 1.44), $F(1, 318) = 51.94$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .39$.

Perceptions of leader prototypicality were submitted to a three-way regression examining the main effects, two-way interactions and three-way interaction between leader rhetoric, leader prototypicality, and group permeability. There were significantly higher perceptions of leader prototypicality in the prototypical leader condition (M = 6.24, SD = 1.31) than the non-prototypical leader condition (M = 5.43, SD = 1.47), $F(1, 318) = 7.95$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$.

I did not use a Likert scale to measure the effectiveness of the group permeability manipulation. I asked students to recall the three reasons why it would be extremely difficult (low permeability) or extremely easy (high permeability) to transfer to a new university to complete the rest of their degree, as an attempt to strengthen the effect of the manipulation. The group permeability manipulation was adapted from prior work where it was validated (Dechesne et al., 2000).

Self-uncertainty. The predicted three-way interaction between leader rhetoric, leader prototypicality, and group permeability, was not statistically significant, $F(1, 318) = 7.95$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. There was a statistically significant two-way interaction between leader rhetoric and group permeability, $F(1, 317) = 5.74$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. There were no other significant interactions or main effects.

Simple effects tests decomposed the significant two-way interaction between leader rhetoric and group permeability onto self-uncertainty. When the leader used continuity rhetoric, self-uncertainty was higher when group permeability was low compared to high, $F(1, 321) = 4.73$, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. When group permeability was low, self-uncertainty was significantly higher when the leader used continuity rhetoric compared to discontinuity rhetoric, $F(1, 321) = 4.05$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. No other simple effects comparisons reached statistical significance.

Social identity uncertainty. The predicted three-way interaction onto the social identity uncertainty scale (including both identity uncertainty and member uncertainty) was not statistically significant, $F(1, 317) = 0.17$, $p = .68$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$. There were also no main effects or two-way interactions that reached statistical significance. There was no support for Hypothesis 2.

For exploratory purposes, I divided the social identity uncertainty scale into the identity uncertainty and member uncertainty subscales and examined the three-way interaction onto each subscale. There were no main effects, two-way interactions, or three-way interactions that reached statistical significance.

Group entitativity. The predicted three-way interaction onto perceptions of group entitativity was not statistically significant, $F(1, 317) = 0.06$, $p = .80$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$. There were no other significant main effects or two-way interactions. There was no support for Hypothesis 3.

Study 3 Discussion

The only statistically significant findings in Study 3 revealed a two-way interaction between group permeability and leader rhetoric onto self-uncertainty. Similar to Study 1, which used a similar design, there were significant findings for group entitativity or social identity uncertainty. When group permeability was low, students felt more self-uncertain when their leader used continuity compared to discontinuity rhetoric. There was no statistically significant difference in self-uncertainty between rhetoric conditions when group permeability was high. These findings are interesting in relation to Study 2, where self-uncertainty was higher when a leader used discontinuity compared to continuity rhetoric when group permeability was low. Although Study 3 findings did not provide support for any of my hypotheses, the findings are consistent with my proposition that perceptions of low group permeability enhance the effect of leader rhetoric onto self-uncertainty. Though effects of leader rhetoric and leader prototypicality onto self-uncertainty are not consistent with my hypotheses, which indicates that although group permeability may enhance present threats to the epistemic value of the group (i.e., self-uncertainty and group entitativity), that social identity discontinuity rhetoric is not always a stronger source of epistemic threat than social identity continuity, nor does leader prototypicality always buffer against the impact of social identity discontinuity rhetoric onto self-uncertainty (Study 2). In fact, the relationship between social identity continuity and self-uncertainty is more complex than I expected.

The University of Alberta is a large school with over 35,000 undergraduate students currently enrolled. Although university identification was high, this identification may be fostered by student's identification with their department, their major, and other groups, or organizations they identify with which are projected onto the University of Alberta superordinate identity (Wenzel et al., 2007). Therefore, students' clarity about the undergraduate identity used

in the present research may be low. The rhetoric conditions did not provide details about the prototypical group attributes that were continuous or discontinuous. The continuity condition, for example, included phrases like “We have only strengthened the intellectual and professional qualities that define what it means to be a UofA student” and “We can be confident that the large structural changes going on at the university will have no disruptive impact on our collective identity.” These findings introduce the interesting possibility that continuity rhetoric, when the group prototype is unclear/ambiguous, may actually contribute to feelings of self-uncertainty. Even though students have received information from a leader that their group identity is high in social identity continuity, this information may function to project their ambiguous sense of the undergraduate group prototype into the future, rather than resolving uncertainty about what their undergraduate identity will look like (and by definition, part of their self-concept) by progressing a clear sense of self into the future. Messages of continuity about an unclear group prototype may project into the future an ambiguous and uncertain sense of self that is derived from an ambiguous and uncertain group identity, rather than projecting a clear and temporally situated sense of self into the future.

There was only a statistically significant difference in self-uncertainty across rhetoric conditions when group permeability was low. My proposition that group permeability would enhance the salience of information that undermines certainty about the self-concept appears partially supported by the findings, even though it was the continuity rather than the discontinuity rhetoric condition that was the source of the most self-uncertainty when group permeability was low.

The findings from Study 3 indicate that the relationship between social identity (dis)continuity rhetoric and group permeability onto self-uncertainty may be moderated by group

identity clarity. Group identity clarity could be conceptualized in multiple ways, including perceptions of social identity uncertainty about the definition of the group identity, or perceptions of group entitativity. Social identity continuity rhetoric may only preserve the self-uncertainty reducing function of the group identity when the group is highly entitative or low in social identity uncertainty. Group identities that are ambiguous, unclear, and loosely defined cannot resolve uncertainty as effectively as highly entitative groups, for example (Hogg et al., 2007; Hogg, 2004, 2021, 2023). Indeed, projecting unclear and loosely defined group prototypical attributes into the future may, in fact, be threatening to group members because it focuses attention on a future characterized by more uncertainty (see Roth et al., 2017), particularly so when group members perceive that they cannot exit the group to seek membership in a group with higher epistemic value.

There are several limitations to the design of Study 3. Firstly, university identities are meant to be temporary. Therefore, belonging to a temporary but low permeability group is not a life sentence, as students can expect that they will eventually graduate and move on to new group memberships in their post-grad plans. A major limitation is that I did not include a self-report manipulation check for the effectiveness of the group permeability manipulation on students' perceptions of difficulty in exiting the group (this manipulation has been validated in previous work – Dechesne et al., 2000). Instead, I included a recall task where students listed the reasons why their university identity was easy or difficult to exit during the duration of their four-year degree. This was intended to amplify the effect of the manipulation because of the temporary nature of the group membership (see Fayant et al., 2017). The study's findings were in line with my expectations for group permeability which provided some support that the manipulation

worked as expected. Regardless, it is still a major limitation to not validate the manipulation within the experiment.

Similar to Study 1, the present experiment included information about an anonymous university leader whose job was to represent undergraduate student interests. Participants may not have considered this leader to be a "true" leader, which could explain why leader prototypicality did not interact with the other independent variables onto self-uncertainty. A limitation in using university student samples is that much of the information has to be fabricated, including the identity of the leader because it is unethical to provide false information about real student leaders at the university. While this is standard procedure for social identity-based studies on leadership using similar samples (e.g., Rast et al., 2012; Rast et al., 2016; Giessner et al., 2009; van Knippenberg et al., 2008), it is a limitation that should be addressed by attempting to replicate student sample findings in real world contexts with real leaders.

Chapter V: General Discussion and Conclusion

At their best, leaders are the focal point for their group's positive social identity and are invested with trust that their leadership will contribute to the progression of the group's culture, values, ideals into the future. By constructing a clear and temporally continuous positive sense of social identity, leaders can provide a powerful resource for their followers to rely upon to mitigate aversive feelings of uncertainty when coping with large scale or disruptive change in the group (van Knippenberg, 2011; van Knippenberg, 2008; Venus et al., 2019). It may be particularly important for leaders to provide this epistemic function for group members for whom the group is a highly salient and accessible source of self-definition because there are significant obstacles preventing them from exiting the group.

However, historical, and present-day examples demonstrate that many leaders choose to accentuate how current or potential change will force a rupture in the progression of the group identity into the future. I posited that leaders who used social identity discontinuity rhetoric would produce greater feelings of self-uncertainty amongst their group members relative to using continuity rhetoric. I hypothesized that the effect of social identity discontinuity rhetoric onto self-uncertainty would be significant only for non-prototypical leaders because prototypical leaders are naturally invested with trust that they will protect and promote social identity continuity (Platow et al., 2006; Steffens et al., 2021; van Knippenberg, 2011; van Knippenberg, 2008). I further expected that this relationship would be strongest when the group had impermeable boundaries. I was also interested in whether these same conditions would accentuate perceptions of social identity uncertainty and lower perceptions of group entitativity. The results of the three experiments that I designed to test these propositions did not support my

hypotheses and revealed some unexpected findings that have implications for future research on this topic.

Summary of findings

Study 1 manipulated leader prototypicality (prototypical vs. non-prototypical) and leader rhetoric (continuity vs. discontinuity rhetoric) and measured perceptions of self-uncertainty, social identity uncertainty, and group entitativity in a sample of university students. There were no statistically significant main effects, two-way interactions, or three-way interaction onto any of the dependent variables. Study 1 did not provide support for my hypotheses.

Study 2 manipulated leader rhetoric (continuity vs. discontinuity rhetoric) and measured the degree to which Albertans perceived their party leader (Rachel Notley or Danielle Smith) as being prototypical of Alberta, and the degree to which they perceived significant obstacles preventing them from leaving Alberta and living elsewhere. Study 2 did not support my hypotheses but revealed some interesting findings regarding self-uncertainty and group entitativity. When Albertans perceived their party leader to be high in prototypicality, they reported more self-uncertainty when their leader used discontinuity than continuity rhetoric. There was no significant difference in self-uncertainty between discontinuity and continuity rhetoric conditions for a low prototypicality leader. Self-uncertainty was also higher when a leader used discontinuity than continuity rhetoric under conditions of low group permeability, but this was not statistically significant when group permeability was high. Interestingly, perceptions of group entitativity were higher when a low prototypicality leader used continuity compared to discontinuity rhetoric when group permeability was low. There was also a weak and marginally significant effect such that perceptions of entitativity were higher when a prototypical leader used discontinuity compared to continuity rhetoric when group permeability was high.

Study 3 manipulated leader prototypicality (prototypical vs. non-prototypical), leader rhetoric (continuity vs. discontinuity rhetoric) and group permeability (low vs. high) in a sample of university students. Interestingly, Study 3 findings revealed no support for my hypotheses. There was only a significant two-way interaction onto self-uncertainty between leader rhetoric and group permeability. When group permeability was low, participants reported more self-uncertainty when the leader used continuity compared to discontinuity rhetoric, and this difference was not statistically significant when group permeability was high. The independent variables did not influence perceptions of social identity uncertainty or group entitativity.

Theoretical implications

Studies 2 and 3 both revealed a two-way interaction between leader rhetoric and group permeability onto self-uncertainty. Self-uncertainty was higher when a leader used discontinuity rhetoric when perceptions of group permeability were low in Study 2. In contrast, self-uncertainty was higher when a leader used continuity rhetoric when group permeability was low in Study 3. These differences may be influenced by the clarity of the group prototype. Study 2 used Albertan group membership whereas Study 3 used undergraduate UofA group membership. Central to successful political leaders' campaign strategies is the negotiation of a shared identity between themselves and their current and potential/target supporters through a variety of public appearances, including interviews, debates, rallies, and social media (Haslam et al., 2020; Hogg et al., 2012; Reicher et al., 2005). At the University of Alberta, student leadership campaigns typically do not involve highly publicized appearances, much media coverage, or wide social media outreach. Undergraduate student leaders have a much smaller platform from which to engage in identity entrepreneurship than political leaders. Therefore, students' understanding of the definition of the undergraduate student body identity may be at baseline, relatively unclear

especially in relation to Albertan provincial identity during an election campaign. If this is true, continuity focused rhetoric in the university context may largely function to project an unclear identity into the future. In this way, continuity rhetoric may actually be more threatening to the self-concept than discontinuity rhetoric, because it accentuates the uncertainty that one derives from their identity as an undergraduate student (see Roth et al., 2017; Obradovic & Bowe, 2020).

A finding from Study 2 that is somewhat consistent with this proposition is that self-uncertainty was higher when a leader who was perceived to be high in prototypicality used discontinuity compared to continuity rhetoric when perceptions of group permeability were low. Perceptions that a leader is a prototypical representation of Alberta necessitates an understanding of the definition of Albertan group identity because a prototypical leader functions as a reference point for defining what it means to be an Albertan (Haslam et al., 2020; Hogg et al., 2012; Reicher et al., 2005). Thus, perceptions of leader prototypicality may accentuate the threat that discontinuity poses to the uncertainty-reducing function of the group identity because the prototypical leader is a focal point of the group who clearly represents the cultural and normative values, customs, and ideals that are at risk of disruption. This appears to be of most significance when group permeability is low, which should enhance the salience of the impact of social identity discontinuity onto self-conceptual uncertainty. Similarly, when group permeability was low, perceptions of group entitativity were lower when a non-prototypical leader used continuity rather than discontinuity. This may reflect the lack of trust group members have in a non-prototypical leader to progress the values, ideals, and customs that define Albertan identity as a cohesive and distinct, i.e., entitative group (e.g., van Knippenberg, 2011; van Knippenberg et al., 2008; Syfers et al., 2023b).

Taken together, social identity discontinuity rhetoric may be less threatening to self-conceptual certainty than continuity rhetoric to the extent that the group prototype is unclear and/or the leader at the helm of the group is perceived to be low/non-prototypical. The latter proposition is particularly interesting in comparison to recent work published by Syfers et al. (2023), which hypothesized and found across three experiments (that sampled University of Alberta undergraduate students), that amongst students who were primed to be high in self-uncertainty, change support was higher when a non-prototypical leader constructed a university restructuring initiative as promoting (continuity rhetoric condition) vs. disrupting (discontinuity rhetoric condition) the progression of the UofA undergraduate student identity into the future. Syfers et al. proposed that non-prototypical leaders who used continuity rhetoric to describe a change initiative were providing uncertainty reducing information to self-uncertain group members, which would reduce resistance to change that was rooted in the perception that the post-change group identity would be discontinuous with the pre-change group identity. On the surface, the findings in Study 2 and Study 3 appear to somewhat contradict Syfers et al.'s findings. However, Syfers et al. did not consider the role of group permeability. It appears that considering group members perceptions of their mobility between groups may affect the nature of the relationship between (dis)continuity rhetoric, leader prototypicality, and epistemic related outcomes like self-uncertainty and group entitativity. When people are made aware of their deep and potentially inescapable ties to the events that affect their group, continuity rhetoric may only contribute to feelings of certainty about their self-concepts the extent that the group identity is clearly and unambiguously defined.

Future directions and limitations

This work illuminated several directions for future research that address its limitations. First, indicators of group identity clarity, like social identity uncertainty and group entitativity may be introduced as moderators of the relationship between leader (dis)continuity rhetoric and group permeability or leader prototypicality onto self-uncertainty. For example, continuity rhetoric may reduce self-uncertainty relative to discontinuity rhetoric amongst members of a low permeability and highly entitative group. Future work may also expand upon the conceptualization of group permeability used in the present work. Group permeability was defined in this work as the perceived inability for members to successfully exit the group and join a new group within the same domain (e.g., place of residence, university). Group permeability was traditionally defined by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) as the subjective perception (which can be related to genuine structural relations between groups in society) of a person's ability to engage in upward mobility as an individual. Thus, group permeability traditionally involved status perceptions between groups. For high status groups, high permeability can be threatening because it allows for an influx of low status group members to join the high-status group, which can threaten the group's positive social identity (Ellemers, 1993). However, high group permeability may also be threatening to the extent that an influx of outgroup members undermines a clear sense of identity for the ingroup (See Anjewierden et al., forthcoming). Future research may examine how different conceptualizations of group permeability (e.g., influx of new members vs. inability for current members to leave the group) may affect the relationship between leader (dis)continuity rhetoric, leader prototypicality, and self-uncertainty.

Future work may also examine these relationships in more diverse samples. The present research is limited due to its use of mainly university students and Albertan residents during a

controversial political election. I would like to see future research of this nature use groups like nations, organizations, ethnicity, age, sports teams, etc. Each group membership is characterized by unique social identities, social contexts, and relations with other groups. Additional important moderators of the relationships examined in this thesis may be revealed by conducting similar work on a variety of group types.

Another limitation to the present work is that it did not use a longitudinal design. The experiments captured a moment in time where self-uncertainty was affected by an interaction between leader rhetoric and leader prototypicality or group permeability. Employing a longitudinal design that examines the progression of the group before and after the cause of the discontinuity (e.g., election, organizational change, government policy, etc.) would answer theoretical questions such as how do prototypical leaders who use discontinuity rhetoric manage their group members' self-uncertainty? Does self-uncertainty eventually result in disidentification with a group, even if group boundaries are impermeable? Can a non-prototypical leader, over time and through identity entrepreneurship, establish themselves as a prototypical defender of their group's social identity continuity?

Conclusion

People seek clear and unambiguous information from their important social group memberships about their identity and their place in the world. Leaders are figureheads who represent their groups to the world and engage in rhetoric and behaviors aimed at negotiating a strong shared sense of identity between themselves and their followers. It is important for social psychologists and leadership researchers to understand when leaders' rhetoric disrupts the ability for the group membership to provide self-uncertainty reducing functions because of the implications of self-uncertainty for worsening political and intergroup dynamics. This thesis

presented some evidence that social identity discontinuity and continuity rhetoric can both, under conditions of low group permeability, contribute to feelings of self-uncertainty. However, the role of leader prototypicality and group prototype clarity as moderators of this relationship needs further research to be properly understood.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for key Study 1 variables

Variable	α	*M*(*SD*)	1	2	3	4	5
University identification	.87	6.40(1.35)	-	-			
Identity discontinuity	.87	4.76(1.38)	-.07	-	-	-	-
Leader prototypicality	.81	5.76(1.32)	.16**	-.12*	-	-	-
Self-uncertainty	.93	5.53(1.94)	-.01	.14**	.01	-	-
Social identity uncertainty	.91	4.99(1.49)	-.30***	.29***	-.17**	.42***	-
Group entitativity	.68	5.13(1.30)	.40***	-.14**	.37***	-.10	-.34***

Note. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for key Study 2 variables

Variable	α	*M*(*SD*)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Social identity discontinuity	.97	5.80(1.89)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Leader prototypicality	.97	6.61(1.67)	-0.12**	-	-	-	-	-
Group permeability	-	6.34(2.65)	.09	-.08	-	-	-	-
Self-uncertainty	.94	4.55(1.93)	.35***	-.10*	.22***	-	-	-
Social identity uncertainty	.91	4.58(1.61)	.36***	-.18**	.17***	.48***	-	-
Group entitativity	.94	5.93(1.65)	.23***	.29***	-.11*	.04	-.28***	-
Leader support	.98	7.05(1.69)	.12*	.79***	-.04	-.06	.12**	.12*

Note. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; **$p < .001$.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics for key Study 3 variables

Variable	α	*M*(*SD*)	1	2	3	4	5
University identification	.87	6.551(.31)	-	-			
Identity discontinuity	.84	4.89(1.70)	-.16**	-	-	-	-
Leader prototypicality	.82	5.81(1.45)	.16**	-.18**	-	-	-
Self-uncertainty	.92	5.39(2.11)	-.04	-.04	.01	-	-
Social identity uncertainty	.94	4.79(1.59)	-.28***	.12*	-.13*	.54***	-
Group entitativity	.86	5.29(1.48)	.39***	.34***	.23***	.01	-.24***

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Figure 1

Self-uncertainty predicted by leader rhetoric and leader prototypicality in Study 2

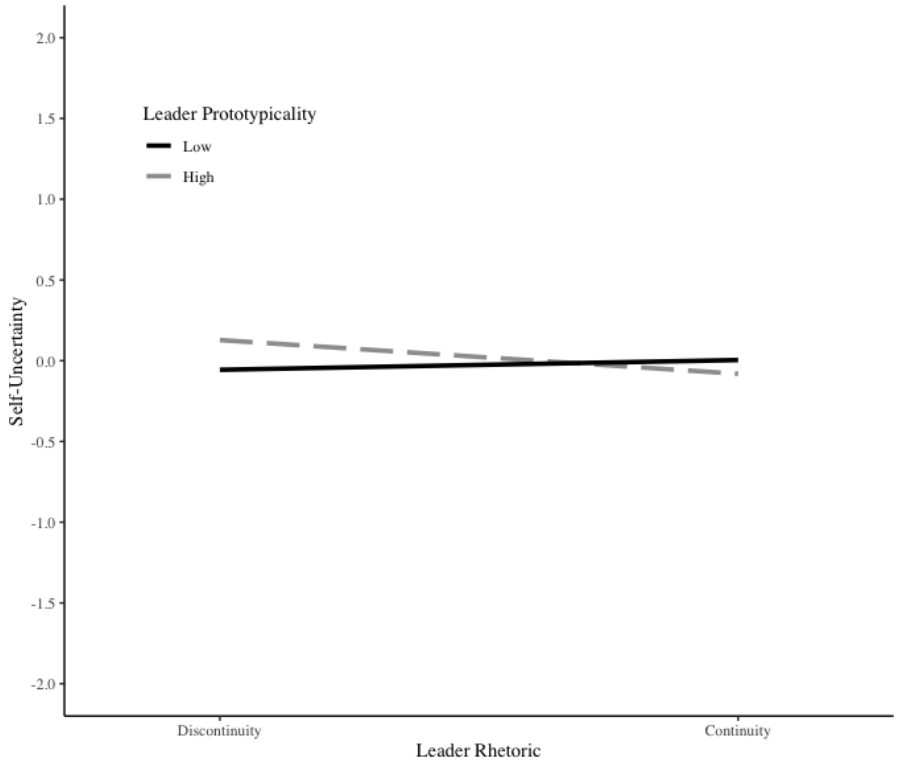


Figure 2

Self-uncertainty predicted by leader rhetoric and group permeability in Study 2

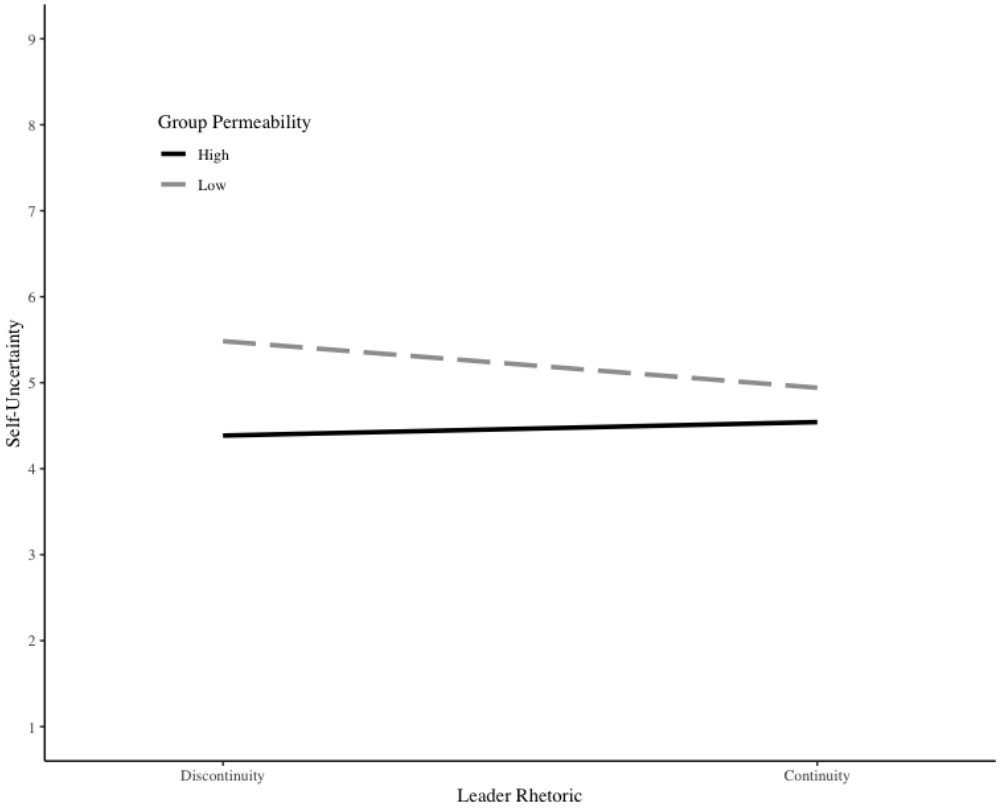


Figure 3

Perceptions of Albertan group entitativity predicted by leader rhetoric and moderated by leader prototypicality when group permeability is high (+1SD) in Study 2

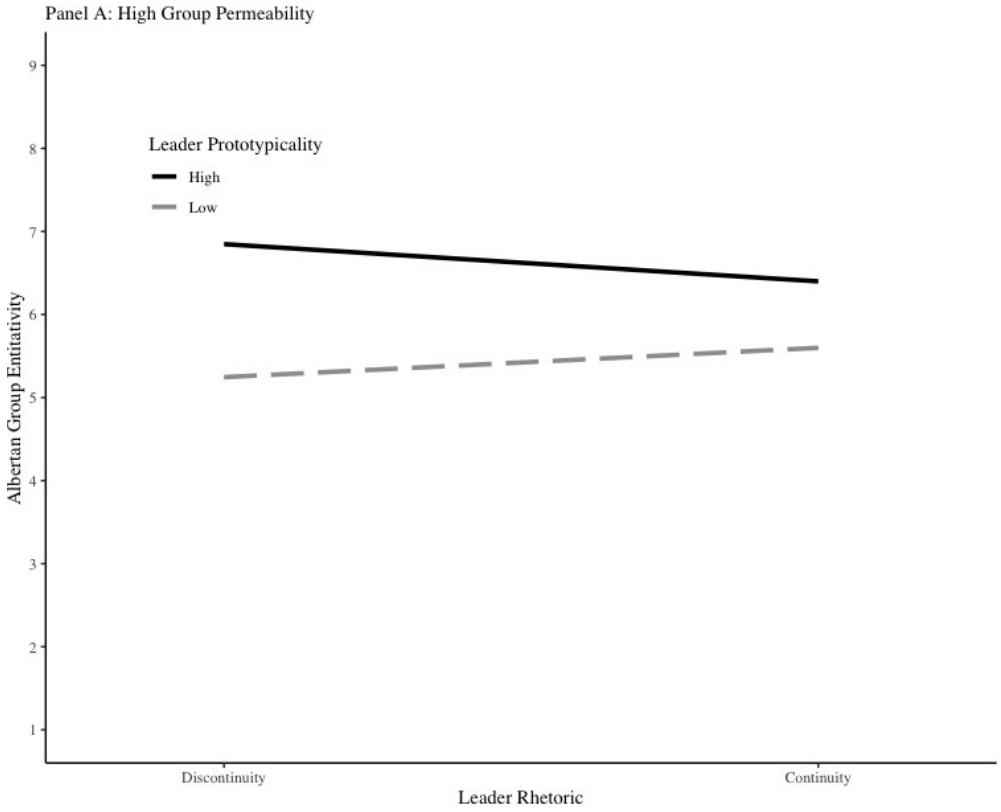


Figure 4

Perceptions of Albertan group entitativity predicted by leader rhetoric and moderated by leader prototypicality when group permeability is low (-1SD) in Study 2

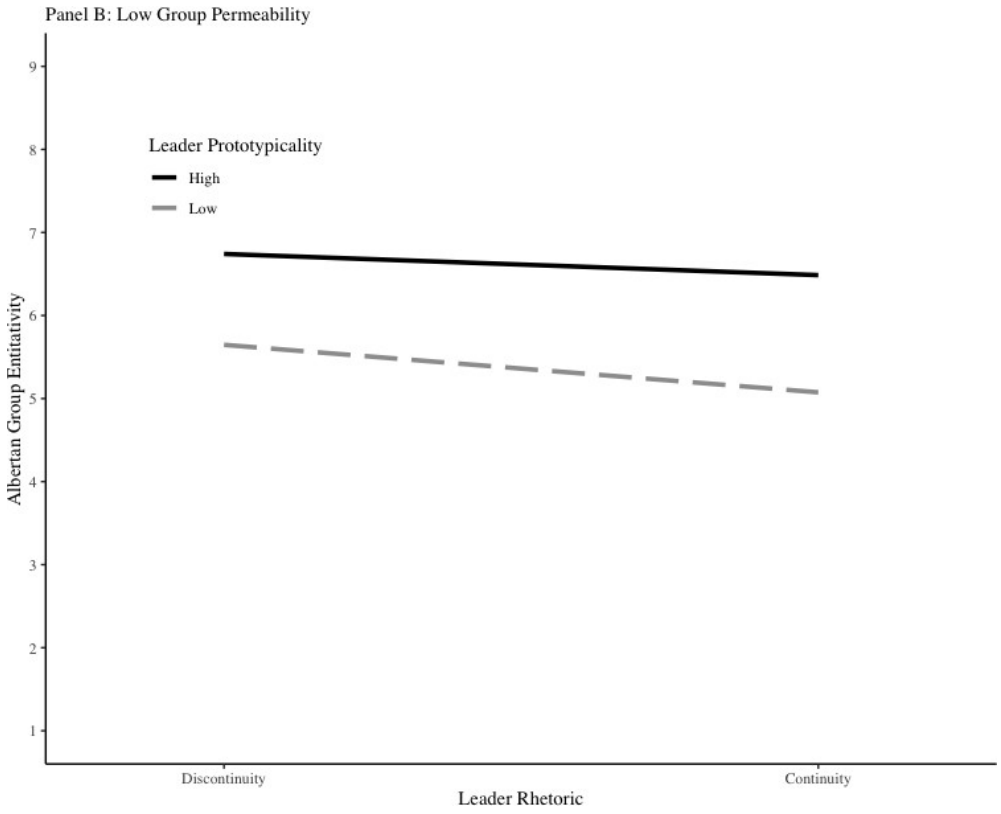
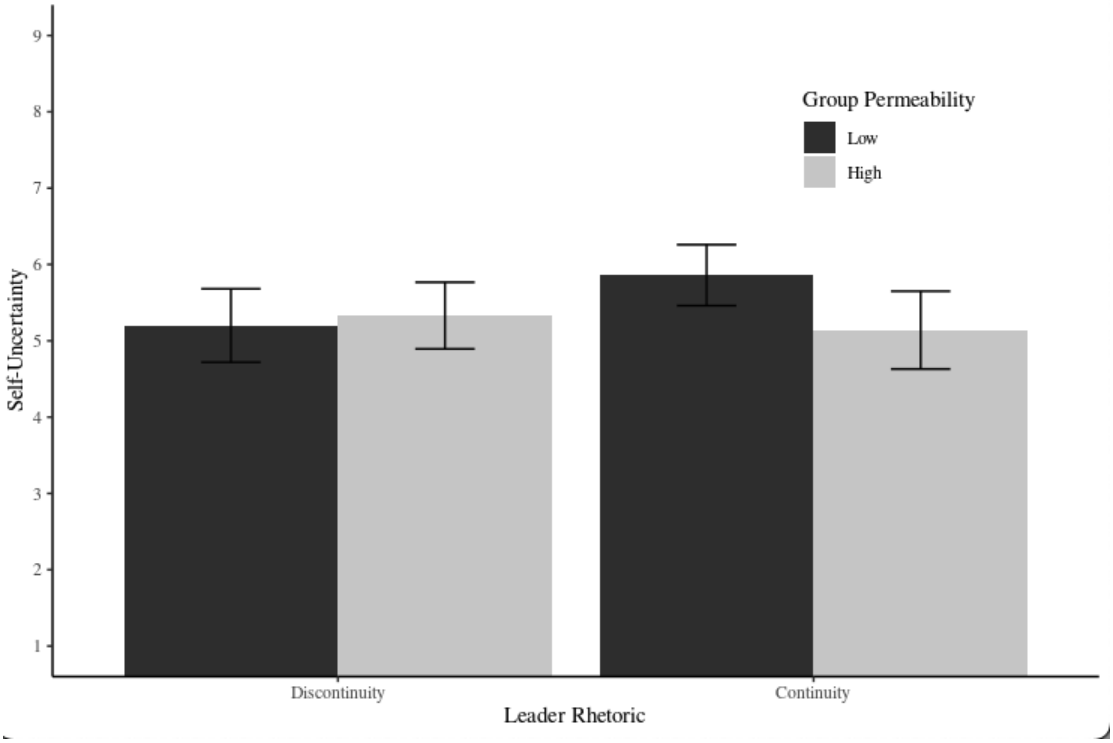


Figure 5

Self-uncertainty predicted by leader rhetoric and group permeability in Study 3



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Appendix A: Leader prototypicality manipulations for Studies 1 and 3

Prototypical leader

Leader A is a typical member of the University of Alberta community. Leader A shares the same values and interests as the rest of the students at University of Alberta and can therefore represent students interests very well. With deep ties and involvement in the campus community, Leader A wants to make the best possible decisions for students.

Non-prototypical leader

Although Leader A is not a typical member of the University of Alberta community and shares different values and interests than many other students, Leader A is focused on making the best decision possible for students. Without any deep ties in the campus community, Leader A brings a unique perspective to student matters and will try to represent student interests as well as they possibly can.

Appendix B: Rhetoric manipulations for Studies 1 and 3

Continuity rhetoric

Dear fellow students,

Since our founding, UofA students have possessed shared qualities and abilities that set us apart from other Canadian universities. Although our university is large and diverse, UofA students have historically shared a core set of characteristics that are key to our accomplishments as a higher learning insitution. COVID-19 and provincial budget cuts forced drastic changes to every part of university structure, educational programs, and student life. This letter concerns results of research we conducted on the impact of these changes on the present-day student body.

We conduct the same survey every year on the core values, attitudes, and other important qualities shared by the student body. UofA students have always possessed specific qualities, which demonstrates that there is a core identity shared by UofA students throughout history. Despite the drastic changes ongoing at the UofA, **our most recent survey shows that current students express the same defining attributes as those in the past. We have only strengthened the intellectual and professional qualities that define what it means to be a UofA student. We can conclude that our student body shares a strong collective identity that connects us to students from the past and will continue to be inherited by future students.**

Understanding the character of our student body is crucial because students are the lifeblood of our university. This research is ongoing, and we will continue to update students on our findings. **We can be confident that the large structural changes ongoing at the university have no disruptive impact on our collective identity. We know how to honor our collective values as we build the future of our university.**

Sincerely,

[Leader A]

Discontinuity rhetoric

Dear fellow students,

Since our founding, UofA students have possessed shared qualities and abilities that set us apart from other Canadian universities. Although our university is large and diverse, UofA students have historically shared a core set of characteristics that are key to our accomplishments as a higher learning institution. COVID-19 and provincial budget cuts forced drastic changes to every part of university structure, educational programs, and student life. This letter concerns results of research we conducted on the impact of these changes on the present-day student body.

We conduct the same survey every year on the core values, attitudes, and other important qualities shared by the student body. UofA students have always possessed specific qualities,

which demonstrates that there is a core identity shared by UofA students throughout history. **However, our most recent surveys show that these core qualities have ceased to exist in present day students. We can conclude that present day students no longer possess the strong collective identity that, until recently, has connected UofA students throughout history. We are disconnected from past students, and this prevents future students from inheriting the authentic UofA identity.**

Understanding the character of our student body is crucial because students are the lifeblood of our university. This research is ongoing, and we will continue to update students on our findings. The large structural changes ongoing at the university have disrupted our collective identity. It is unclear whether we will reclaim this identity or if we must create something entirely new. At this time, we do not yet understand the collective values held by students and what this means for the future of our university.

Sincerely,

[Leader A]

Appendix C: Social identity uncertainty

Social identity uncertainty (adapted from Wagoner et al., 2017)

1. I feel that the definition of UofA's identity is unclear.
2. I feel uncertain about what it means to be a UofA student.
3. I feel uncertain about the characteristics that define being a UofA student.
4. I feel uncertain about what the UofA stands for.
5. I feel uncertain about the distinctiveness of the UofA's identity.
6. I feel uncertain that the UofA identity that I know is correct.
7. I feel uncertain about my role as a UofA student.
8. I feel uncertain about fitting in as a typical UofA student.
9. I feel uncertain about other UofA students accepting me as a typical UofA student.
10. I feel uncertain about being a representative UofA student.
11. I feel uncertain about who I am as a UofA student.
12. I feel uncertain about whether other students will recognize me as being a representative UofA student.

Appendix D: Leader rhetoric manipulations for Study 2

Discontinuity rhetoric

"We are not often faced with questions of whether the vote we cast will protect Alberta as we know it, but this year we are. This election will decide whether we defend Albertan values and ideals, or whether we allow a [outgroup party] government to completely dismantle and destroy us. We face a fundamental threat not only to our province's prosperity and growth, but to a future that builds on the hard work, core values, and continuous progress that defines who we are as Albertans.

Who will we be under a [outgroup party] government? I can tell you who we will not be. We will not be a province that is heralded for a strong and stable economy. We will not be a province with a flourishing [renewable OR energy industry]. We will not be a province with leaders you can trust, and we certainly will not be a province that takes care of its people. Where will this leave us? Who will we be?

The outcome of this election threatens to rupture the continuity of Albertan values and progress so that the Alberta of tomorrow is unrecognizable. Don't let the [outgroup party] take us away from it truly means to be Albertan."

Continuity rhetoric

"We are not often faced with questions of whether the vote we cast will protect Alberta as we know it, but this year we are. I know that this year Albertans will decide to defend our values and ideals from a [outgroup party] government that wants to completely dismantle and destroy us. I know that the outcome of this election will be a future that builds on the hard work, core values, and continuous progress that defines who we are as Albertans.

Who will we be under a [ingroup party] government? We will be a province that is heralded for a strong and stable economy. We will be a province with a flourishing [renewable OR energy industry].We will be a province with leaders you can trust, and we certainly will be a province who takes care of its people. Our future will remain true to who we are as Albertans while building on the progress we already made.

A [ingroup party] government will promote the continuity of Albertan values and progress so that the Alberta of tomorrow is an even better version of who we are today. A [ingroup party] government will forge a path into a future that represents who Albertans truly are."

Appendix E: Group permeability manipulations for Study 3

Low permeability

A report from the Canadian University Research Council concluded that once a student is enrolled in a four-year degree program, it is **extremely difficult to exit their current university** and transfer to a different university to complete their degree. Universities are lowering transfer student acceptance rates, and those few transfer students who do get accepted to a new university encounter many issues, including delays in their degrees, financial problems, and social problems. The report concludes that university choice should be seen as definite and discourages students from attempting to transfer universities before completing their degrees.

High permeability

A report from the Canadian University Research Council concluded that once a student is enrolled in a four-year degree program, it is **extremely easy to exit their current university** and transfer to a different university to complete their degree. Universities are increasing transfer student acceptance rates, and transfer students usually don't have many issues with transitioning to a new university. Transfer students do just as well socially and financially as other students, and typically finish their degrees on time. The report concludes that university choice is reversible and encourages students to attempt to transfer universities if they are not happy with their current university.