Navigating Uncertainty:
Harnessing Social Identity Rhetoric for Effective Change Leadership

by

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Abstract

Leadership is a crucial force in shaping group identity and initiating collective changes within groups, particularly during times of uncertainty. The use of affirmations in rhetoric to convey a clear group identity that reduces uncertain feelings can garner more support for leaders when group members experience heightened uncertainty about self-concept (Gaffney et al., 2019). However, during change initiatives, the employment of affirmational rhetoric may pose a threat to group identity as it conveys the proposed identity unambiguously. In such contexts, negational rhetoric may be a more suitable rhetorical style for leaders to promote collective changes as it conveys the change with less rigidity, alleviating the threat posed to group identity (e.g., Mugny, 1982). The advantage enjoyed by negational rhetoric should be more salient when self-uncertainty is elevated, wherein change-oriented leaders can garner more trust among followers (Rast et al., 2016). Drawing upon the social identity perspectives on leadership (e.g., Hogg, 2001a), the goal of this dissertation is to initiate a line of research that centers around the use of affirmations and negations in leadership rhetoric in constructing a group identity that favors leaders' visions of change. Three experiments examined the interaction between leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty for a leader advocating for or against a collective change. Study 1 (*N* = 174) investigated the interactive effect of leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty on leader evaluations for an anti-change leader but failed to replicate the findings in previous research. Study 2 (*N* = 155) focused on the same interaction for a pro-change leader and provided partial support for the preferential evaluations of a leader using negational rhetoric under high self-uncertainty. Study 3 (*N* =267) introduced a third predictor variable by incorporating the anti-change and pro-change leader conditions. The results for the anti-change leader also failed to replicate previous findings while the results for the pro-change leader contradicted the findings of Study 2. These conflicting results indicate a need to refine experimental manipulations and test potential moderators in future research.

Preface

This dissertation is an original work by Yunzhu Ouyang. The research project, of which this dissertation is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project name "University Leadership Study", No. Pro00104499, August 11th, 2023. No part of this thesis has been previously published.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mom, who has always seen the best in me. I also dedicate this work to my dad, who wants a Ph.D. in the family so badly. To both of you, thank you for being the constant source of strength, driving me to the best version of myself.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Leadership is one of the most widely studied phenomena in social sciences attributed to its profound impact on the success and advancement of individuals, organizations, and societies. One of the primary challenges faced by leaders revolves around how to mobilize collective action and foster social change. Effective leaders serve as agents of change, possessing the capability to inspire, guide, and rally group members towards a vision of change. Prominent leadership figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malala Yousafzai exemplify this transformative potential of leadership. Dr. King, with his unwavering commitment to civil rights, led the African American community against racial discrimination through nonviolent protests and speeches. His famous speech, "I Have a Dream," ignited a nationwide movement that dismantled segregation laws, leading to significant changes in civil rights legislation in the United States. Similarly, Malala Yousafzai, a fearless advocate for girls' rights to education, confronted oppressive forces in her native Pakistan. Her leadership brought attention to the importance of education for all children, instigating positive changes in the accessibility of education for young girls.

Despite living in different countries and belonging to different generations, Martin Luther King and Malala Yousafzai share one commonality: they brought about changes during times of profound uncertainty and crisis. Martin Luther King advocated for change and equal rights for African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, a period marked by widespread social and political unrest due to deep-rooted racial segregation and discrimination against African Americans. Likewise, Malala Yousafzai bravely spoke out against the injustice faced by girls in their quest for education in Pakistan when the Taliban posed a threat to educational rights and created a climate of fear and uncertainty.

These examples illustrate the capacity of leaders to mobilize the masses and inspire change, particularly in times of uncertainty and crisis, while also highlighting the inherent difficulties and challenges involved in the process of social change and mobilization. Groups inherently resist change because it poses a threat to their established shared identity, which is crucial to their self-concept, as well as a fear of losing unique group attributes and group cohesion. Group members who deviate from group norms are often stigmatized as "black sheep" and subjected to marginalization and ostracism (Abrams et al., 2000; Marques, & Paez, 1994). In contrast, group leaders are granted "innovative credit" and are well-positioned to bring about changes and lead the group in a new direction (Abrams et al., 2008). However, instead of encouraging innovation and change, leaders often choose to conform to group identity and norms due to a fear of losing their leadership positions and their followers' support and trust.

Leadership is essentially a group process wherein leaders and followers exert reciprocal influence and collectively determine group outcomes (e.g., Abrams & Hogg, 2010; Hogg, 2001b). Leaders play a vital role in communicating group norms, unifying group members with a shared identity, and motivating them towards collective goals and action. Followers also participate in this group process by selecting and supporting their leaders and defending their leaders' vision. To wield influence, leaders must embody the core values and attributes of the group and act in the group's best interest. However, when leaders cannot serve as the embodiment of group identity while bringing about changes, they must serve as "entrepreneurs of identity" to actively construct and communicate a group identity in favor of their prototypicality and visions of change (e.g., Reicher et al., 2005).

In this process, language serves as a powerful tool (Fiol, 2002). Leaders often utilize various rhetorical strategies to mobilize followers towards collective action and social change (Seyranian & Bligh, 2008). One commonly employed rhetorical style involves the use of negations or affirmations. An illustrative example can be found in Winston Churchill's renowned speech during World War II. Churchill strategically employed negations such as “we shall not flag or fail” and “we shall never surrender,” which contrasted with his use of affirmations like “we shall go on to the end” and “we shall defend our island.” (“We shall Fight on the Beaches”, n.d.). His employment of negations and affirmations reinforced his determination to protect their country and commitment to achieving victory. Leaders can utilize negations and affirmations to shape the social identity of a group by defining what the group is and what it is not. The former is referred to as negational rhetoric, while the latter is known as affirmational rhetoric. During times of uncertainty, affirmational rhetoric is preferred as it can provide a clear group identity that alleviates feelings of uncertainty (Gaffney et al., 2019).

Previous research has demonstrated that uncertainty can alter people’s preferences for leaders, leading to the emergence of leaders who deviate from group identity and norms (Rast et al., 2012; Rast et al., 2013). Moreover, research has found that leaders with a focus on group change tend to receive more trust from followers in uncertain contexts when the group is psychologically meaningful to them (Rast et al., 2016). However, using affirmational rhetoric to convey a changed group identity in an unambiguous manner might pose threats to the current identity, which may disrupt or erode the values and attributes associated with group membership. To address these unresolved questions, this dissertation will examine the interactive effects of leader rhetoric and uncertainty on the evaluations of leaders who oppose or support group change.

The Psychology of Leadership

Effective leadership inevitably involves inspiring and guiding followers. The dynamics between leaders and followers greatly shape group goals and determine collective outcomes. Therefore, the psychology of leadership should not be understood merely at the individual level or from the perspective of leaders. Leadership is essentially a group process where leaders and followers both play important roles in shared endeavors (Hogg, 2001a; Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005). However, traditional approaches to leadership primarily address the invariant properties of leaders, such as personality traits and leadership styles, or the unidirectional influence from leader to follower. For example, the "Great Man" approach claims leaders are individuals in possession of certain personal and social qualities that make them superior to others. Thus, the research work of this approach focuses on identifying personality traits that are associated with effective leadership (e.g., Stogdill, 1948; Mann, 1959). However, although some associations exist between certain personality traits and leadership, their capacity to predict successful leaders is weak. More importantly, the prediction of a quality in leadership appears to depend on the context, and successful leaders are those who can adapt and adjust their behavior to fit different contexts and situations (e.g., De Hooogh et al., 2005; Oreg & Berson, 2015).

Taking both leadership styles and situational factors into consideration, a wide variety of contingency theories have uncovered the importance of the fit between the characteristics of leaders and specific contexts. One of the best-known contingency theories is Fielder's least preferred co-worker theory (Fiedler, 1964, 1978). This approach determines one's leadership style by asking people to describe their least preferred co-worker (LPC). Those who describe the LPC more negatively are categorized as task-oriented leaders, while those who rate the LPC more positively are categorized as relationship-oriented leaders. Moreover, this theory evaluates the favorability of a situation based on three factors: leader-member relations, task structure, and position power. A situation is considered more favorable when the leader has better relationships with followers, the task is more structured, and the leader holds a higher degree of power. In terms of the fit between leaders and situations, this approach proposes that task-oriented leadership is more effective in a highly favorable or unfavorable situation, whereas relationship-oriented leadership is more effective in a moderately favorable situation.

One major criticism of contingency theories is that they view the interaction between leaders and situations as fixed and fail to fully capture more complicated dynamics in social contexts (Haslam et al., 2020). Leadership is essentially a group process that both leaders and followers participate in. Neither the "Great Man" approach nor contingency theories make an attempt to understand the role of followers; therefore, the reciprocal influence between leaders and followers is largely neglected.

One theory that addresses the neglect of followership is the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This theory proposes that leadership is contingent upon the exchange relationship between leaders and their subordinates. Low LMX relationships are based primarily on transactional leader-follower relations, characterized by a simplified economic exchange between leaders and followers. Specifically, employees perform their tasks with the expectation of receiving benefits and rewards from their leaders in return. On the contrary, high LMX relationships are grounded in trust, respect, and obligation, motivating employees to internalize group goals and enhance their work performance. Effective leadership lies in the ability of leaders to establish high-quality exchange relationships with their followers and fulfill higher-level social needs within the organizational context.

However, LMX isolates the leader-member dyad from other relations within or across groups and fails to examine the dynamics between leaders and followers at the wider group or social-network level (Hogg & Martin, 2003; Hogg, Martin, & Weeden, 2003). For example, in a company where the employer consistently fosters high-quality and positive relationships with individual employees, some may still lack motivation to excel in their work due to their poor relationships with fellow colleagues. In such cases, the effectiveness of the employer's leadership is significantly influenced by the interactions among employees, rather than solely depending on the relationships between the employer and employees.

As high LMX relationships move beyond mere transactional leader-follower relations to encompass mutual commitment and reciprocal obligations (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991), they align with the principle of transformational leadership. The transformational leadership perspective emphasizes how leaders can inspire followers to achieve higher levels of needs and values (Burns, 1978). This theory believes that charismatic leaders are proactive, change-oriented, and able to offer inspirational visions, enabling them to transform relatively base urges and drives into greater psychological and moral values and needs for followers, and to motivate followers to work towards collective goals that transcend self-interest (Bass, 1990; Bryman, 1992). Although the transformational leadership theory recognizes the importance of followers by addressing leaders' charisma as not an inherent attribute but rather conferred by followers, it tends to see charisma as fixed rather than dynamic (Haslam et al., 2020). In fact, the perception of a leader's charisma may change across different contexts and different people. This perspective also treats a leader's ability to transform things as inflexible, assuming that if a leader can transform followers, they are transformational in any context and among any followers. Moreover, recognizing a leader as transformational or charismatic is largely a descriptive way of examining leadership. This perspective is limited by its inability to explain the underlying psychological processes that enable a leader to transform followers (Dinh et al., 2014).

While this field has witnessed the proliferation of diverse leadership paradigms and theories, this dissertation aims to delve into a focused exploration of classical leadership that has garnered significant scholarly attention and sustained research interest over the past five decades. Recognizing the limitations inherent in the leadership theories discussed above, an approach to address these gaps is to adopt a social identity perspective on leadership. This perspective views leadership as a group process in which both leaders and followers actively participate and examines the underlying psychological processes that occur between them (Haslam et al., 2022; Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). Drawing on social identities, this perspective posits that leadership is not just about the relationship between leaders and followers but rather a more complex process that occurs within social groups. Indeed, whenever we talk about leaders and followers, we see them as associated with a reference group, such as a nation, a soccer team, a university, an ethnic group, a religious group, etc.

The Social Identity Perspective on Leadership

Social identity theory (SIT) is an integrated theoretical framework that focuses on intragroup processes and intergroup relations by addressing the role of self-concept in group membership (see Abram & Hogg, 2010). This theory is based on the idea that people define and evaluate themselves in group terms through intergroup social comparisons, aiming to differentiate the ingroup from the outgroup (Hogg, 2000b). Social identity refers to a sense of cognitive and affective belonging to one’s group (Tajfel, 1972). It provides an internalized group membership that is important and meaningful to oneself. As an extension to social identity theory, self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner, 1985; Turner et al., 1987) recognizes that groups are internally structured, and the process of identifying with a group is grounded in common category membership that differentiates the ingroup from the outgroup. When people identify with a group, they perceptually place themselves into a social category in terms of relevant ingroup and outgroup prototypes. A group prototype refers to a fuzzy set of attributes that describe and prescribe the core attitudes, values, and behaviors of members who share that social category (Hogg, 2001a). As prototypes capture similarities within groups as well as differences between groups, the prototype of a social group is contextually responsive. It can be modified to varying degrees across different contexts, depending on what group or groups the ingroup is compared with.

For example, members of a women's firefighter association are more likely to highlight the masculine attributes typically associated with firefighters, such as physical strength, endurance, and courage, when comparing their group with a social service association that is commonly stereotyped as possessing more feminine attributes (Eagly & Karau, 2002). However, when juxtaposed with male firefighters, they may shift their focus from their occupation to gender, emphasizing the more feminine aspects, such as resilience, empathy, and collaboration. The prototype of being a female firefighter changes as the comparison group changes, oscillating between addressing masculine attributes and differentiating itself from them.

When social identity is salient, people go through a depersonalization process where they internalize the group's prototype into their self-concepts and use it to direct their attitudes and behaviors (Turner et al., 1987). Individuals are constantly influenced by the prototype as they compare and contrast themselves with other ingroup and outgroup members to assess their fit with the prototype. As a result, the prototype becomes the basis of social influence within and between groups. When individuals identify with a group, their beliefs and attitudes toward others are primarily based on perceived prototypicality rather than personal preferences or interpersonal relationships. According to the social attraction hypothesis (Hogg, 1992, 1993), group members' preferences for others are rooted in prototype-based social attraction instead of personal attraction. Consequently, ingroup members are favored more than outgroup members as they represent the ingroup prototype better. Similarly, more prototypical members are generally preferred over less prototypical members.

The most prototypical group members, who best embody central and desirable aspects of the group, are the most reliable sources for prototype-based information. Their attitudes and behaviors set the standards and norms for other group members to follow (Hogg, 2005). Similarly, followers look to group leaders for information about who they are, what they should think, and how they should behave in the group (Hogg, 2001b; Hogg & Smith, 2007). Prototypical leaders have more leverage in gaining trust and support because they can satisfy followers' need for group prototype-based information by maintaining and exhibiting their own prototypicality.

As individuals identify more strongly with a group, their perceptions and evaluations of fellow group members and leaders are increasingly influenced by prototypicality. As a consequence, prototypical group members wield a significantly greater influence over fellow group members, thereby enhancing their chance of attaining leadership roles (e.g., Erber & Fiske, 1984; Taylor & Fiske, 1975). Similarly, prototypical leaders are more influential and evaluated more favorably than less prototypical leaders (van Knippenberg, 2011). The preference for prototypical leaders or leadership candidates varies depending on the salience of social identity. When group membership is salient and important to one's self-concept, people desire prototypical leaders more than non-prototypical leaders. However, for people who weakly identify with the group, leader prototypicality is less important in endorsing and evaluating leaders (Hogg et al., 2005).

The advantage that prototypical leaders possess is not solely due to the cognitive representativeness of ingroup prototypes, but also because of their active influence through attraction and liking. Attraction among group members works through group membership and depersonalization rather than idiosyncrasies and interpersonal relationships (Hogg, 2001a). When depersonalization takes place within a group, prototype-based social attraction, rather than interpersonal attraction, drives people's preference for other members, such that more prototypical members are preferred over less prototypical members (Hogg, 1992, 1993). This liking for highly prototypical members grants them popularity and influence within the group, as people are more likely to comply with the requests and suggestions of someone they like (Berscheid & Reis, 1998). The compliance enhanced by liking allows prototypical members to exercise leadership in the group by having their ideas and requests more readily accepted by other members. This advantage of prototypical members translates into prototypical leaders being trusted more, supported more, and favored more than non-prototypical leaders because they are more socially attractive. Leaders can further elevate their social attractiveness and affirm their prototypicality by behaving in a more group-serving manner, such as by displaying ingroup favoritism or intragroup fairness (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Platow, Reid, & Andrew, 1998; Tyler & Lind, 1992). These behaviors not only protect one's positive social identity and the interests of the group but also meet followers' expectations for a prototypical leader and thus strengthen their preference for that leader.

Research has consistently replicated and supported the preference for prototypical leaders across research paradigms and populations spanning different contexts and countries (see

Steffens et al., 2021; van Knippenberg, 2011). For example, Hains, Hogg, and Duck (1997) randomly assigned participants into small discussion groups where the appointed leader was either prototypical or non-prototypical. They found, as predicted, that the prototypical leader was perceived as more effective than the non-prototypical leader when group membership was salient. However, when group salience was weakened, participants did not differ in their perceptions of the prototypical and non-prototypical leaders. In a naturalistic field study, Fielding and Hogg (1997) investigated small interactive groups in the real world. Participants were students from Outward Bound courses in Australia. They measured participants' group identification, leader prototypicality, and leader effectiveness and found that higher perceived prototypicality of the leader predicted higher leader effectiveness ratings, and this relationship was even stronger for people who strongly identified with the group.

Despite the relatively bleak picture of non-prototypical leaders presented in this literature, some recent research has shown that non-prototypical leaders can be influential under certain circumstances. For example, group members who are uncertain are more likely to prefer, support, and trust non-prototypical, anti-normative, or even “nasty” leaders (Hogg, 2020; Rast, Gaffney, & Hogg, 2013; Rast, Hogg, & Giessner, 2013; Rast et al., 2012). Moreover, incumbent non-prototypical leaders have a better chance to receive favorable evaluations under high uncertainty, while prospective non-prototypical leaders are more likely to be evaluated favorably under low uncertainty (Ouyang et al., 2023). When deviating from group norms, prospective leaders can still retain support relative to incumbent and former leaders (Abrams, Randsley de Moura, Marques, & Hutchison, 2008). Furthermore, non-prototypical leaders can motivate followers to achieve higher levels of performance by being self-sacrificial (van Knippenberg &

van Knippenberg, 2005) or by enhancing similarities between followers and leaders after acquiring a leadership role (Alabastro et al., 2013).

Leaders as Entrepreneurs of Identity

The social identity perspective on leadership suggests that being prototypical is critical for effective leadership when a person's group membership is salient. This viewpoint has two important implications. First, leaders need to be representative of group identities to gain support, trust, and favorable evaluations from group members (e.g., Hogg, 2000a). Second, leaders can promote active followership by actively constructing social identities in a way that renders their prototypicality (e.g., Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005). The first implication treats leadership as a reactive process where the given social context determines who is more prototypical than others and hence more influential and effective in leadership roles. The second implication recognizes that leadership is also a proactive process where leaders possess the capability to shape the social context in which they represent a social identity that they share with followers (Haslam et al., 2020). This capability allows leaders to mobilize collective actions by constructing a social category that followers can categorize themselves into and define themselves in terms of. Specifically, occupying the leadership position empowers a leader to construct a social category where they share a collective identity with others. Through the self-categorization process, people see themselves as equivalent to and interchangeable with other group members who are exemplars of this social category (Turner & Oakes, 1986). As a result of identification with the group, individuals form a psychological representation of the attributes associated with this shared identity, which they use to direct their attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, leaders are capable of mobilizing collective actions toward their vision by actively defining the core values, beliefs, and characteristics of the group.

As social beings, most of us have a diverse range of social identities depending on what criteria we use to group ourselves and the social context in which we do so. According to SCT (Oakes, 1987; Oakes, Turner, & Haslam, 1991), the salience of a social category is determined by two factors: accessibility and fit. Accessibility (or readiness) refers to individuals' tendency to use a particular self-category based on 'past experience, present expectations, and current motives, values, goals, and needs" (Turner et al., 1994, p. 455). This concept stresses that self-categorization must be meaningful and purposeful for individuals, and it hinges on one's social location, which is shaped by demographic and geographic factors instead of being random or aimless. For example, consider two individuals from different backgrounds. Josh grew up in a rural farming community, while Emma grew up in a bustling urban environment. When asked about their hometown or origin, Josh is more likely to categorize himself as someone from the rural background. The category of "rural people" is more accessible to Josh than to Emma, due to their different past experiences and geographic locations. Although this idea addresses an important aspect of self-categorization, it has not been extensively explored or empirically investigated. More attention has been paid to the second factor, fit.

Fit is divided into two distinct concepts: comparative fit and normative fit. Comparative fit refers to the phenomenon where people tend to be grouped together when the average difference among ingroup members is smaller than the average difference between ingroup members and outgroup members that form the frame of reference. Self-categorization is based on the meta-contrast principle, where categories are formed to maximize the ratio of perceived intergroup differences to intragroup differences (e.g., Turner et al., 1987). The salience of a category depends on the context, as changes in the comparative context can alter the way individuals categorize themselves. On the other hand, normative fit is based on social norms, values, and beliefs rather than contextual factors. A social category is salient when the grouping of people matches stereotypical and normative expectations concerning similarities and differences among them. In other words, a social identity is more likely to be salient when individuals conform to the expected behaviors, attitudes, and characteristics associated with that identity.

For example, nationality is a readily accessible social category for Chinese people. According to the principle of comparative fit, a Chinese person is more likely to emphasize their national identity when attending a social event where attendees are from different countries, compared to an event where only Chinese people are present. This is because, in the former situation, the average difference among Chinese individuals is relatively small compared to the average difference between Chinese and those from other countries. According to the principle of normative fit, the salience of nationality is further enhanced when their conversations revolve around the topic of Chinese culture, as their behaviors align with stereotypical expectations of their national group.

The salience of social identity enables group members to form shared perspectives on social reality and to influence each other, paving the way for mass social influence and mobilization (Reicher et al., 2005; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Identification with a social group determines who can be influenced and mobilized, as group membership ensures individuals' conformity to group norms. To achieve a larger scope of collective action, leaders aim to construct a more inclusive social category that includes everyone they wish to mobilize and makes the included ones feel represented. For example, the former Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, often used phrases like "my fellow Canadians" in his speeches, aimed at broadening the scope of his intended audience and encompassing all individuals who identify themselves as Canadian (e.g., CBC News, 2014).

Moreover, since social identity provides important information to guide group members' attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Hogg, 2000b), the content ascribed to social identity determines the direction of collective actions. Leaders can mobilize followers toward collective actions they wish to promote by defining the norms and values associated with the group identity. However, this does not imply that leaders have the ability to promote any social changes; instead, they must tactfully frame the changes as part of the manifestation of group identity so that they can persuade group members to work together toward them (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2020).

Furthermore, the group prototype, or core group norms and values, determines who is in a position to direct the mass action. As group members who best embody the group prototype are the most influential (e.g., Hogg, 2005), leaders seek to render their prototypicality by representing the core values and beliefs of the group and working in the group's best interest. In a series of studies conducted by Haslam and colleagues (Haslam & Platow, 2001; Haslam et al., 2001), participants were asked to evaluate a leader who was 1) identity-affirming (showed preferential support for group members who endorsed group norms), 2) identity-negating (showed preferential support for group members who opposed group norms), or 3) even-handed (showed no preference for group members who endorsed or opposed group norms). The results indicated that identity-affirming or even-handed leaders received more support and were perceived as more charismatic than identity-negating leaders. Participants were also more willing to take action to promote novel plans proposed by identity-affirming or even-handed leaders compared to identity-negating leaders. These findings imply that the success of leadership and collective actions hinges on a leader's capability to represent group identity, affirm group norms, and promote the group's interests.

However, not all leaders conform to the established norms and represent the group identity in a given context. Some leaders, who may not embody the group prototype or have a change-oriented approach, still strive to advance the group's position and mobilize collective action. In such cases, leaders must actively define and frame the group identity in a way that favors their prototypicality. A good example is that of Barack Obama, who was considered an unconventional presidential candidate in American history. Despite this, he successfully established his prototypicality by crafting an inclusive and diverse identity of America and framing his personal experience as a reflection of a typical American story, effectively representing and embodying that identity (Augoustinos & Garis, 2012).

In sum, leaders must act as "entrepreneurs of identity" to exert influence effectively. In the process of social influence and mobilization, leaders play crucial roles in determining three core aspects of mass action–who is influenced, what is influential, and who is influential–by actively shaping group boundaries, establishing group norms, and asserting their own representativeness. Leadership speeches and discourses often contain important information about social identity, thus the language employed in such communication plays a vital role in determining the scope, direction, and leaders of collective action. In other words, a leader's ability to effectively define and affirm group identity through language is indispensable for promoting active followership (e.g., Hopkins & Reicher, 1997; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a). In particular, the rhetorical style deployed in speeches and statements lies at the heart of leadership processes and profoundly impacts followers' endorsement and evaluation of leaders.

Leader Rhetoric as the Vehicle

Analyses of political speeches have shown that leaders construct and communicate social identities to garner support and mobilize collective action by rhetorically representing target groups. The rhetorical style leaders use to define and describe social identity is called social identity rhetoric (Gaffney et al., 2019). The employment of social identity rhetoric has been widely observed in the speeches of numerous political leaders throughout history. For instance, Margaret Thatcher and Neil Kinnock held opposing stances and represented the interests of different groups in the British miners' strike in 1984–1985 (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996b). Despite these differences, both leaders conveyed important information about social identity in their speeches, aiming to frame an inclusive category that would mobilize a larger audience and establish a set of values and beliefs that they were representative of as guides for collective action. Other analyses of leadership speeches have revealed similar strategic applications of social identity rhetoric in the speeches of anti-abortion leaders in the UK, aimed at mobilizing more supporters for anti-abortion movements (Hopkins & Reicher, 1997; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a), in the mobilization argumentations of British Muslim activists encouraging voting and participating in British elections (Hopkins, Reicher, & Kahani-Hopkins, 2003), and in the speeches of American presidents advocating for social change (Seyranian & Bligh, 2008).

These examples provide compelling evidence that communication serves as a major vehicle for leadership and social influence (Fiol, 2002; Hogg & Tindale, 2005). Within groups, discussions inevitably arise about group norms, encompassing topics such as who "we" are, how "we" should behave, and how the ingroup differs from outgroups. Such conversations, often referred to as "norm talk," have the power to shape, maintain, and alter people's perceptions of group norms and prototypes (Hogg & Tindale, 2005). However, different group members possess varying degrees of influence through their participation in "norm talk." For example, when group membership becomes salient, prototypical leaders and members are more supported, trusted, and evaluated as more effective by other group members than those who are less prototypical (e.g., Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003). Consequently, they can exert disproportional influence over other group members in determining group norms, values, and behaviors.

When influence within the group is prototype-based, communication is central to intragroup leadership. Leaders must skillfully manage their prototypicality through communication (Hogg, 2001a; Hopkins & Reicher, 1997; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a). Prototypical leaders need to communicate their prototypicality to their followers by emphasizing how they embody the group's core norms and values. They can even introduce innovative ideas and initiate changes if they successfully justify their actions as serving the group's best interests and aligning with the group's essential identity. On the contrary, less prototypical leaders need to actively construct their prototypicality through communication or behavior. One effective approach for them to enhance their prototypicality is to establish an inclusive identity they are representative of in their communication with the audience. In addition, constructing such an inclusive identity can amplify leaders' influence as it enables a broader audience to identify with the group.

One commonly employed strategy by political leaders in their speeches is to define things in terms of "we" and "they," which sets intergroup boundaries by distinguishing the ingroup from the outgroup (e.g., Gamson, 1992; see also Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a). The construction of group boundaries in discourse involves framing the speaker and the audience within a shared categorization while positioning opponents outside this category (Hopkins & Reicher, 1997).

Leaders who aim to mobilize collective action should exert effort in defining the context in a way that maximizes the proportion of the intended audience as part of the ingroup while minimizing the proportion of the intended audience associated with the outgroup (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a). The inclusiveness established through the comparison to outgroups has the potential to leverage support for leaders and mobilize followers toward collective action.

Moreover, by simply stressing intragroup inclusion, leaders can frame a particular social category and construct an inclusive identity to sustain their influence potential. The literature on social influence has demonstrated that people are more likely to be persuaded by (Cialdini & Trost, 1998) and to place trust in (Fiske, 1998) members of their ingroup. The use of inclusive language such as "we" and "us" in leadership rhetoric enables leaders to position themselves as members of the audience's ingroup and frame their visions as norms and values shared by all ingroup members (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996b). As a consequence, leaders can effectively foster followers' perceptions of a highly inclusive social identity and mobilize followers toward collective interests by incorporating "we" and "us" terms in their speeches.

For example, charismatic leaders tend to employ particular rhetorical strategies in their communication to motivate followers towards collective goals and social change (e.g., Bligh, Kohles, & Meindl, 2004; Fiol et al., 1999). One effective strategy is to use inclusive language to construct a shared identity that is aligned with their visions of social change among followers. Seyranian and Bligh (2008) conducted correlational research on a large sample of American presidential speeches from the 20th century to examine the relationship between presidential charisma and the employment of various rhetorical techniques. They asked participants to rate the charisma of different presidents and analyzed the presence of inclusive language in their speeches during the introduction of social change. The results indicated that highly charismatic leaders, such as Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan, consistently used more inclusive language (i.e., “we”, “us”, and “our”) across different phases of social change compared to non-charismatic leaders.

Moreover, Seyranian (2014) conducted an experiment to examine the impact of inclusive language in leadership speeches on people's support for a leader and the change they promoted. Participants were randomly assigned to read a speech ostensibly by a student leader on renewable energy, in which the leader either utilized inclusive language or not. Afterwards, they completed several scales measuring their evaluations of the student leader and their attitudes toward renewable energy. Seyranian found that participants evaluated the leader using inclusive language as more prototypical, socially attractive, charismatic, trustworthy, persuasive, and effective than the leader who did not use inclusive language. Additionally, they were more likely to consider supporting renewable energy as an ingroup norm and intended to engage in collective action towards it.

This research highlights the importance of using inclusive language as a crucial communication strategy for framing a shared identity between a leader and their target audience. The constructed identity is vital in mobilizing group members to work together toward the collective vision promoted by the leader. Moreover, during times of change, leaders can use inclusive language in their communication to realign social identity with their vision for social change, thereby facilitating the desired change. By actively defining and communicating "who we are", leaders can effectively promote active followership and mobilize collective action. However, it is worth noting that different leaders may define and communicate an inclusive identity in distinct ways.

A leader can rhetorically describe a shared identity by using affirming language in terms of "who we are" and "what attributes we possess" (e.g., "we are a strong group"). Alternatively, negating language can be used to describe the shared identity in terms of "who we are not" and "what attributes we do not possess" (e.g., "we are not a weak group"). Affirming language should construct and communicate a social identity more clearly than negating language because it causes less informational processing conflict. Sentences containing negations (e.g., not, no, or never) are more difficult to process and understand than sentences without negations (e.g., Just & Carpenter, 1971). MacDonald and Just (1989) conducted a series of experiments to investigate the availability of negated information in readers' memories and their comprehension of the text. Participants responded to sentences containing negated nouns (e.g., Elizabeth baked some bread but no cookies) and were later given a recognition (Experiment 1) or naming (Experiment 2) task. The results revealed that negated information was less accessible, as evidenced by slower response times to negated words. In addition, MacDonald and Just discovered that negation also impaired comprehension and retrieval from memory, as demonstrated by participants' performance in a true-false test.

Negated information is more difficult to process and comprehend as it triggers a two-step cognitive process. Negations activate two opposing representations, one for factual information and one for counterfactual information (Dudschig & Kaup, 2018, 2020). The information to be negated is initially activated, followed by the activation of the information resulting from the outcome of the negation (Kaup, Lüdtke, & Zwaan, 2006). For example, a sentence such as "our group is not effective" first activates a representation of an effective group and subsequently forms a representation of an ineffective group. This two-step process inevitably leads to more difficulties in processing and comprehending communication that contains negations. Compared to affirming language, negating language possesses a significant disadvantage in communication that is challenging to overcome, even when readers or audiences are aware of the difficulty of understanding negated information (Margolin & Hover, 2011) or when their attention is directed to negative words highlighted in bold typeface (Margolin, 2013).

As such, affirming language should be better suited than negating language to construct and convey an unambiguous social identity. The use of affirming language to define and communicate social identity in rhetoric is called affirmational rhetoric, and the use of negating language in social identity rhetoric is referred to as negational rhetoric. Leaders can strategically employ affirmational and negational rhetorical styles in their speeches to garner more support and mobilize collective action based on the context. Affirmational rhetoric should be preferred over negational rhetoric when the target audience seeks a clearly defined group identity, particularly when they experience uncertainty related to their self-concept.

CHAPTER TWO

Leading Changes in Times of Uncertainty

The world is rife with uncertainty. For example, many of us have experienced enormous uncertainty aroused by the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years. Especially in the initial stages of the outbreak, people were grappling with a range of unknowns: the origin of the virus, its health implications, and effective preventative measures. Such uncertainties permeated all aspects of daily life and left a deep impact on individuals and society. Until now, many countries have continued to suffer from the economic recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with job losses, employment rates, and inflation creating further uncertainty. Beyond these intimidating circumstances, however, feelings of uncertainty can stem from less threatening, even positive, experiences in daily life, such as a student striving for a high GPA or an employee anticipating a substantial raise.

According to uncertainty-identity theory, feeling uncertain is aversive, and people are motivated to reduce feelings of uncertainty, particularly those related to their self-concept (Hogg, 2007, 2012). There is some evidence of individual differences in the experience of uncertainty. Individuals experience higher levels of uncertainty and a lower tolerance for it if they have an authoritarian personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950), are closed-minded (Rokeach, 1960), or have a high need for cognitive closure (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Nonetheless, uncertainty is primarily created or triggered by social contexts rather than individual personality traits (cf. Sorrentino, & Short, 1986), as it is contingent on the information available within a specific context. Moreover, the intensity and duration of uncertain feelings can vary across contexts and over time. Uncertainty-identity theory primarily focuses on context-induced uncertainty and the factors that trigger it in individuals (Hogg, 2007, 2012).

Although the motivation to reduce uncertainty is shared by all human beings, people may not always feel compelled to resolve feelings of uncertainty if the uncertainty is not important or relevant to their self-concept (Mullin & Hogg, 1999; Hogg, 2007). People tend to solve problems in less effortful ways and may choose to process only the information that strongly motivates them to do so (Gollwitzer & Bargh, 1996; Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Uncertainty related to the self-concept can drive people to deal with it because it has crucial influences on people's perceptions, feelings, and behaviors. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, people were more motivated to resolve uncertainties related to COVID-19 than those related to the H1N1 flu because the COVID-19 outbreak posed a direct threat to their lives. Uncertainty about COVID-19 and its impact on their lives was subjectively important and self-relevant. Self-relevance is a critical factor in determining the strength of people's motivation to address feelings of uncertainty. (Hogg, 2007; see also Rast, 2015). Uncertainty caused by economic crises, personal failures, or natural disasters can all motivate people to manage or reduce it, as long as the uncertainty is important and relevant to their self-concept and identity.

Uncertainty Reduction Motive and Group Identification

Uncertainty can take various forms and affect people differently. However, it can be managed and resolved in different ways, such as by strengthening associations with conservatism (Jost et al., 2007), applying knowledge strategy planning (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2017), and promoting organizational fairness (Lind & van den Bos, 2002). Drawing on social identities and group memberships is a particularly effective method for reducing self-related uncertainty. By comparing themselves to fellow ingroup or outgroup members, people can form social consensus and certainties on how to think, feel, and behave (Turner, 1975; Hogg, 2000a). Moreover, uncertainty arising from disagreement with other ingroup members can be reduced through compliance with group norms (Abrams, Wetherell, Cochrane, Hogg, & Turner, 1990; McGarty, Turner, Oakes, & Haslam, 1993; Turner, 1991). The implication is that uncertainty reduction might be a compelling motivation related to group membership and the social identity process.

In the past, social identity theorists emphasized self-enhancement as an underlying motive for people to identify with a group. More recent research expands self-categorization theory to suggest that people also have a motive to reduce subjective uncertainty, driving them to categorize themselves into a group (Hogg, 2000b; Hogg & Mullin, 1999). When people categorize themselves into a group and depersonalize, they define themselves in terms of ingroup prototypes. Group prototypes represent the central attributes that define the ingroup and distinguish it from other groups (Hogg, 2000b; Hogg & Smith, 2007). These prototypes provide members with descriptive and prescriptive information about who they are, what to believe, and how to behave.

The self-categorization process also involves a socially comparative context, where similar others in the group (particularly prototypical members) validate one's self-concept and relevant cognitions and behaviors (Hogg, 2000b). Therefore, when people feel uncertain about themselves or things reflecting on their self-concept, they can alleviate their feelings of uncertainty to a large extent by joining new groups or strengthening their ties with an existing ingroup. Even when uncertainty arises from prototype-related disagreement within the group, members might still be able to resolve the uncertainty by dis-identifying with the current group and identifying with a different group so that they can restore the consensus needed for uncertainty reduction.

Previous research has provided empirical support for uncertainty-identity theory. Using the minimal group paradigm (Billig & Tajfel, 1973), Grieve and Hogg (1999) manipulated task uncertainty by asking participants to allocate points on complicated distribution matrices or to describe their thoughts about several ambiguous pictures. Afterwards, they either randomly categorized participants into groups by asking them to inspect and remember their group name or simply aggregated participants without categorizing them. They found that under high subjective uncertainty, participants who were categorized into a group exhibited significantly more ingroup bias and stronger ingroup identification than those who were not categorized.

Ingroup bias is a good indicator of group identification, as people who strongly identify with their groups favor the ingroup over the outgroup members (Tajfel, 1974; Turner et al., 1987). Mullin and Hogg (1998) further examined the relationship between uncertainty and ingroup bias by exploring different types of uncertainty. Besides task uncertainty, they added situational uncertainty to their study by manipulating participants' familiarity with the experimental context. Participants who were categorized expressed stronger identification with the group and more ingroup bias than non-categorized participants under both task and situational uncertainty. This finding provided further evidence that social identity can reduce self-uncertainty.

In addition, researchers have explored how different aspects of groups influence the uncertainty reduction function of social identity. Although the self-esteem hypothesis (Abrams & Hogg, 1988) argues that people are motivated to identify with high-status groups to boost self-esteem, Reid and Hogg (2005) found that group status did not affect the relationship between uncertainty and group identification. Self-uncertainty strengthened participants' identification with the ingroup even when their group had relatively low status (did worse than other groups in a perception task). This finding shows that uncertainty reduction is a sufficiently strong motive for group identification and that it can override the self-enhancement motive.

Research has also shown that group relevance influences how strongly uncertain people identify with their ingroup. Specifically, Hogg and Svensson (2009) found that the effect of uncertainty on group identification was stronger when the group was more personally relevant, such as being suitable for the individual's career interests. Interestingly, this effect was observed regardless of whether participants engaged in self-affirmation, which is thought to reduce the need to bolster self-esteem according to self-affirmation theory (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1988). These findings further confirm that uncertainty can motivate people to identify with groups independently of self-esteem or self-enhancement concerns.

In addition to group relevance, entitativity has also been found to play a significant role in uncertainty-induced group identification. Entitativity refers to the perceived cohesiveness of a group (Campbell, 1958). Highly entitative groups are cohesive, homogeneous, and clearly structured, with unambiguous group boundaries and highly consensual goals (Campbell, 1958; Lickel et al., 2000). Such groups are more effective at reducing uncertainty than groups low in entitativity. Hogg and colleagues (2007) conducted two studies to investigate the effects of self-uncertainty and ingroup entitativity on group identification. Self-uncertainty was primed in both studies, while group entitativity was measured in Study 1 and manipulated in Study 2. Afterwards, participants completed a multi-item measure of group identification. The results showed that participants identified most strongly with the group when they were uncertain and the group was highly entitative.

Uncertainty strengthens people's identification, belonging, and ties with high entitativity groups more than with low entitativity groups. In some cases, the desire for distinctive or entitative groups under high uncertainty may even motivate individuals to join radical or extremist groups (Hogg, 2014). These groups often possess the extreme form of some attributes that entitative groups have, such as rigid, closed boundaries, internal homogeneity and consensus, and hierarchy structure, in addition to engaging in highly radical practices and actions (Hogg, Meehan, & Farquharson, 2010). For instance, Hogg and colleagues (2010) conducted a study using a group of students who preferred a moderate campus group over a radical one. They found that self-uncertainty strengthened identification with the radical group, leading to the disappearance of the initial preference for the moderate group. These findings suggest that under high uncertainty, the desire for a clear group identity can override other concerns and motivations, leading individuals to identify with more radical or extremist groups.

Self-Uncertainty and Affirmational Leadership

In times of uncertainty, group members often look to their leaders for guidance and direction. The ability of leaders to construct and communicate a clear and unambiguous group identity is crucial to gaining support from followers and mobilizing collective action under uncertainty (Hogg, 2018). This is supported by research that investigates people's preferences for autocratic leadership during uncertain times. In a study conducted by Rast and colleagues (2013), participants reported their levels of self-uncertainty and how autocratic they perceived their organizational leader to be. Afterwards, their support for their leaders was measured on a multi-item scale. Although autocratic leadership is generally less favored (e.g., De Cremer, 2006), the results revealed that highly uncertain participants supported an autocratic leader more than a non-autocratic leader, while the reverse was observed among less uncertain participants. Autocratic leaders are particularly attractive to followers during times of uncertainty because they provide clear and authoritative guidance in defining the group's identity. This allows them to establish and convey a clear social identity with a 'single authentic' definition (Reicher & Hopkins, 2003).

Similar to autocratic leadership, affirmational rhetoric can be employed to define a distinctive group identity that alleviates feelings of uncertainty. Gaffney and colleagues (2019) asked student participants to describe their university identity by using either affirming or negating language and then measured their identification with the university, perceived group entitativity, and feelings of uncertainty. The findings revealed that the use of affirming language predicted stronger group identification and higher group entitativity compared to the use of negating language, which led to reduced self-uncertainty. As such, when people experience heightened self-uncertainty, they prefer a leader to utilize affirmational rhetoric rather than negational rhetoric to construct and communicate their group identity. In another study by Gaffney et al. (2019), self-uncertainty was primed and leader rhetorical style (affirmational vs. negational) was manipulated before Republican participants evaluated their presidential nominee Donald Trump as a leader during the 2016 U.S. Republican primaries. The results demonstrated that highly uncertain participants evaluated Trump more favorably and expressed stronger intentions to vote for him when Trump employed affirmational rhetoric, compared to those who felt less uncertain. Therefore, leaders aiming to foster active followership amidst uncertainty should strategically utilize affirmational rhetoric to convey a distinct identity through their communication.

Promoting Changes Under Uncertainty

Social influence within groups is essential a process whereby group members internalize attributes associated with group identity into their self-concept and conform to group norms. Consequently, attitudes and behaviors that deviate from group norms tend to fade away, leaving little room for changes at the group or societal level. According to the social identity perspective on leadership, leaders who embody the group prototype are favored, supported, and trusted by group members (Gaffney, Rast, & Hogg, 2018; Hogg, 2007; Rast, Gaffney, & Hogg, 2013, Rast, Hogg, & Randsley de Moura, 2018). Conversely, non-prototypical leaders are perceived as undesirable, ineffective, and minimally influential. This preference for leaders based on their representativeness of group identity makes it difficult for leaders to bring about positive changes to groups, even those that may benefit group growth.

Bringing about collective change inevitably involves a shift towards the unknown and acts as a catalyst for uncertainty. For instance, in the 1970s, the Canadian government introduced multiculturalism as an official policy to reduce the discrimination and marginalization of non-White immigrants. Although this policy was widely seen as a positive change at the time and has since become an important part of Canadian identity, there were concerns and uncertainties about how it would impact Canadian identity and national unity. In such times of uncertainty, drawing on identity-related information is an effective approach for uncertainty reduction (e.g., Hogg, 2000a). Leaders are a reliable source of such information and play a vital role in providing the needed clarity about the core values and attributes of the group that direct people's thoughts and behaviors (Rast, 2015; van Knippenberg, 2011).

Rast, Gaffney, Hogg, and Crisp (2012) conducted two experiments to examine how self-uncertainty affects preferences for leaders. Participants rated a prototypical or non-prototypical leader after reporting their uncertainty levels. The results showed that participants were more supportive of a prototypical leader when they felt less uncertain. However, this preference was significantly weakened (Study 2) or disappeared (Study 1) when they felt highly uncertain. Drawing upon uncertainty-identity theory, Rast and colleagues argued that a leader could provide the identity that group members need for uncertainty reduction, regardless of how prototypical the leader is perceived. Under highly subjective uncertainty, people simply need a leader to help resolve self-uncertainty, and they are less rigid in examining the leader's prototypicality because the leader's position legitimizes them to provide identity-related information (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). This finding implies that leaders have the potential to diverge from group norms and foster change in times of uncertainty.

Rast and colleagues (2016) conducted two experiments and one time-lagged field study to investigate the influence of self-uncertainty and the importance of group membership on followers' trust in leaders who prioritize group change or stability. Their findings revealed that when a group held psychological significance to individuals' self-concept, they exhibited higher levels of trust in leaders who focused on promoting change during periods of uncertainty. This discovery strengthens the evidence supporting leaders' ability to facilitate collective change in times of uncertainty.

A more comprehensive analysis of social change is provided by research on minority influence (Martin & Hewstone, 2008; Wood et al., 1994). The main point from this research is that a minority with a numerical or power disadvantage has the potential to alter the views of the majority and produce significant social change by consistently advocating for a message that is less rigid and not transparently self-interested (Moscovici, 1976; Mugny, 1982). One important implication for change leaders who seek to exert influence is that they should avoid communicating the change in a rigid manner that accentuates conflicts and tensions. The use of negational rhetoric can render the change message less direct and rigid than affirmational rhetoric, allowing for common ground between the leader (the minority) and other group members (the majority). Therefore, the negational rhetorical style should be preferred over the affirmational style when groups are undergoing significant changes, particularly during times of uncertainty when leaders are granted more trust to implement change (Rast et al., 2016).

However, when there is little uncertainty in groups, leaders are expected to conform to group norms to be influential and effective, making driving changes difficult regardless of the rhetorical style employed–whether it is affirmational or negational.

The Current Studies

As discussed previously, uncertainty drives people to seek group membership, as it provides them with identity-related information that resolves their uncertain feelings (e.g., Hogg, 2000b; Hogg & Mullin, 1999). Leaders can foster active followership and encourage collective action by effectively communicating a clear group identity to followers. As affirming language causes less informational processing conflict and renders a more distinctive social identity than negating language (e.g., Dudschig & Kaup, 2018; Just & Carpenter, 1971), affirmational rhetoric can elicit more support, trust, and favorable evaluations for leaders compared to negational rhetoric during uncertain times. Empirical evidence for this preference for affirmational rhetoric under uncertainty has been demonstrated in the research of Gaffney and colleagues (2019).

Although affirmational rhetoric is effective in providing the needed clarity of group identity during times of uncertainty, it may not well serve the goal of promoting group change. Leaders who wish to modify the values and attributes of their group are more likely to be successful if they communicate their message in a less rigid and more ambiguous manner (Moscovici, 1976; Mugny, 1982). Clearly describing a proposed group identity can threaten the current identity and lead to greater resistance from group members. In such cases, using negational rhetoric to describe and convey the proposed identity can provide the needed ambiguity that buffers the threat of losing the current identity. This ambiguity allows room for group members to connect the proposed identity back to the current one, thereby reducing their resistance to change.

The current research first aims to replicate the findings of Gaffney and colleagues (2019) by using a university student sample and a fictional student leader who is the Chair of a student organization at the participants' university. This research also investigates how social identity rhetoric and self-uncertainty interact to influence the evaluations of a leader who opposes or supports a group change. A pilot study was conducted to assess the leader rhetoric manipulation. Three experimental studies were conducted to investigate people's preferences for affirmational versus negational rhetorical styles in times of uncertainty when the group leader attempted to maintain the current group identity or promote a changed group identity. Specifically, Study 1 examined the interactive effect of leader rhetoric (affirmational versus negational) and self-uncertainty (low versus high) on leader evaluation when the leader opposed a group change. Study 2 investigated the interactive effect of leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty on leader evaluation when the leader supported a group change. Finally, Study 3 examined the interactive effects of leader rhetoric, self-uncertainty, and leader stance (anti-change versus pro-change) on leader evaluation.

CHAPTER THREE

This dissertation comprises a pilot study and three experiments that took place in a laboratory room. The focal change adopted in these studies was the introduction of the comprehensive examination by the Department of Psychology at a Canadian university. As the participants were undergraduate students who were majoring or minoring in psychology at the same university, this change was psychologically important and relevant to them, ensuring a high level of experimental realism. While this group change was fabricated, it should have adequate mundane realism since many universities require undergraduate students to pass a comprehensive exam before they can receive their degrees. In addition, the introduction of the comprehensive exam was selected as the focal change because it is a comparatively moderate group change that should have a significant impact on the participants without being entirely negative. This allows the group leader to frame the change in a positive light when promoting it. If the group change were too radical, group members would be too resistant to it, making it difficult for the leader to promote the change using rhetoric alone.

Based on previous research (Gaffney et al., 2019), the manipulation of leader rhetoric was carefully designed, considering the leader stance as being anti-change vs. pro-change, and was assessed in the pilot study. The goal of Study 1 is to replicate prior findings from Gaffney and colleagues (2019, Study 2) by examining whether a leader using affirmational rhetoric is preferred when group members experience heightened self-uncertainty. This was achieved by employing a similar research methodology but with a different subject population. Following the research approach of Gaffney and colleagues, the leader affirmed the group identity by opposing a potential change within the ingroup in Study 1. Building upon Study 1, Study 2 utilized the same research methodology but took a step further to examine how leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty affected people's preferences for a leader when they supported a potential group change.

Study 1 and Study 2 investigated this relationship for anti-change and pro-change leaders separately, making it challenging to directly compare these effects between the two types of leaders. To address this limitation, Study 3 incorporated both anti-change and pro-change leaders as conditions of a third predictor variable, leader stance. As such, the interactive effect between leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty was tested across the different conditions of leader stance. Study 3 aims to replicate the findings in Study 1 and Study 2 while also facilitating a direct comparison of preferences for an anti-change leader versus a pro-change leader.

To determine the appropriate sample sizes for detecting significant effects, statistical power analyses were performed using the recommended procedures by Cohen (1988, 1992). Study 1 and Study 2 were expected to yield a small to medium effect size ($f = .20$), while Study 3 was expected to have a smaller effect size ($f = .15$). Based on these analyses, a sample size of 200 was recommended for both Study 1 and Study 2, whereas Study 3 should have a sample size of 350.

Study 1

In times of uncertainty, leaders are typically the most reliable and prominent sources of group-related information that helps reduce feelings of uncertainty. As such, leaders who can provide a clear sense of group identity are often favored by group members as they can provide the clarity needed in an uncertain context. Previous research has revealed that the affirmational rhetorical style yields more support for leaders under high than low self-uncertainty, compared to the negational rhetorical style (Gaffney et al., 2019). This is because the use of affirmations can construct and convey the group identity more clearly with fewer informational processing conflicts, relative to the use of negations (e.g., Margolin & Hover, 2011).

While aiming to replicate previous findings, Study 1 is not entirely identical to the work of Gaffney and colleagues (2019). A leader can communicate the group identity by asserting what attributes the group possesses or does not possess; they can also do so by stating a stance that represents the group identity. In the context of ongoing changes within the group, a leader can affirm the group identity by advocating against changes by using either affirmational or negational rhetoric. Therefore, Study 1 employed a similar methodology to that used in the research by Gaffney and colleagues (2019) while endorsing a different approach to communicate and affirm group identity through opposition to a collective change.

Study 1 recruited undergraduate students majoring or minoring in psychology at a Canadian university. Participants were told they were participating in a study on the psychology of leadership in a university setting. The low or high level of self-uncertainty was primed among participants by using a priming procedure. Subsequently, participants read a news article, ostensibly from the university's official newspaper, in which a student leader spoke against the introduction of the comprehensive examination proposed by the Department of Psychology. Afterwards, they reported their support for, trust in, and perceived effectiveness of the student leader. The leader rhetoric manipulation was created based on the one used in the study of Gaffney and colleagues, and this manipulation was assessed in a pilot study. This study employed a 2 (social identity rhetoric) x 2 (self-uncertainty) between-subjects factorial design.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1a. Affirmational rhetoric will yield more support, trust, and perceived effectiveness for an anti-change leader under high than low self-uncertainty.

Hypothesis 1b. Negational rhetoric will yield more support, trust, and perceived effectiveness for an anti-change leader under low than high uncertainty.

Hypothesis 2. Under high uncertainty, an anti-change leader will garner more support, trust, and perceived effectiveness when employing affirmational rhetoric rather than negational rhetoric. Under low uncertainty, leader support, trust, and perceived effectiveness will not significantly differ across leader rhetoric conditions.

Method

Pilot study. The pilot study recruited 70 undergraduate students from the Department of Psychology through the research participation pool. Participants received partial course credit in exchange for their voluntary participation in a study ostensibly examining leadership in the university setting. In the recruitment materials, students were clearly informed that they must be undergraduate students majoring or minoring in psychology to be eligible to participate in the study. To prevent unintentional sign-ups by ineligible participants, the first question asked them if they were currently majoring or minoring in psychology. Only participants with a psychology major or minor were included in the final sample. To begin, participants reported their demographic information on age, gender, and ethnicity. They then read a quote from a student leader in their department who ostensibly supported or opposed the introduction of the comprehensive examination by the Department of Psychology.

As the leader rhetoric manipulation needs to be checked across the conditions of the leader stance variable (anti-change vs. pro-change), participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions (see Appendix A-1, A-2, A-3, and A-4 for materials used in the pilot study): 1) affirmational rhetoric x anti-change leader condition (65 words), 2) negational rhetoric x anti-change leader condition (68 words), 3) affirmational rhetoric x pro-change leader condition (65 words), and 4) negational rhetoric x pro-change leader condition (68 words). These statements were adapted from previous research (Gaffney et al., 2019) and have been carefully designed to be as similar as possible in terms of length, structure, and word count. The affirmational rhetoric x anti-change leader statement reads:

> I believe this new motion will pose a great challenge to students in our department," Leader X said. "I am opposed to introducing the comprehensive exam as an additional requirement for the program because it will put a heavy burden on our students and slow the progress of many students per year. We should all agree that **we oppose the introduction of the comprehensive exam**."

The negational rhetoric x anti-change leader statement reads:

> I believe this new motion will pose a great challenge to students in our department," Leader X said. "I am not supportive of introducing the comprehensive exam as an additional requirement for the program because it will put a heavy burden on our students and slow the progress of many students per year. We should all agree that **we do not support the introduction of the comprehensive exam**.

The affirmational rhetoric x pro-change leader statement reads:

> I believe this new motion will provide a great opportunity for students in our department," Leader X said. "I am supportive of introducing the comprehensive exam as an additional requirement for the program because it will improve the critical thinking and research skills of our students and enhance student success after graduation. We should all agree that **we support the introduction of the comprehensive exam**.

The negational rhetoric x pro-change leader statement reads:

> I believe this new motion will provide a great opportunity for students in our department," Leader X said. “I am not opposed to introducing the comprehensive exam as an additional requirement for the program because it will improve the critical thinking and research skills of our students and enhance student success after graduation. We should all agree that **we do not oppose the introduction of the comprehensive exam**.

Following the leader rhetoric manipulation, participants completed two manipulation check questions. The first question asked participants to indicate whether they saw the word "not" in the quote from Leader X by responding with either "yes" or "no." Participants in the affirmational rhetoric condition should respond "no," while those in the negational rhetoric condition should respond "yes." Next, participants in the affirmational rhetoric condition were asked to respond with either "true" or "false" to the statement "Leader X suggests that we should oppose/support the introduction of the comprehensive exam," while those in the negational rhetoric condition responded to the statement "Leader X suggests that we should not support/oppose the introduction of the comprehensive exam." Participants pass this manipulation check if they answer “true”. For the manipulation to be considered successful, the pass rate for both manipulation check questions should be over 90%.

The analysis of data revealed a high pass rate for both manipulation checks. Specifically, 92.86% of participants (n = 65) passed the first manipulation check question, and 97.14% of them (n = 67) passed the second manipulation check question. These results demonstrate that the leader rhetoric manipulations were successful.

Participants and design. Undergraduate student participants majoring or minoring in psychology (*N* = 174) at a Canadian university were recruited through the research participation pool in the Department of Psychology. Participants were offered partial course credit in exchange for their voluntary participation in a study ostensibly examining the psychology of leadership in the university setting. Due to the eligibility restrictions on participants and the limited capability of the research participation pool at the university, the sample size fell short of the recommended 200 participants.

The majority of participants were females (79.89%, n = 139), followed by males (17.24%, n = 30), other gender groups (1.72%, n = 3), and those who preferred not to disclose (1.15%, n = 2), with an average age of 18.89 years. The participants primarily identified as South Asian (21.84%, n = 38), Euro-North American (21.26%, n = 37), East Asian (16.67%, n = 29), European (13.79%, n = 24), African (8.62%, n = 15), and Middle Eastern (6.32%, n = 11), with a smaller proportion identifying as Hispanic (2.87%, n = 5), Indigenous (1.72%, n = 3), Pacific Islander (0.58%, n = 1), and other ethnic groups (6.32%, n = 11).

In Study 1[1], there were two predictor variables: social identity rhetoric (affirmational vs. negational) and self-uncertainty (low vs. high). Social identity rhetoric was manipulated by using a fabricated news article, and self-uncertainty was primed through a priming procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions created by the combination of the two predictor variables. The primary dependent variables were multi-item measures of leader support, leader trust, and perceived leader effectiveness.

Procedure and measures. Participants entered a laboratory and were seated in separate cubicles, where they completed the study using a computer. To begin, participants provided informed consent and read a statement about the purpose of the study, which was ostensibly to examine the psychology of leadership in the university setting. Similar to the pilot study, participants first responded to a filter question asking if they were currently majoring or minoring in psychology. Only participants with a psychology major or minor were included in the final sample. They then reported their demographic information, including age, gender, and ethnicity as well as their identification with the Department of Psychology, using a six-item measure adapted from prior research (Grant et al., 2015; Hogg & Hains, 1996; 1998; Hogg et al., 2007). Previous research has indicated group identification can influence people's evaluations of leaders (e.g., Hogg et al., 1998, 2006), so participants' identification with the department was measured as a covariate in this study. Participants rated their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements: 1) "Being a student in the Department of Psychology is important to my identity," 2) "I often think about myself as a student in the Department of Psychology," 3) "My identity as a student in the Department of Psychology influences my life choices a lot," 4) "My identity as a student in the Department of Psychology influences my daily decisions a lot," 5) "I am often aware of being in the Department of Psychology," and 6) "I often think about my identity in the Department of Psychology;" 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 9 = *Strongly Agree* ($\alpha = .90$).

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[1] All three studies were pre-registered on OSF, which can be accessed through https://osf.io/8mnfz/?view_only=98b6c973ebe44d58b4acfb025359213c for Study 1, https://osf.io/9xb42/?view_only=ebeae317793a48fe9ab876e1b0da6b5e for Study 2, and https://osf.io/jdbuv/?view_only=67092dd9e53247909d5c5fec1890a541 for Study 3.

Next, the study employed an experimental procedure to prime participants with either low or high self-uncertainty, following previous research (Hogg et al., 2007; Hohman et al., 2017; Hohman & Hogg, 2011, 2015). Participants in the low uncertainty condition were asked to list three things that made them feel confident about being a student in the Department of Psychology, while those in the high uncertainty condition listed three things that made them feel uncertain about being a student in the Department of Psychology.

After the priming procedure, participants read a news article featuring the newly elected Chair of a student organization speaking against a proposed motion to introduce a comprehensive examination in their department. Unlike the pilot study where leader rhetoric was manipulated for both anti-change and pro-change leaders, participants in Study 1 only received the leader rhetoric manipulation for an anti-change leader. The student leader used either affirmational or negational rhetoric to communicate the group identity as opposing this change. These manipulations were similar to those described in the pilot study for the anti-change condition, but the article also included additional information about the student leadership position as well as the new motion to make the manipulation closer to a real news article (see Appendix B-1 and B-2 for the full materials). Participants were randomly assigned to either the affirmational or negational rhetoric condition.

Following the leader rhetoric manipulation, participants were asked to answer a manipulation check question. Those in the affirmational rhetoric condition responded “true” or “false” to the statement "According to the news article, Leader X suggests that we should oppose the introduction of the comprehensive exam,” while those in the negational rhetoric condition responded to the statement “According to the news article, Leader X suggests that we should not support the introduction of the comprehensive exam.” Participants then completed several measures assessing their evaluations of the student leader as well as an attention check question. The attention check question asked participants to select “*Somewhat Agree*”, one of the agreement/disagreement levels, to indicate their attention. Participants who did not pass the attention check were excluded from the final dataset.

Leader support. Participants indicated the extent to which they supported the student leader presented. Leader support was measured with a six-item scale adapted from previous leadership research (Rast et al., 2012; Rast, Hogg, & Giessner, 2013). Participants indicated their agreement or disagreement with statements: 1) “Leader X is an effective leader,” 2) “Leader X represents the interests of students in the Department of Psychology well,” 3) “Leader X fits in well with students in the Department of Psychology," 4) "I am very likely to trust Leader X as a leader, 5) I am a strong supporter of Leader X," and 6) "Leader X is very favorable for a student leadership position in the Department of Psychology;" 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 9 = *Strongly Agree* (α = .91). Higher scores indicate greater support for the leader.

Leader trust. Participants subsequently rated their trust in the student leader, which was measured using a 6-item scale adapted from previous research (Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008; Rast et al., 2013). Participants indicated their agreement or disagreement with statements: 1) "I trust Leader X absolutely," 2) "I think Leader X does the right things," 3) "I think Leader X is trustworthy," 4) "Leader X is very committed to students in the Department of Psychology," 5) "Leader X wants the best for students in the Department of Psychology," and 6) "Leader X aims to gain benefits for all students in the Department of Psychology;" 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 9 = *Strongly Agree* (α = .90). Higher scores indicate greater trust in the leader.

Leader effectiveness. Participants assessed the effectiveness of the student leader using a four-item scale adapted from previous research (van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005). Participants rated their level of agreement or disagreement with statements: 1) "Leader X is a good leader," 2) "Leader X is effective," "3) Leader X leads the group in a way which motivates others," and 4) "I would like working together with Leader X;" 1 = *strongly disagree*, 9 = *strongly agree*; α = .88). Higher scores indicate greater perceived leader effectiveness.

Finally, participants were thanked and fully debriefed.

Results

Data were analyzed with the most recent version of the R statistical package (R Core Team, 2023). There were two predictor variables (social identity rhetoric and self-uncertainty) and three outcome variables (leader support, leader trust, and leader effectiveness). Although these outcome variables were highly correlated, they are theoretically distinct and were examined separately in previous research (e.g., Rast et al, 2013). Since both predictor variables are dichotomous variables, a two-way ANOVA was conducted for each dependent variable. Significant interactions were followed up with simple effects analyses. Reliabilities, means, SDs, and inter-correlation of all variables are shown in Table 1.

Background variables and manipulation checks. Analysis of the demographic variables in relation to the main outcome variables revealed a significant effect of gender on leader support, leader trust, and leader effectiveness. Female participants expressed more support for the leader ($\beta = .22$, $t = 2.82$, $p < .01$; $M = 6.68$, $SD = 1.24$ and $M = 5.97$, $SD = 1.36$), more trust in the leader ($\beta = .19$, $t = 2.40$, $p = .018$; $M = 6.30$, $SD = 1.23$ and $M = 5.71$, $SD = 1.24$), and perceived the leader as more effective ($\beta = .25$, $t = 3.19$, $p < .01$; $M = 6.43$, $SD = 1.26$ and $M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.43$), compared to male participants.

Moreover, participants' identification with their department had a significant effect on leader support ($\beta = .16$, $t = 2.13$, $p = .035$), leader trust ($\beta = .20$, $t = 2.63$, $p < .01$), and leader effectiveness ($\beta = .26$, $t = 3.55$, $p < .01$). Those who strongly identified with their department gave more support, more trust, and higher evaluations of the leader's effectiveness, compared to those with weaker identification with the department. However, controlling for participants' gender and identification with the department did not change the pattern of results. Therefore, the subsequent analyses were presented without these variables as covariates.

Before addressing the primary hypotheses, the quality of the leader rhetoric manipulation was assessed. The manipulation was successful with a high pass rate of 96.37%. Participants who did not pass the leader rhetoric manipulation check were excluded from the final dataset.

Table 1

Study 1: Reliabilities, means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations of all key variables

Variable	α	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1. Leader Rhetoric	-	1.49	.50				
2. Self-Uncertainty	-	1.48	.50	-			
3. Leader Support	.91	6.55	1.27	-.03	.01		
4. Leader Trust	.90	6.20	1.23	-.02	-.01	.83**	
5. Leader Effectiveness	.88	6.28	1.31	-.05	-.03	.82**	.80**

Note. Means ($N = 174$) range from 1 to 9, with 9 indicating more of the property described, except for leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty, which are two dichotomous variables with values of 1 (affirmational) and 2 (negational) for leader rhetoric and with values of 1 (low) and 2 (high) for self-uncertainty. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Leader trust. Similarly, a two-way ANOVA was performed to assess the effect of leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty on leader trust. The results demonstrated that neither the main effects nor interactions on leader trust reached statistical significance (*ps* > .05).

Leader effectiveness. The effect of leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty on leader effectiveness was tested using a two-way ANOVA. Consistent with the findings on leader support and leader trust, the main effects and interactions on leader effectiveness were not statistically significant (*ps* > .05).

Discussion

Study 1 investigated the interactive effect of leader rhetoric (affirmational vs. negational) and self-uncertainty on leader support, leader trust, and perceived leader effectiveness for a leader advocating against a group change. The results did not successfully replicate the findings of previous research (Gaffney et al., 2019). The use of affirmational rhetoric did not result in increased support, trust, and effectiveness ratings for an anti-change leader under high than low uncertainty. Similarly, the employment of negational rhetoric did not yield more support, trust, and perceived effectiveness for an anti-change leader under low than high uncertainty. Therefore, Hypothesis 1a and 1b were not supported. Moreover, Hypothesis 2 was only partially supported. Under high uncertainty, an anti-change leader did not garner significantly more support, trust, and perceived effectiveness compared to negational rhetoric. Under low uncertainty, no significant differences were observed in support, trust, and perceived effectiveness for the anti-change leader between the affirmational and negational rhetoric conditions.

The absence of significant effects may be ascribed to variations in the experimental manipulations utilized in the present study compared to those in previous research. While the leader rhetoric manipulation in Study 1 was carefully adapted from the work of Gaffney and colleagues (2019) to ensure a reliable replication, it diverged from the previous study due to the introduction of a collective change in the adapted manipulation. This change may have elicited substantial uncertainty among participants, as individuals commonly experience change-related uncertainty during periods of organizational or group transformations (Bordia et al., 2004; Hogg, 2021; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). As group membership enables people to define themselves in terms of group identity (Turner et al., 1987), change-related uncertainty can transform into uncertainty about one's self-concept when participants believe the collective change would significantly alter the core values and attributes associated with their group identity. Consequently, these participants could have experienced heightened self-uncertainty, irrespective of the uncertainty condition assigned to them. As a result, the effect of leader rhetoric on evaluations of the anti-change leader fails to manifest across the different self-uncertainty conditions.

Study 1 examined people's evaluations of a leader who affirmed group identity by opposing a collective change using either affirmational or negational rhetoric, particularly when their self-uncertainty was heightened. However, there exists a gap in the literature, as no work to date empirically examines the impact of using affirmations and negations in rhetoric on individuals' evaluations of a leader advocating for group changes, especially during times of uncertainty. Leaders are often less supported and favored when they deviate from group norms and promote change initiatives (e.g., Hogg, 2007), as collective changes may pose a threat to the continuity of group identity (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, & Bobbio, 2008). However, heightened self-uncertainty has the potential to lead people to favor leaders who prioritize changes (Rast et al., 2016). Thus, building upon Study 1, Study 2 expanded the work of Gaffney and colleagues (2019) by investigating people's support, trust, and effectiveness ratings for a pro-change leader who employs either affirmational or negational rhetoric under high versus low self-uncertainty.

CHAPTER FOUR

Study 2

Previous research has demonstrated that a leader who affirms group identity receives more support from followers than a leader who negates it (Haslam et al., 2001). When a leader promotes a collective change, they might be perceived as identity-negating because they deviate from group norms and pose a threat to group identity. As such, it is challenging for pro-change leaders to garner support and motivate followers toward collective actions.

Nonetheless, previous research has also suggested heightened self-uncertainty can lead people to favor change-oriented leaders, particularly among those who highly identify with the group (Rast et al., 2016). Moreover, strategically leveraging leader rhetoric that mitigates the threat posed to group identity can help change-oriented leaders garner followers' support for the collective change in times of uncertainty (Syfers et al., 2023). Thus, building upon Study 1, Study 2 expanded the work of Gaffney and colleagues (2019) by investigating people's support, trust, and effectiveness ratings for a pro-change leader who employs affirmational or negational rhetoric under high versus low self-uncertainty.

Study 2 used a methodology similar to Study 1. The only difference is that the student leader supported the group change in Study 2, rather than opposing it. The cover story, self-uncertainty prime, and dependent variable measures (leader support, trust, and effectiveness) were identical to those employed in Study 1. However, the leader rhetoric manipulation differed slightly: participants read a news article in which the student leader supported the proposed motion to introduce the comprehensive examination by using either affirmational or negational rhetoric.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1a. Affirmational rhetoric will yield more support, trust, and perceived effectiveness for a pro-change leader under low than high self-uncertainty.

Hypothesis 1b. Negational rhetoric will yield more support, trust, and perceived effectiveness for a pro-change leader under high than low uncertainty.

Hypothesis 2. Under high uncertainty, a pro-change leader will garner more support, trust, and perceived effectiveness when employing negational rhetoric rather than affirmational rhetoric. Under low uncertainty, leader support, trust, and perceived effectiveness will not significantly differ across leader rhetoric conditions.

Method

Participants and Design. Participants were undergraduate students majoring or minoring in psychology ($N = 155$) at a Canadian university recruited through the research participation pool in the Department of Psychology. The final dataset excluded a participant who spent an unreasonably short time (8.12 seconds) on the vignette page of the negational rhetoric manipulation (262 words). Participants received partial course credit in exchange for their voluntary participation in a study that was described as exploring the psychology of leadership in the university setting. Due to the eligibility restrictions on participants and the limited capability of the research participation pool at the university, the sample size did not reach the recommended 200 participants as determined by the power analysis.

The majority of participants were women (67.31%, $n = 105$), followed by men (28.21%, $n = 44$), other gender groups (3.21%, $n = 5$), and those who preferred not to disclose (1.28%, $n = 2$), with an average age of 19.10 years. The largest share of participants identified as East Asian (23.08%, $n = 36$), followed by South Asian (21.79%, $n = 34$), Euro-North American (19.23%, n

= 30), European (18.59%, *n* = 29), and African (8.97%, *n* = 14), with a smaller proportion identifying as Middle Eastern (3.21%, *n* = 5), Indigenous (1.92%, *n* = 3), Pacific Islander (1.28%, *n* = 2), Hispanic (0.64%, *n* = 1), and other ethnic groups (1.28%, *n* = 2).

There were two predictor variables: social identity rhetoric (affirmational vs. negational) and self-uncertainty (low vs. high). Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions, creating a 2 (social identity rhetoric) x 2 (self-uncertainty) between-subjects factorial design. The key dependent variables were the same as those in Study 1 (leader support, leader trust, and intergroup leader effectiveness).

Procedure and Measures. Participants were seated in separate cubicles within a laboratory, where they completed the study using a computer. Similar to Study 1, participants first provided informed consent and were informed that the study focused on leadership psychology in a university setting. After that, they answered the filter question concerning their eligibility for study participation and some basic demographic questions, including age, gender, and ethnicity. Participants then rated their identification with the Department of Psychology using the same group identification measure (Grant et al., 2015; Hogg & Hains, 1996; 1998; Hogg et al., 2007) employed in Study 1 (e.g., "Being a student in the Department of Psychology is important to my identity;" 1 = *strongly disagree*, 9 = *strongly agree;* $\alpha = .91$).

Next, participants were primed with either low or high self-uncertainty employing the same experimental procedure as Study 1 (Hogg et al., 2007; Hohman et al., 2017; Hohman & Hogg, 2011, 2015). Following that, participants read a news article similar to the one used in Study 1. However, the student leader supported the introduction of the comprehensive examination by employing either affirmational or negational rhetoric. These manipulations were similar to those described in the pilot study for the pro-change condition but with additional information about the student leadership position and the new motion (see Appendix C-1 and C-2 for the full materials). Participants were randomly assigned to either the affirmational or negational rhetoric condition.

Afterwards, participants went through a manipulation check for the leader rhetoric manipulation. In the affirmational rhetoric condition, participants responded "true" or "false" to the statement "According to the news article, Leader X suggests that we should support the introduction of the comprehensive exam," while those in the negational rhetoric condition responded to the statement "According to the news article, Leader X suggests that we should not oppose the introduction of the comprehensive exam."

Subsequently, participants evaluated the student leader using the same measures utilized in Study 1, including the leader support measure (Rast et al., 2012; Rast et al., 2013; e.g., I am a strong supporter of Leader X;" α = .93), the leader trust measure (Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008; Rast et al., 2013; e.g., "I trust Leader X absolutely;" α = .91), and the leader effectiveness measure (van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005; e.g., "Leader X is effective;" α = .88). Additionally, they competed the same attention check question employed in Study 1. Participants who did not pass the attention check were excluded from the final dataset.

Finally, participants were thanked and fully debriefed.

Results

Similar to Study 1, there were two predictor variables (social identity rhetoric and self-uncertainty) and three dependent variables (leader support, leader trust, and leader effectiveness). Since both predictor variables are dichotomous, a two-way ANOVA was conducted on each dependent variable using the most recent version of the R statistical package (R Core Team, 2023). Additionally, simple effects analyses were performed for all significant interactions. Reliabilities, means, SDs, and inter-correlation of all variables are shown in Table 2.

Background variables and manipulation checks. Analysis of the demographic variables demonstrated a significant effect of ethnicity on leader trust. Participants identified as South Asian ($M = 5.45$, $SD = 1.55$) exhibited more trust in the leader compared to those identified as European ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.28$), $\beta = .23$, $t = 2.25$, $p < .05$. Moreover, a demographic check on participant age, gender, and ethnicity demonstrated that the number of participants who received different leader rhetoric conditions significantly differed by ethnicity, χ^2 (9, 155) = 17.02, $p < .05$. Including ethnicity in the model strengthened the observed effects, so all the analyses on leader trust were performed with participants' ethnicities controlled for.

Moreover, the effect of participants' identification with their department on leader support, leader trust, and leader effectiveness was not statistically significant (*ps* > .05), and controlling for it did not change the pattern of results. Therefore, the subsequent analyses were presented without participants' identification with the department as a covariate.

Before addressing the primary hypotheses, the quality of the leader rhetoric manipulation was assessed. The leader rhetoric manipulation was successful with a high pass rate of 98.81%. Participants who did not pass the leader rhetoric manipulation check were excluded from the final dataset.

Leader support. A two-way ANOVA was performed to investigate the impact of leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty on leader support. The results revealed that none of the main effects or interactive effects of leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty on leader support reached statistical significance (*ps* > .05).

Table 2

Study 2: Reliabilities, means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations of all key variables

Variable	α	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1. Leader Rhetoric	-	1.51	.50				
2. Self-Uncertainty	-	1.51	.50	-			
3. Leader Support	.91	4.88	1.63	.05	-.04		
4. Leader Trust	.90	5.03	1.50	-.03	-.05	.85**	
5. Leader Effectiveness	.88	5.16	1.59	.02	-.13	.84**	.80**

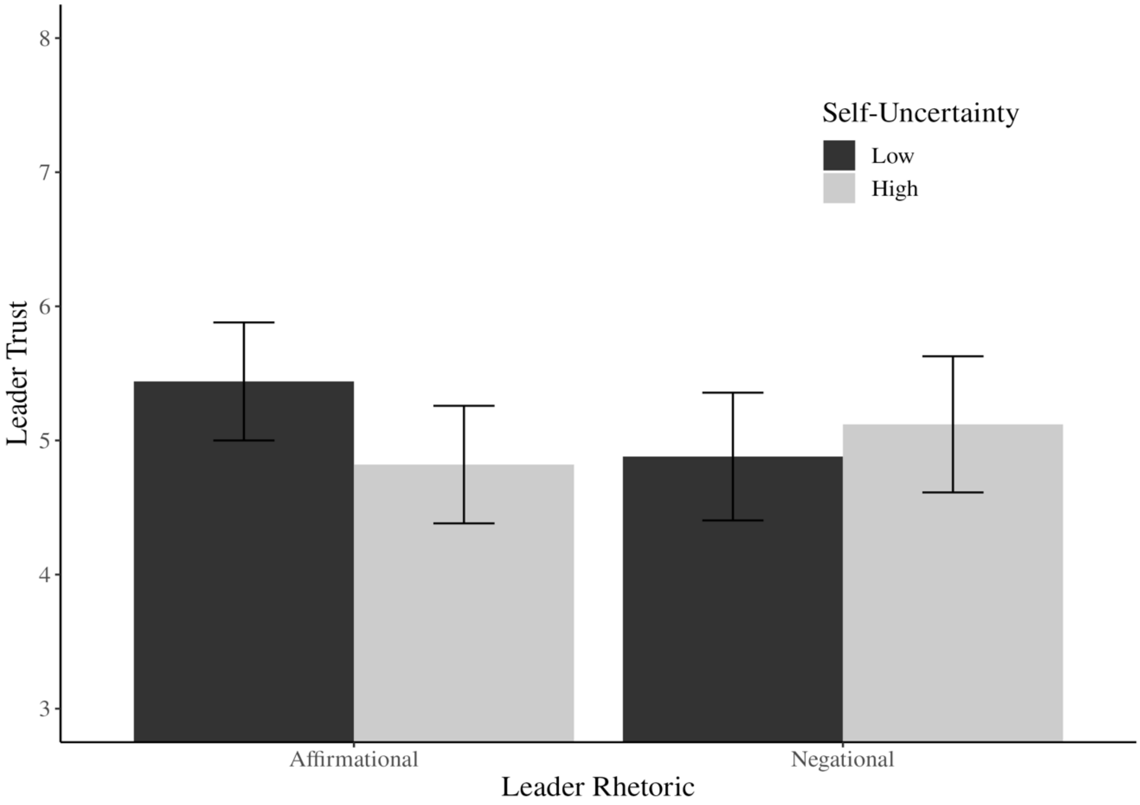
Note. Means ($N = 155$) range from 1 to 9, with 9 indicating more of the property described, except for leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty, which are two dichotomous variables with values of 1 (affirmational) and 2 (negational) for leader rhetoric and with values of 1 (low) and 2 (high) for self-uncertainty. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Leader trust. A two-way ANCOVA with ethnicity as the covariate was performed on leader trust. The results demonstrated a significant two-way interaction between leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty on leader trust, $F(1, 142) = 3.94, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .03$ (see Figure 1). Simple effects analyses revealed that, consistent with hypothesis 1a, the pro-change leader received more trust under low self-uncertainty ($M = 5.44, SD = 1.25$) compared to high self-uncertainty ($M = 4.82, SD = 1.50$) when employing affirmational rhetoric, $F(1, 142) = 7.33, p = .05, \eta_p^2 = .03$. When negational rhetoric was employed, although the trend supported hypothesis 1b, there was no difference in the high and low self-uncertainty conditions ($M = 5.12, SD = 1.51$ and $M = 4.88, SD = 1.63$), $F(1, 142) = 0.73, p = .39, \eta_p^2 = .01$. Similarly, while there was a trend supporting hypothesis 2, the difference between the affirmational and negational rhetoric conditions (*M* = 5.12*, SD* = 1.51 and *M* = 4.82*, SD* = 1.50) did not reach statistical significance, *F*(1, 142) = 1.41, *p* = .24, η_p^2 = .01.

Leader effectiveness. The effect of leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty on leader effectiveness was examined using a two-way ANOVA. Similar to the findings on leader support, the main effects and interactions on leader effectiveness were not statistically significant (*ps* > .05).

Figure 1

Study 2: Leader trust as a function of leader rhetoric, moderated by self-uncertainty.



Discussion

Study 2 expanded the scope of Study 1 as well as the work of Gaffney and colleagues (2019) by examining the interaction between leader rhetoric (affirmational vs. negational) and self-uncertainty on participants' support, trust, and perceived effectiveness for a leader who promoted a group change. The findings provided mixed evidence in support of the hypotheses. While the expected interactive effect of leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty was not observed on leader support and leader effectiveness, it was significant on leader trust. The results on leader trust partially supported the hypotheses of Study 2. In line with hypothesis 1a, affirmational rhetoric yielded significantly more trust for the pro-change leader under low than high self-uncertainty. However, hypothesis 1b and hypothesis 2 were not supported, as the simple effects associated with negational rhetoric did not reach statistical significance, although the trends appeared to be consistent with these hypotheses.

These hypothesized interactions and simple effects were absent probably because the proposed change–the introduction of the comprehensive exam–was too aversive for the participants, particularly when their leader supported it. To make the collective change more relevant to the participants, they were informed that students would have to pass the comprehensive exam to receive their degrees in the manipulation material. Although this change was framed in a positive way, emphasizing its potential to improve students' critical thinking and research skills, it may still be perceived as too threatening given its role in determining if participants could graduate from the program. Consequently, it might be difficult for a student leader to make this collective change acceptable or to enhance support, trust, and perceived effectiveness among fellow students by simply using negations in rhetoric.

Moreover, the results also demonstrated that, although leader support, leader trust, and leader effectiveness are highly correlated constructs, they differ from each other theoretically. Previous research has only found increased trust in a pro-change leader when people experience heightened self-uncertainty (Rast et al., 2016). The employment of affirmations and negations in rhetoric may be able to influence people's trust in a leader who initiates a collective change under high versus low uncertainty. However, trusting a leader to pormote changes for the group's best interests does not necessarily mean that group members support the leader in initiating the change or perceive the leader as effective in leading the group toward a brighter future.

Lastly, the lack of significance in many anticipated interactions and simple effects may be attributed to the inadequate power in Study 2. This study required participants to be undergraduate students with a major or minor in psychology, making the recruitment challenging. A significant portion of participants in the Research Participation Pool comprised first-year undergraduate students who may have not declared their majors. This restriction significantly reduced the number of eligible participants in the pool, leading to an insufficient sample size and inadequate power in this study.

Study 2 provided some evidence supporting the preference for affirmational rhetoric under low self-uncertainty and the preference for negational rhetoric under high self-uncertainty when a leader promotes a group change. Building upon the work of Study 1 and Study 2, Study 3 was designed to incorporate anti-change and pro-change leaders as the conditions of a third predictor variable, enabling direct comparisons of the hypothesized effects between an anti-change and a pro-change leader.

CHAPTER FIVE

Study 3

Study 1 and Study 2 examined how social identity rhetoric and self-uncertainty interact to influence evaluations of an anti-change leader and a pro-change leader separately. Study 3 combined the two leader stance conditions (anti-change vs. pro-change) into a single predictor variable and employed a similar methodology to investigate the interactive effect of leader rhetoric (affirmational vs. negational), self-uncertainty (low vs. high), and leader stance on leader evaluation. The materials, including the cover story, leader rhetoric manipulation, self-uncertainty prime, and dependent variable measures, were identical to those employed in Study 1 and Study 2. However, Study 3 used a 2 (social identity rhetoric) x 2 (self-uncertainty) x 2 (leader stance) between-subjects factorial design. The leader stance manipulation included two conditions: the anti-change leader condition, where the student leader opposed the new motion to introduce the comprehensive examination, and the pro-change leader condition, where the student leader supported the new motion.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. An anti-change leader will be more supported, trusted, and perceived as more effective than a pro-change leader across leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty conditions.

Hypothesis 2a. Affirmational rhetoric will yield more support, trust, and perceived effectiveness for an anti-change leader under high than low self-uncertainty.

Hypothesis 2b. Negational rhetoric will yield more support, trust, and perceived effectiveness for an anti-change leader under low than high uncertainty.

Hypothesis 3. Under high uncertainty, an anti-change leader will garner more support, trust, and perceived effectiveness when employing affirmational rhetoric rather than negational rhetoric. Under low uncertainty, leader support, trust, and perceived effectiveness will not significantly differ across leader rhetoric conditions for an anti-change leader.

Hypothesis 4a. Affirmational rhetoric will yield more support, trust, and perceived effectiveness for a pro-change leader under low than high self-uncertainty.

Hypothesis 4b. Negational rhetoric will yield more support, trust, and perceived effectiveness for a pro-change leader under high than low uncertainty.

Hypothesis 5. Under high uncertainty, a pro-change leader will garner more support, trust, and perceived effectiveness when employing negational rhetoric rather than affirmational rhetoric. Under low uncertainty, leader support, trust, and perceived effectiveness will not significantly differ across leader rhetoric conditions for a pro-change leader.

Method

Participants and Design. Undergraduate students (*N* = 267) majoring or minoring in psychology at a Canadian university were recruited through the research participation pool in the Department of Psychology. Participants received partial course credit in exchange for their voluntary participation in what was described as a study on the psychology of leadership in the university setting. Due to the eligibility restrictions on participants and the limited capability of the research participation pool at the university, the sample size did not reach 350 participants.

The majority of participants were women (80.52%, *n* = 215), followed by men (16.48%, *n* = 44), other gender groups (2.62%, *n* = 7), and those who preferred not to disclose (0.37%, *n* = 1), with an average age of 18.68 years. The largest share of participants identified as East Asian (20.97%, *n* = 57), followed by South Asian (18.73%, *n* = 50), Euro-North American (18.73%, *n* = 50), European (14.98%, *n* = 40), and African (9.36%, *n* = 25), with a smaller proportion identifying as Middle Eastern (4.49%, *n* = 12), Indigenous (3.37%, *n* = 9), Hispanic (1.50%, *n* = 4), and other ethnic groups (7.87%, *n* = 21).

The study had three predictor variables: leader rhetoric (affirmational vs. negational), self-uncertainty (low vs. high), and leader stance (anti-change vs. pro-change). Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions, and the key dependent variables were the same as those in the previous studies (leader support, leader trust, and leader effectiveness).

Procedure and Measures. Participants were seated in separate cubicles within a lab space, where they completed the study on a computer. Similar to Study 1 and Study 2, participants were asked to provide informed consent and given materials and an explanation of the study's purpose. Next, they identified their eligibility for study participation and reported some basic demographic information, including age, gender, and ethnicity, as well as their identification with the Department of Psychology utilizing the same measure (Grant et al., 2015; Hogg & Hains, 1996; 1998; Hogg et al., 2007; α = .89) as used in Study 1 and Study 2

Afterwards, participants were primed with either low or high self-uncertainty using the same priming procedure employed in Study 1 and Study 2 (Hogg et al., 2007; Hohman et al., 2017; Hohman & Hogg, 2011, 2015). Participants then read a news article similar to the one used in Study 1 and Study 2, but there were four versions of the news article corresponding to the manipulated conditions created by the interaction between leader rhetoric and leader stance. Participants were randomly assigned to either the affirmational or negational rhetoric condition and either the anti-change leader or the pro-change leader condition.

Subsequently, participants responded to a manipulation check to ensure they had correctly identified the student leader's rhetorical style. In the affirmational rhetoric condition, participants responded "true" or "false" to the statement "According to the news article, Leader

X suggests that we should support/oppose the introduction of the comprehensive exam," while those in the negational rhetoric condition responded to the statement "According to the news article, Leader X suggests that we should not oppose/support the introduction of the comprehensive exam." In addition, participants went through a manipulation check for the leader stance manipulation, which asked them to indicate the extent to which they perceived Leader X to oppose or support the change discussed in the news article. Participants' responses range from 1 (*strongly oppose*) to 9 (*strongly support*). Participants in the pro-change leader condition should rate higher on this item than those in the anti-change leader condition.

Following that, participants evaluated the student leader using the same measures employed in Study 1 and Study 2 to assess the key dependent variables: leader support ($\alpha = .93$), leader trust ($\alpha = .91$), and leader effectiveness ($\alpha = .90$). They also responded to the same attention check question. Participants who did not pass the attention check were excluded from the final dataset.

Finally, participants were thanked and fully debriefed.

Results

There were three predictor variables (leader rhetoric, self-uncertainty, and leader stance) and three dependent variables (leader support, leader trust, and leader effectiveness) in Study 3. A three-way ANOVA was conducted on each dependent variable since all predictor variables are dichotomous. Additionally, simple effects analyses were performed for all significant interactions. Reliabilities, means, SDs, and inter-correlation of all variables are shown in Table 3.

Background variables and manipulation checks. Analysis of the demographic variables demonstrated a significant effect of gender on leader support, leader trust, and leader effectiveness. Female participants expressed more support for the leader ($\beta = .16$, $t = 2.46$, p

$< .05$; $M = 6.05$, $SD = 1.63$ and $M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.76$), more trust in the leader ($\beta = .14$, $t = 2.14$, $p < .05$; $M = 5.99$, $SD = 1.41$ and $M = 5.49$, $SD = 1.44$), and perceived the leader as more effective ($\beta = .18$, $t = 2.71$, $p < .01$; $M = 5.98$, $SD = 1.47$ and $M = 5.32$, $SD = 1.49$), compared to male participants. Moreover, there was a significant effect of ethnicity on leader support and leader trust. Participants identified as South Asian expressed more support ($\beta = .17$, $t = 2.05$, $p < .05$; $M = 6.39$, $SD = 1.55$ and $M = 5.67$, $SD = 1.59$) and more trust ($\beta = .16$, $t = 1.95$, $p = .05$; $M = 6.22$, $SD = 1.24$ and $M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.30$) compared to those identified as European. While the inclusion of demographic variables in the models strengthened the observed effects, a check on participant age, gender, and ethnicity revealed that the distribution of participants across different conditions of predictor variables did not significantly differ in terms of age, gender, or ethnicity. Consequently, subsequent analyses were conducted without incorporating these demographic variables as covariates.

Moreover, participants' identification with their department had a significant effect on leader support ($\beta = .13$, $t = 2.14$, $p < .05$), leader trust ($\beta = .16$, $t = 2.56$, $p < .05$), and leader effectiveness ($\beta = .16$, $t = 2.60$, $p = .01$). Stronger identifications with the department predicted more support, more trust, and higher effectiveness ratings for the leader. Controlling for participants' identification with the department also enhanced the observed effects, so all subsequent analyses were performed with it as a covariate.

An analysis of the leader rhetoric manipulation demonstrated the manipulation was successful with a high pass rate of 98.89%. Participants who failed to pass the leader rhetoric manipulation check were consequently excluded from the final dataset. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the leader stance manipulation was addressed with an independent samples t-test. The results revealed the manipulation was successful: participants in the pro-change leader condition ($M = 7.73$, $SD = 1.86$) perceived the leader as more supportive of the group change compared to those in the anti-change leader condition ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 2.12$), $t(265) = -22.57$, $p < .001$.

Table 3

Study 3: Reliabilities, means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations of all key variables

Variable	α	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1. Leader Rhetoric	-	1.49	.50					
2. Self-Uncertainty	-	1.49	.50	-				
3. Leader Stance	-	1.49	.50	-	-			
4. Leader Support	.93	5.90	1.67	.03	-.05	-.50*		
4. Leader Trust	.91	5.88	1.42	-.03	-.05	-.38**	.87**	
6. Leader Effectiveness	.90	5.84	1.49	-.02	.00	-.29**	.84**	.85**

Note. Means ($N = 267$) range from 1 to 9, with 9 indicating more of the property described, except for leader rhetoric, self-uncertainty, and leader stance, which are three dichotomous variables with values of 1 (affirmational) and 2 (negational) for leader rhetoric, with values of 1 (low) and 2 (high) for self-uncertainty, and with values of 1 (anti-change) and 2 (pro-change) for leader stance. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Leader support. A three-way ANCOVA, with participants' identification with the department as the covariate, was performed on leader support. The results indicated a significant main effect of leader stance on leader support, $F(1, 258) = 93.00$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .26$. Consistent with hypothesis 1, participants were more supportive of the anti-change leader ($M = 6.73$, $SD = 1.35$) than the pro-change leader ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 1.54$).

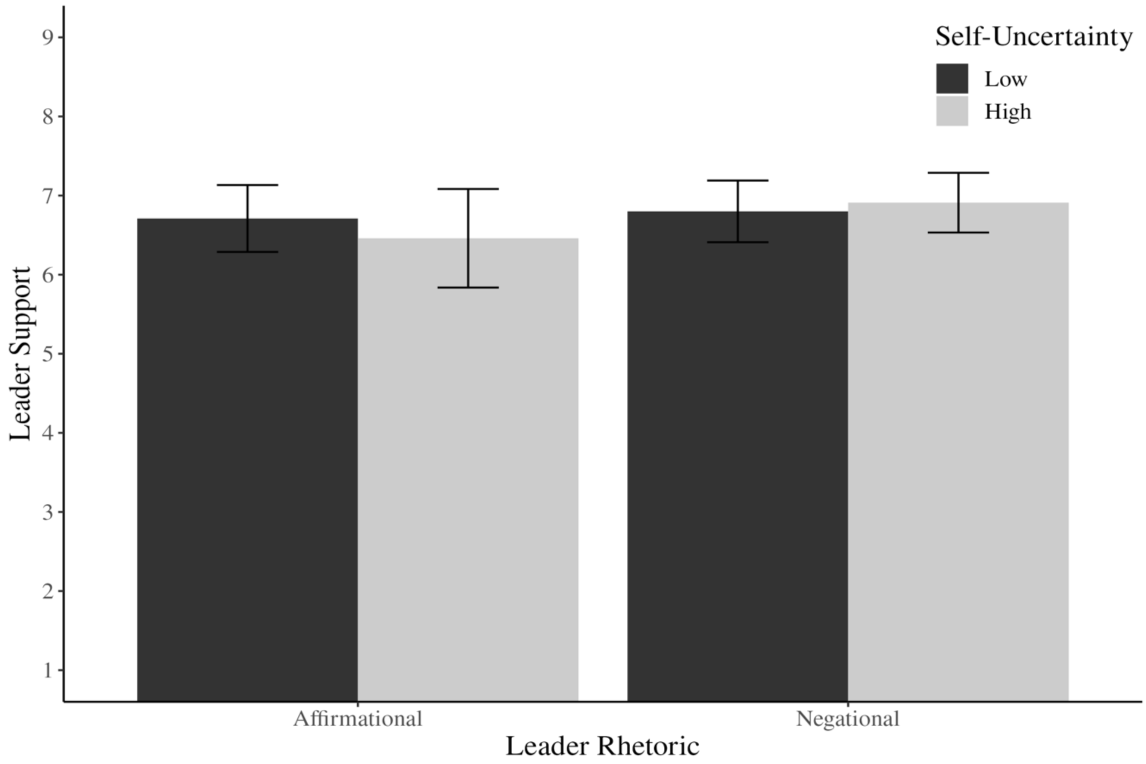
Moreover, there was a marginally significant three-way interaction between leader rhetoric, self-uncertainty, and leader stance on leader support, $F(1, 258) = 3.83$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$ (see Figure 2). Simple effects analyses showed that there was a trend that contradicted hypothesis 4b. A pro-change leader employing negational rhetoric garnered marginally more support under low self-uncertainty ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.66$) compared to high self-uncertainty ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.45$), $F(1, 258) = 3.18$, $p = .08$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$.

Additionally, further supporting hypothesis 1, under low self-uncertainty, participants supported the anti-change leader more than the pro-change leader in both the affirmational rhetoric ($F(1, 258) = 28.10$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$; $M = 6.71$, $SD = 1.33$ and $M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.47$) and negational rhetoric conditions ($F(1, 258) = 17.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$; $M = 6.80$, $SD = 1.16$ and $M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.66$). Likewise, under high self-uncertainty, the anti-change leader received more support compared to the pro-change leader in both the affirmational rhetoric ($F(1, 258) = 12.72$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$; $M = 6.46$, $SD = 1.77$ and $M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.55$) and negational rhetoric conditions ($F(1, 258) = 38.55$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$; $M = 6.91$, $SD = 1.09$ and $M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.45$). There were no other significant main or simple effects.

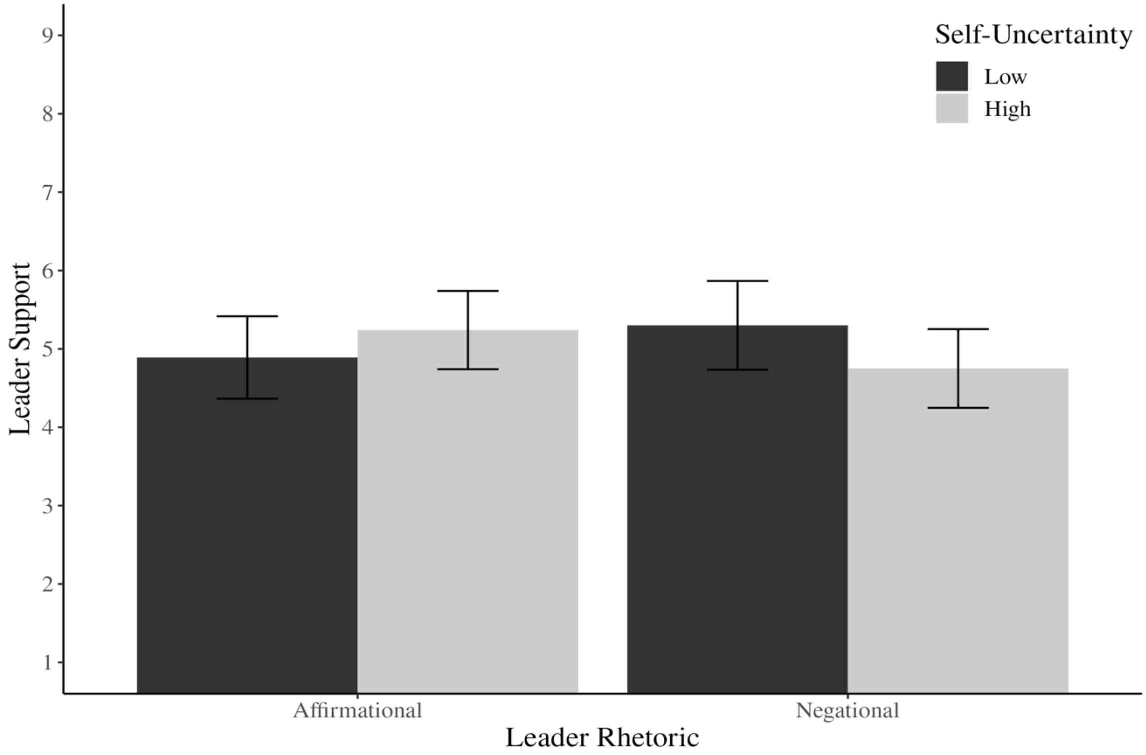
Figure 2

Study 3: Leader support as a function of leader rhetoric, moderated by self-uncertainty and leader stance.

Panel A: Anti-Change



Panel B: Pro-Change



Leader trust. Similarly, a three-way ANCOVA with participants' identification with the department as the covariate was conducted on leader trust. The findings revealed a significant main effect of leader stance on leader trust, $F(1, 258) = 49.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$. Consistent with hypothesis 1, participants demonstrated more trust in the anti-change leader ($M = 6.42$, $SD = 1.22$) than the pro-change leader ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.41$).

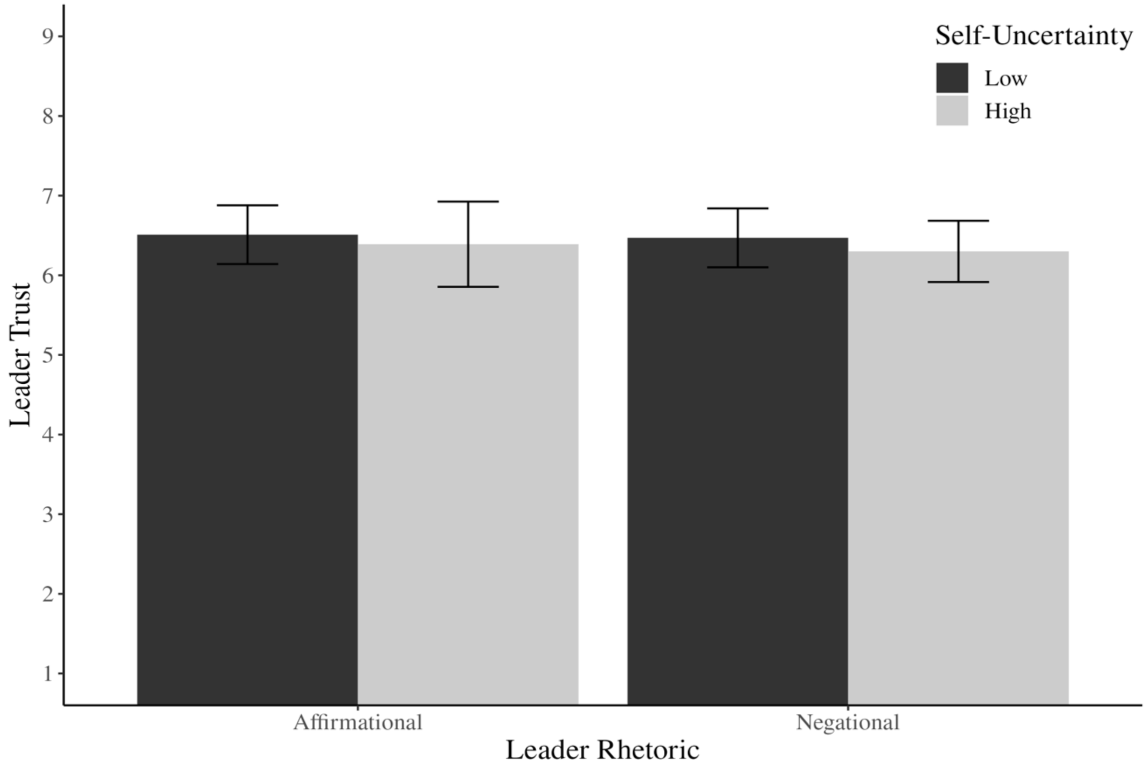
More importantly, there was a marginally significant three-way interaction between leader rhetoric, self-uncertainty, and leader stance on leader trust, $F(1, 258) = 3.37$, $p = .068$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$ (see Figure 3). Simple effects analyses revealed contrary results to hypothesis 4b, where participants gave more trust to a pro-change leader who employed negational rhetoric under low self-uncertainty ($M = 5.57$, $SD = 1.52$) compared to high self-uncertainty ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.26$), $F(1, 258) = 4.29$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Moreover, contrary to hypothesis 5, under high self-uncertainty, affirmational rhetoric ($M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.30$) yielded more trust for a pro-change leader compared to negational rhetoric ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.26$), $F(1, 258) = 4.17$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$.

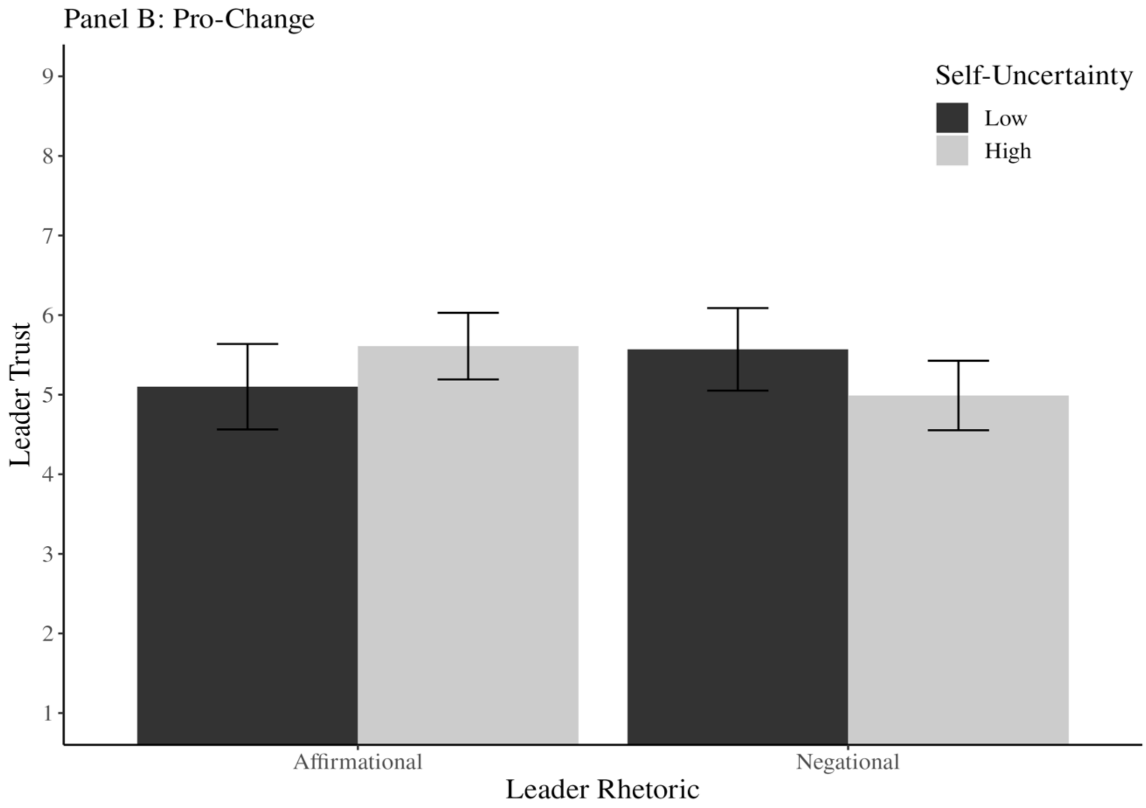
In addition, under low self-uncertainty, participants trusted the anti-change leader more than the pro-change leader in both the affirmational rhetoric ($F(1, 258) = 20.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$; $M = 6.51$, $SD = 1.16$ and $M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.50$) and negational rhetoric conditions ($F(1, 258) = 7.26$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$; $M = 6.47$, $SD = 1.10$ and $M = 5.57$, $SD = 1.52$). Similarly, under high self-uncertainty, the anti-change leader was more trusted compared to the pro-change leader in both the affirmational rhetoric ($F(1, 258) = 6.40$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$; $M = 6.39$, $SD = 1.52$ and $M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.30$) and negational rhetoric conditions ($F(1, 258) = 17.97$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$; $M = 6.30$, $SD = 1.11$ and $M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.26$). No other significant main or simple effects were observed.

Figure 3

Study 3: Leader trust as a function of leader rhetoric, moderated by self-uncertainty and leader stance.

Panel A: Anti-Change





Leader effectiveness. Leader effectiveness was examined similarly using a three-way ANCOVA with participants' identification with the department as the covariate. The results revealed a significant main effect of leader stance on leader effectiveness, *F*(1, 258) = 26.41, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$. In line hypothesis 1, participants perceived the anti-change leader (*M* = 6.27, *SD* = 1.34) as more effective than the pro-change leader (*M* = 5.41, *SD* = 1.51).

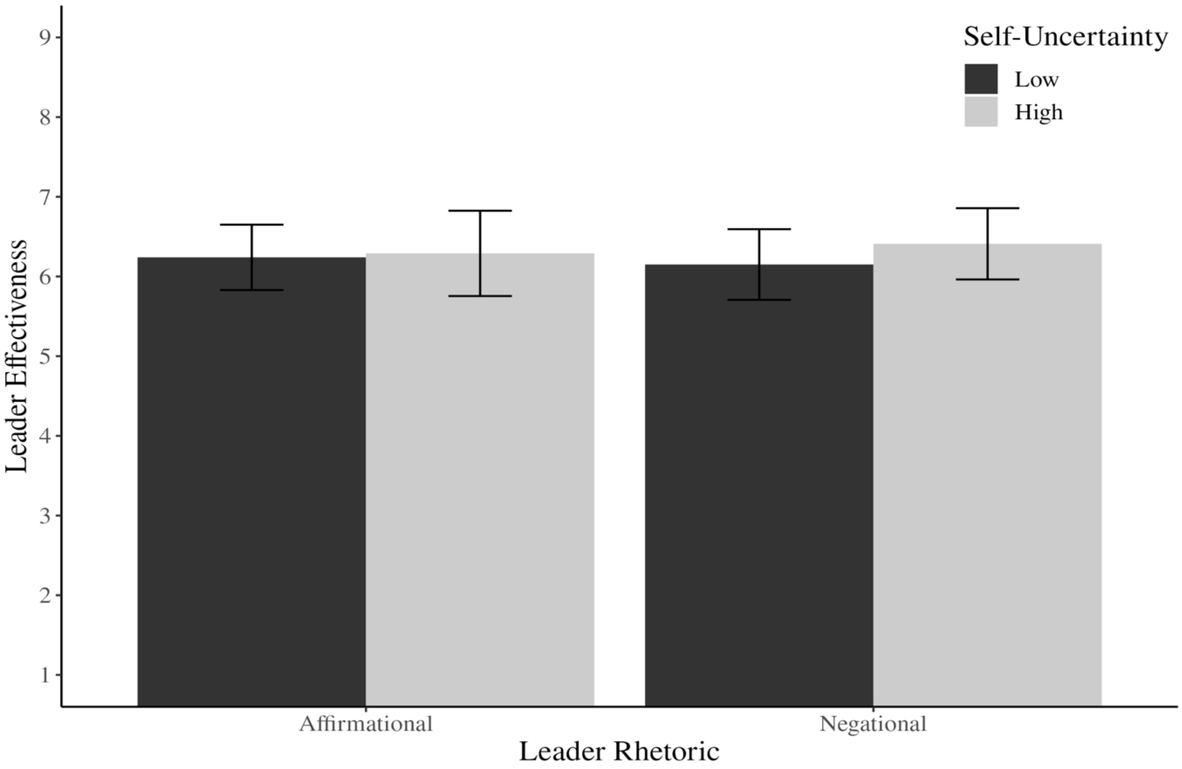
Moreover, there was a marginally significant three-way interaction between leader rhetoric, self-uncertainty, and leader stance on leader effectiveness, *F*(1, 258) = 3.15, $p = .08$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$ (see Figure 4). Similar to the findings for leader support and leader trust, simple effects analyses revealed a trend that contradicted hypothesis 4b. Participants perceived a pro-change leader as marginally more effective under low self-uncertainty (*M* = 5.58*, SD* = 1.51) compared to high self-uncertainty (*M* = 5.07*, SD* = 1.37) when negational rhetoric was employed, *F*(1, 258) = 2.93, $p = .09$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. In addition, inconsistent with hypothesis 5, under high self-uncertainty, a pro-change leader garnered marginally higher effectiveness ratings when employing affirmational rhetoric (M = 5.66, SD = 1.56) compared to negational rhetoric (M = 5.07, SD = 1.37), $F(1, 258) = 3.15$, $p = .08$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$.

Furthermore, under low self-uncertainty, participants perceived the anti-change leader (M = 6.24, SD = 1.29) as more effective compared to the pro-change leader (M = 5.28, SD = 1.58) in the affirmational rhetoric condition, $F(1, 258) = 8.28$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Although there was a trend supporting hypothesis 1, the use of negational rhetoric resulted in no statistically significant difference in effectiveness ratings between the anti-change leader (M = 6.15, SD = 1.32) and the pro-change leader (M = 5.58, SD = 1.51) under low self-uncertainty, $F(1, 258) = 2.21$, $p = .14$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. Additionally, under high self-uncertainty, the anti-change leader was perceived as more effective in the negational rhetoric condition ($F(1, 258) = 15.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$; M = 6.41, SD = 1.29 and M = 5.07, SD = 1.37) and as marginally more effective in the affirmational rhetoric condition ($F(1, 258) = 3.60$, $p = .06$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$; M = 6.29, SD = 1.52 and M = 5.66, SD = 1.56), compared to the pro-change leader. No other main or simple effects achieved statistical significance.

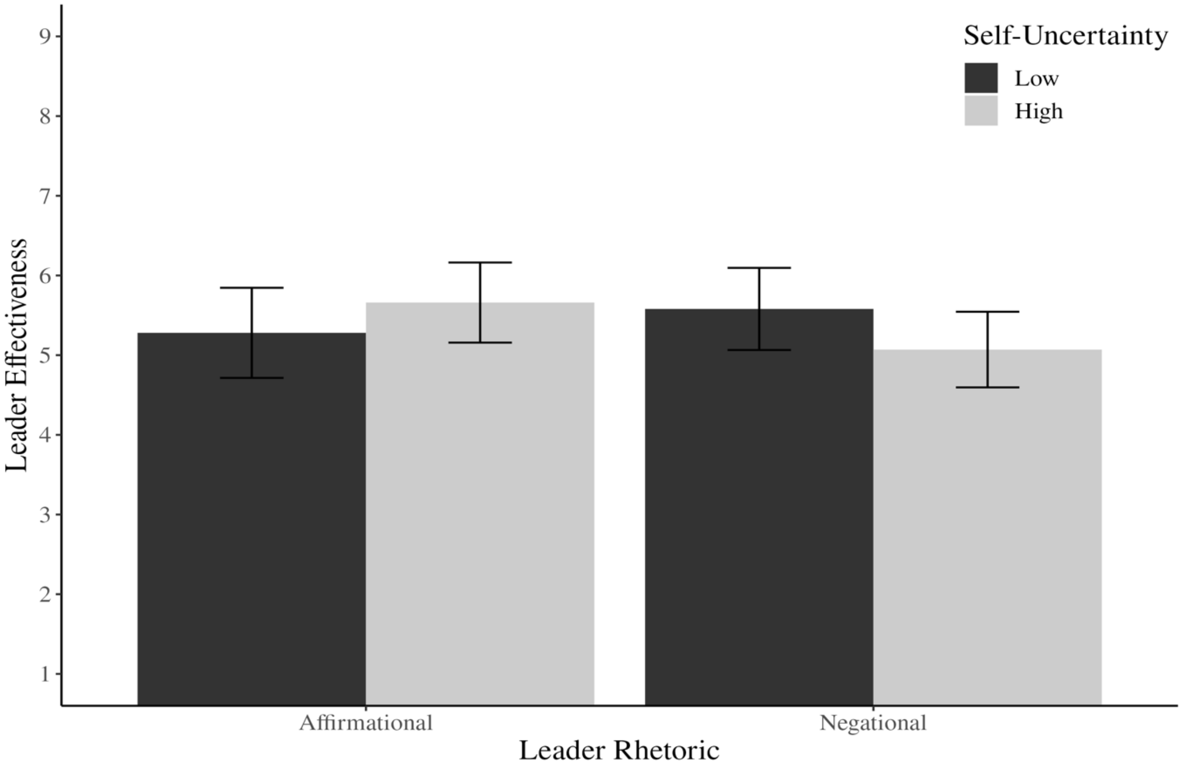
Figure 4

Study 3: Leader effectiveness as a function of leader rhetoric, moderated by self-uncertainty and leader stance.

Panel A: Anti-Change



Panel B: Pro-Change



Discussion

Employing a methodology similar to those in Study 1 and Study 2, Study 3 examined the interactive effect of leader rhetoric, self-uncertainty, and leader stance on people's support for, trust in, and effectiveness evaluations of a leader who advocated for or against a group change. The results presented a complex picture, with some evidence contradictory to the main hypotheses. First of all, hypothesis 1 was generally supported, although the expected effects were notably weaker on leader effectiveness compared to those on leader support and leader trust. Specifically, the anti-change leader received more support, greater trust, and higher effectiveness ratings compared to the pro-change leader, regardless of the employed rhetoric and participants' levels of self-uncertainty.

However, the results failed to provide evidence in support of the hypotheses for the anti-change leader. Consistent with the findings of Study 1, none of the expected effects on leader support, trust, and perceived effectiveness achieved statistical significance for the leader who opposed the collective change. As previously discussed in the section of Study 1, a collective change can provoke a great amount of uncertainty when group members perceive their group identity might be ultimately altered by the change (Muhlemann et al., 2022; Venus, Stam, & van Knippenberg, 2019). Although the student leader attempted to affirm the group identity by opposing the change, their limited power and influence in contrast to the department might have created uncertainty regarding their ability to affect the decision of the department. Therefore, the lack of significant effects may be attributed to heightened feelings of uncertainty triggered by the change, which potentially confounded the uncertainty levels of participants in the low and high self-uncertainty conditions.

Inconsistent with the findings of Study 2, Study 3 presented results contrary to the hypotheses for the pro-change leader. While not all of the simple effects reached statistical significance, a trend emerged indicating the use of negational rhetoric yielded greater support, trust, and perceived effectiveness for a leader promoting a collective change under low than high self-uncertainty. Moreover, under high self-uncertainty, there was a trend favoring the pro-change leader when employing affirmational rather than negational rhetoric. These findings are unexpected, given that a change message conveyed in a less rigid manner is more acceptable (Moscovici, 1976; Mugny, 1982). Negational rhetoric should be preferred over affirmational rhetoric when conveying the group change, as it communicates a more flexible stance taken by the leader through constructing a proposed group identity of lesser clarity.

One potential explanation for these contradictory findings is that participants' motivation to reduce uncertainty outweighs their motivation to resist group change. When participants focus on the change itself and its potential impacts, the advantage enjoyed by negational rhetoric becomes salient as it makes the change message more acceptable. However, when the motivation to reduce uncertainty is particularly strong, affirmational rhetoric may take precedence as it provides the needed clarity of identity.

One concern with the manipulation is that the change was proposed by the department. Students might view their department as the authority or another group leader. When both the department and student leader promote the group change, students may start to question what the group identity is. This is particularly true for students who have not formed a clear sense of group identity. Although the majority of participants in both studies were first-year undergraduate students, a distinction between Study 2 and Study 3 is that data collection for Study 3 took place in the first semester of the first year while in the second semester for Study 2.

It is plausible to assume that many participants in Study 3 had recently entered the program and may still be seeking information to construct their group identity. These participants would possess a stronger motivation to reduce uncertainty that surpasses their motivation to resist the group change. When experiencing heightened self-uncertainty, they might pay more attention to their uncertain feelings than the group change, thus favoring a leader who can provide a distinct group identity through employing affirmational rhetoric.

CHAPTER SIX

General Discussion

Leadership is a universal phenomenon that is widely studied in multiple disciplines, such as the social sciences, applied sciences, and humanities (Bass, 2008). It profoundly influences various realms of human society, shaping the destinies of individuals and their groups, as well as impacting social movements and the historical progress of all human beings. Leaders play a pivotal role in envisioning a desirable future, communicating group norms, and motivating followers to contribute their best efforts to collective goals. They provide direction and guidance in times of uncertainty and navigate group members through challenges and difficulties.

More importantly, leaders can act as "entrepreneurs of identity" to actively shape group norms and values and mobilize followers towards positive change (e.g., Reicher et al., 2005). In the social influence and mobilization process, language serves as a fundamental tool through which leaders construct an inclusive identity, convey their vision, and drive collective action (Fiol, 2002; Hogg & Tindale, 2005). Therefore, understanding how leaders employ rhetoric to garner more support and promote group change is essential for effective leadership and group success.

This dissertation focused on the use of two contrasting rhetorical styles–affirmational and negational rhetoric. Compared to negational rhetoric, affirmational rhetoric defines and communicates social identity unambiguously, thus providing clear identity-related information that eases uncertain feelings. As such, affirmational rhetoric can yield more support for a leader who affirms group identity in times of uncertainty (Gaffney et al., 2019). Identity-affirming leaders are usually more favorable than identity-negating leaders (Haslam & Platow, 2001; Haslam et al., 2001). Nonetheless, no research to date has examined how the employment of affirmational and negational rhetoric influences evaluations of leaders who negate or deviate from group identity.

A leader can affirm group identity by opposing a collective change or negate it by supporting the change. Groups are inherently resistant to change. Changes occurring within a group inevitably challenge the stability of the group's status as well as the established group identity and norms, creating a sense of uncertainty and fear of the unknown. To overcome these obstacles on the path towards group change, leaders can strategically employ rhetoric to reshape group identity in a way that favors the promoted change while securing followers' support and trust (e.g., Seyranian & Bligh, 2008). Although affirmational rhetoric can provide clarity of identity-related information under uncertainty, using it to communicate potential changes to group identity may pose a threat to the perseveration of current identity and exacerbate resistance to change. In uncertain contexts, negational rhetoric might be a more appropriate rhetorical technique leaders can employ to initiate and promote changes.

A leader who advocates for collective changes may be perceived as a norm deviant in the ingroup, positioning them as the minority whose opinions or stance differ from the prevailing majority of group members (Crano, 2001; Martin & Hewstone, 2008). Research on minority influence suggests that the minority possesses the potential to initiate changes by communicating changes in a less rigid manner (Moscovici, 1976; Mugny, 1982). These findings underscore the advantage enjoyed by negational rhetoric as an effective tool for leaders to advance collective changes, particularly during uncertain times wherein pro-change leaders are granted more trust by followers, particularly those strongly identifying with the group (Rast et al., 2016).

Three experiments were conducted to unveil the intricate relationships between leader rhetoric (affirmational vs. negational) and uncertainty in the context of an anti-change versus a pro-change leader. Study 1 expanded the work of Gaffney and colleagues (2019) by examining the interactive effect of leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty on support, trust, and perceived effectiveness for a leader who advocated against a group change. However, Study 1 failed to replicate the findings demonstrated in previous research. The preference for affirmational rhetoric under high than low self-uncertainty was not evident.

The failure to replicate previous findings could potentially stem from variations in the experimental manipulations used in Study 1 compared to those used in prior studies. While Study 1 followed a similar methodological approach, it differs from the study of Gaffney and colleagues (2019) by introducing a group change. This change, contextualized as the introduction of the comprehensive exam, may have triggered change-related uncertainty that converts into self-uncertainty for participants who perceive it as a potential disruptor of their group identity (e.g., Muhlemann et al., 2022). Consequently, the distinction between participants in the high and low self-uncertainty conditions might be muddled, ultimately contributing to the absence of a discernible effect of leader rhetoric across different levels of self-uncertainty.

Building upon the work of Study 1, Study 2 took a step further to investigate the interaction between leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty on leader support, trust, and perceived effectiveness for a leader who advocated for a group change. Study 2 provided supporting evidence for the hypotheses, although the anticipated effects were only observed in the results for leader trust, and only the effects of affirmational rhetoric on leader trust manifested across varying levels of self-uncertainty. The absence of hypothesized interactions and simple effects can likely be attributed to the proposed change being overly aversive for the participants. The difference between affirmational and negational rhetoric conditions was minimal with the intention to show that a slight variance in rhetoric can have an effect on people's evaluations of leaders. However, when the change is excessively threatening, group members tend to disfavor a leader who supports it, regardless of the use of negations or affirmations in the leader's rhetoric.

Expanding the work by Study 1 and Study 2, Study 3 examined the interactive effect of leader rhetoric and self-uncertainty on leader support, trust, and effectiveness for both an anti-change leader and a pro-change leader. The results revealed a strong effect of leader stance such that the anti-change leader was more supported, more trusted, and perceived as more effective than the pro-change leader. Moreover, similar to the findings in Study 1, the expected effects for the anti-change leader were not displayed.

Additionally, the observed effects for the pro-change leader contradicted the hypotheses. Notably, negational rhetoric produced more favorable evaluations for a pro-change leader under low than high self-uncertainty and less favorable evaluations compared to affirmational rhetoric under high self-uncertainty. These conflicting findings could be explained by the prevalence of different motivations of participants, either the motivation to reduce uncertainty or the motivation to resist change. When the motivation to reduce uncertainty outweighs the motivation to resist change, the preference for affirmational rhetoric under high uncertainty manifests as demonstrated in Study 3. Conversely, when the motivation to resist change prevails under high uncertainty, the preference for negational rhetoric appears as evident in Study 2.

Limitations and Future Research

The current studies provide mixed evidence concerning the impact of affirmational versus negational rhetoric on people's evaluations of anti-change and pro-change leaders under high versus low self-uncertainty. These conflicting findings could be ascribed to several limitations that warrant attention in future research.

First, the change incorporated in the experimental materials might have posed as excessively aversive for the participants. Despite the initial endeavor to adopt a moderate yet relevant collective change for participants, the introduction of the comprehensive exam is likely to have been perceived as overwhelmingly threatening, given its crucial role in determining their graduation from the program. This issue may have led to an overpowering effect of leader stance that overshadows the effects of other predictor variables, as evidenced by the lack of effects across the three studies, particularly those associated with the anti-change leader. People would strongly favor a leader who advocates against the change, irrespective of the employed rhetoric styles and the presented levels of uncertainty within the context. The pilot study in the current research only examined the effectiveness of the leader rhetoric manipulation, while it is equally important to assess the aversion level of the change. Future research should identify, test, and select the collective group change used in experiments with more careful scrutiny.

A second limitation is closely tied to the first one. Other than reducing the aversion level of the collective change, another way of enhancing the unobserved effects is to develop more robust manipulations of affirmational and negational rhetoric. In the current studies, only two sentences were employed to endorse either affirmations or negations (e.g., "I am opposed to/supportive of introducing the comprehensive exam…" and "We should all agree that we oppose/do not support the introduction of the comprehensive exam."). In contrast, an entire paragraph was dedicated to describing the group change. The leader rhetoric manipulation was designed to be minimal with the intention to show that even a small linguistic difference in a leader's communication about social identity could wield a discernible impact. However, the relatively limited use of affirmations and negations in the experimental materials could lead participants to focus more on the group change rather than the affirmational or negational rhetoric. This limitation can be addressed in future work by strengthening the leader rhetoric manipulation, for example, by including more affirmations and negations in the manipulation or by making the manipulation longer and more appealing.

Another important limitation across all three studies is the insufficient sample size. As previously discussed in this dissertation, the current studies required participants to be undergraduate students majoring or minoring in psychology, as the proposed change in the manipulations was specifically relevant to this population. However, this eligibility restriction significantly constrained the pool of participants who could participate in these studies. As a result, the current studies may lack the statistical power needed to detect hypothesized effects due to an insufficient sample size. Future research would greatly benefit from a larger sample size.

Furthermore, an apparent limitation pertains to the contradictory findings across Study 2 and Study 3 for the pro-change leader. Leadership usually takes place in a complex environment, where various factors can potentially influence individuals' perceptions and evaluations of leaders (e.g., Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). Given that Study 3 employed nearly identical materials and methodologies as those used in Study 2, it is plausible to consider other factors in the experiments may have moderated the hypothesized relationship, resulting in conflicting results across the studies. For example, in all three studies, participants' identification with their department fluctuated around the mid-point by average. For those with weak identification, it raises questions about whether the comprehensive exam truly held meaning for them and effectively elicited their reactions to the manipulation. Future research would benefit from researching more entitative or cohesive groups, such as the Undergraduate Psychology Association, where group members identify more strongly with the ingroup (e.g., Lickel et al., 2000). A related moderator worth exploring in future research is identity clarity. Highly entitative groups possess a clearly defined identity (Campbell, 1958; Hogg, 2004). In such groups, group members have a clear sense of group prototypes and norms, making them less motivated to reduce uncertainty. During periods of group changes, members of such groups are likely to evaluate a leader based on their capability to mitigate the threat posed by changes, rather than their capability to reduce uncertainty. Exploring and investigating the aforementioned moderators can help reconcile conflicting findings and extend the current theoretical understanding.

Implications

This dissertation expands current research on effective leadership during times of uncertainty by examining the employment of affirmational and negational rhetorical styles in the context of anti-change versus pro-change leadership. Despite the conflicting findings across studies, this research offers valuable insights by providing a complex picture of how leaders can cultivate more favorable evaluations through managing their rhetoric amid uncertainty. As demonstrated in the current work, a leader’s stance, whether advocating for or against a collective change, plays a more crucial role in influencing group members’ evaluations of leaders compared to rhetorical styles. As such, the key to securing a strong leadership position and promoting active followership is to adhere to group norms and represent the group’s core interests (Hogg, 2001a, 2001b).

Another implication is that, when a leader aims to advance significant changes, simply employing rhetorical styles, at least the use of negations in rhetoric, may not be adequate to alleviate the threat posed by changes and motivate group members toward a vision of change. However, for leaders who promote moderate changes, leader rhetoric does interact with self-uncertainty to shape people's preferences for leaders, although the current research falls short of providing a clear picture of this interactive effect.

Additionally, when choosing their rhetorical styles, leaders should not only consider the context but, more importantly, gain a deeper understanding of group members' needs and motivations shaped within various contexts. The need for uncertainty reduction is essential for group affiliation and identification (Hogg, 2007, 2012), and therefore should always be taken into account when determining rhetorical strategies in times of uncertainty.

Overall, this research provides insightful implications for rhetorical strategies that are effective at promoting active followership and positive group change, particularly in times of uncertainty. It has laid an important foundation for future research seeking to unravel the intricate impact of the use of affirmational and negational rhetoric and self-uncertainty on leadership focusing on change initiatives. In the real world, leadership speeches often involve a blend of affirmational and negational rhetoric. The dissertation marks a significant starting point for future work seeking to understand the more nuanced use of affirmational and negational rhetoric in leadership speeches, as well as providing theoretical support for its applications in practical settings.

Conclusion

In a world rife with uncertainty, effective leadership often serves as the crucial source of information that provides the needed clarity of group identity, meeting the motivation of group members to reduce uncertainty, However, for leaders striving to communicate a vision of change, there are nuanced considerations when employing rhetorical styles. This dissertation has delved into the multifaceted impact of affirmational and negational rhetoric in the context of anti-change and pro-change leadership during times of uncertainty.

While the studies presented yielded mixed results and encountered certain limitations, they have extended our understanding of how leaders can navigate the complexities of rhetorical strategies in the face of collective change. This dissertation establishes the initial groundwork for a novel research line examining the impact of affirmational and negational rhetoric on change leadership in diverse and uncertain contexts. The findings of this work underscore a need for future research with enhanced experimental manipulations and investigations into potential moderators.

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Appendix A-1

Pilot Study: Affirmational Rhetoric x Anti-Change Leader Manipulation

“I believe this new motion will pose a great challenge to students in our department,” Leader X said. “I am opposed to introducing the comprehensive exam as an additional requirement for the program because it will put a heavy burden on our students and slow the progress of many students per year. We should all agree that **we oppose the introduction of the comprehensive exam**.”

Appendix A-2

Pilot Study: Negational Rhetoric x Anti-Change Leader Manipulation

“I believe this new motion will pose a great challenge to students in our department,” Leader X said. “I am not supportive of introducing the comprehensive exam as an additional requirement for the program because it will put a heavy burden on our students and slow the progress of many students per year. We should all agree that **we do not support the introduction of the comprehensive exam**.”

Appendix A-3

Pilot Study: Affirmational Rhetoric x Pro-Change Leader Manipulation

“I believe this new motion will provide a great opportunity for students in our department,” Leader X said. “I am supportive of introducing the comprehensive exam as an additional requirement for the program because it will improve the critical thinking and research skills of our students and enhance student success after graduation. We should all agree that **we support the introduction of the comprehensive exam**.”

Appendix A-4

Pilot Study: Negational Rhetoric x Pro-Change Leader Manipulation

“I believe this new motion will provide a great opportunity for students in our department," Leader X said. “I am not opposed to introducing the comprehensive exam as an additional requirement for the program because it will improve the critical thinking and research skills of our students and enhance student success after graduation. We should all agree that **we do not oppose the introduction of the comprehensive exam**.”

Appendix B-1

Study 1: Affirmational Rhetoric Manipulation

THE gateway
THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA'S STUDENT JOURNALISM SOCIETY

The UPSA Student Chair speaks out on the new motion to introduce the comprehensive exam for undergraduate students

The Undergraduate Psychology Student Advocates (UPSA) is a student-led committee that aims to represent the interests of undergraduate students in the Department of Psychology. The UPSA works closely with the department administration and has a great influence on many student privileges and policies. The UPSA's Student Chair position is a very important leadership role. The Chair holds a lot of power in the UPSA and is responsible for a wide range of tasks, including heading major initiatives and advocating on behalf of students to the department administration.

Recently, the administration of the Department of Psychology has been planning a new motion to introduce the comprehensive examination as an additional requirement for undergraduate students to complete their degrees. Students majoring or minoring in psychology will have to pass the cut-off score on the exam to continue their studies in the program. If students do not make the cut-off score, they will have to take more courses and retake the exam until they pass it. The newly elected Student Chair of the UPSA, Leader X, has been attending meetings with the administration and speaking out on this new motion and its influence on students.

"I believe this new motion will pose a great challenge to students studying in our department," Leader X said. "I am opposed to introducing the comprehensive exam as an additional requirement for the program because it will put a heavy burden on our students and slow the progress of many students per year. We should all agree that **we oppose the introduction of the comprehensive exam**."

Appendix B-2

Study 1: Negational Rhetoric Manipulation

THE gateway
THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA'S STUDENT JOURNALISM SOCIETY

The UPSA Student Chair speaks out on the new motion to introduce the comprehensive exam for undergraduate students

The Undergraduate Psychology Student Advocates (UPSA) is a student-led committee that aims to represent the interests of undergraduate students in the Department of Psychology. The UPSA works closely with the department administration and has a great influence on many student privileges and policies. The UPSA's Student Chair position is a very important leadership role. The Chair holds a lot of power in the UPSA and is responsible for a wide range of tasks, including heading major initiatives and advocating on behalf of students to the department administration.

Recently, the administration of the Department of Psychology has been planning a new motion to introduce the comprehensive examination as an additional requirement for undergraduate students to complete their degrees. Students majoring or minoring in psychology will have to pass the cut-off score on the exam to continue their studies in the program. If students do not make the cut-off score, they will have to take more courses and retake the exam until they pass it. The newly elected Student Chair of the UPSA, Leader X, has been attending meetings with the administration and speaking out on this new motion and its influence on students.

"I believe this new motion will pose a great challenge to students studying in our department," Leader X said. "I am not supportive of introducing the comprehensive exam as an additional requirement for the program because it will put a heavy burden on our students and slow the progress of many students per year. We should all agree that **we do not support the introduction of the comprehensive exam**."

Appendix C-1

Study 2: Affirmational Rhetoric Manipulation

THE gateway

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA'S STUDENT JOURNALISM SOCIETY

The UPSA Student Chair speaks out on the new motion to introduce the comprehensive exam for undergraduate students

The Undergraduate Psychology Student Advocates (UPSA) is a student-led committee that aims to represent the interests of undergraduate students in the Department of Psychology. The UPSA works closely with the department administration and has a great influence on many student privileges and policies. The UPSA's Student Chair position is a very important leadership role. The Chair holds a lot of power in the UPSA and is responsible for a wide range of tasks, including heading major initiatives and advocating on behalf of students to the department administration.

Recently, the administration of the Department of Psychology has been planning a new motion to introduce the comprehensive examination as an additional requirement for undergraduate students to complete their degrees. Students majoring or minoring in psychology will have to pass the cut-off score on the exam to continue their studies in the program. If students do not make the cut-off score, they will have to take more courses and retake the exam until they pass it. The newly elected Student Chair of the UPSA, Leader X, has been attending meetings with the administration and speaking out on this new motion and its influence on students.

"I believe this new motion will provide a great opportunity for students studying in our department," Leader X said. "I am supportive of introducing the comprehensive exam as an additional requirement for the program because it will improve the critical thinking and research skills of our students and enhance student success after graduation. We should all agree that **we support the introduction of the comprehensive exam**."

Appendix C-2

Study 2: Negational Rhetoric Manipulation

THE gateway
THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA'S STUDENT JOURNALISM SOCIETY

The UPSA Student Chair speaks out on the new motion to introduce the comprehensive exam for undergraduate students

The Undergraduate Psychology Student Advocates (UPSA) is a student-led committee that aims to represent the interests of undergraduate students in the Department of Psychology. The UPSA works closely with the department administration and has a great influence on many student privileges and policies. The UPSA's Student Chair position is a very important leadership role. The Chair holds a lot of power in the UPSA and is responsible for a wide range of tasks, including heading major initiatives and advocating on behalf of students to the department administration.

Recently, the administration of the Department of Psychology has been planning a new motion to introduce the comprehensive examination as an additional requirement for undergraduate students to complete their degrees. Students majoring or minoring in psychology will have to pass the cut-off score on the exam to continue their studies in the program. If students do not make the cut-off score, they will have to take more courses and retake the exam until they pass it. The newly elected Student Chair of the UPSA, Leader X, has been attending meetings with the administration and speaking out on this new motion and its influence on students.

"I believe this new motion will provide a great opportunity for students studying in our department", Leader X said. "I am not opposed to introducing the comprehensive exam as an additional requirement for the program because it will improve the critical thinking and research skills of our students and enhance student success after graduation. We should all agree that **we do not oppose the introduction of the comprehensive exam.**"