Civic (as opposed to ethnic) definitions of national identity are believed to foster inclusion of others in the national ingroup when people show commitment to the nation. Social psychological research on social identity and organisational citizenship has conceptualised commitment in terms of civic participation and more symbolic support (e.g. loyalty, taking pride in the group). However, little is known about how lay people understand commitment and if and how showing commitment behaviours impacts on the acceptance of claims to national group membership.

In the current paper we will first report the results of a focus group study investigating how lay people comprehend commitment and how they relate it to national belonging (in a Scottish context).

In a second, experimental, study, we examined how showing commitment impacts on the perceived belonging of “incomers” to the national ingroup by varying levels of commitment displayed to support one’s identity claim. We argue that, if commitment is important when making claim to an identity, displaying behaviours that show high commitment to the nation (as derived from lay perceptions in the focus group) should lead to higher levels of perceived belonging.

Study 1 Focus group discussions

Method

Participants

Data presented are from nine discussion groups (2 to 3 people each) conducted with 22 university students in Scotland. Of the participants twelve were born in Scotland, four weren’t born in Scotland but had lived there for most part of their life, and six were non-
Scottish and had lived in Scotland for an average of about 3.5 years at the time of the interview. Each discussion group contained at least one Scottish-born participant.

**Procedure**

The discussions were semi-structured and loosely followed an interview guide. The focus group mediator explained that there are generally two ways of looking at who counts as Scottish:

“Some say only people that are born and brought up in Scotland can be seen as Scottish, whereas others would say anyone who lives here, as long as you show some sort of commitment, can be seen as Scottish.”

Immediately after offering these definitions participants were asked to give their own examples of commitment behaviours. Following this they took part in a card sorting task. Behaviours that could possibly be seen as commitment behaviours were displayed on cards (e.g. volunteering in a local community centre; being a member of the board of the Scottish crofting association). The participants were asked to, as a group, sort the cards (about 15 per group) into piles of low, medium or high commitment and to discuss their choices. We were not specifically interested in the results of the card sort task, but more in the reasons given for the choices made. After the card sort task some additional questions aimed at understanding how commitment may be related to perceptions of Scottishness were asked. Examples of commitment behaviours given by early groups were included in the card sort tasks of the later groups. Different groups were given different cards with cards being repeated over other groups such that each card appeared about 3 times in total.

**Results**

From participants’ own examples of commitment behaviours and the discussion of the card-sort task we extracted some underlying dimensions of commitment. Generally participants tended to discuss the possible personal reasons or motives behind the behaviours. From this it became clear that behaviours are seen as showing more commitment to the extent that they 1) cost effort (time and money), 2) are chosen (actively seeking out), 3) the underlying motivations are to act in Scotland’s interest, not in one’s own self-interest (e.g.
wanting to come and live in Scotland because you like the country rather than because you could get a well-paid job here), 4) the level of activities (national versus local volunteering) and whether the behaviour was more typically culturally Scottish (e.g. crofting instead of helping a neighbour).

Participants also indicated when behaviours will not be seen as commitment. A main argument was that if they felt people would do the same thing somewhere else (e.g. would volunteer for the same charity in their homeland) then this behaviour did not show commitment to Scotland. Also when people would automatically do something (e.g. pick up the accent) this was not seen as commitment. Interestingly, taking pride in the country was not seen as a sign of commitment either. People who claim Scottishness are expected to feel proud, but showing this pride is not taken as an example of their commitment.

Finally, there was consensus about the idea that for people born in Scotland, showing commitment behaviours was less important. Even if they would refrain from showing any level of civic commitment, they would still “count as Scottish”.

When asked whether showing commitment would support a claim to group membership, there was a general sense that people could claim Scottishness if they so wished, but at the same time a sense that this doesn’t necessarily mean that they will be accepted as ‘real’ group members. That is, people clearly perceive different levels of Scottishness.

**Study 2 Experiment**

In this study we wanted to examine the effects of showing commitment behaviours on the acceptance of identity claims. Importantly, the commitment behaviours used in the manipulations of this study were derived from the focus group study.

Because earlier research (Hopkins et al, 2009, McCrone & Bechhofer, 2008) has shown that people are unwilling to openly deny other’s identity claims, we measured perceived group membership indirectly by using the *ingroup sensitivity effect*. It has been demonstrated that people are more likely to agree with criticism voiced by an ingroup member than an outgroup member (Hornsey & Imani, 2004). Following this logic, if people are more accepting of criticism of a highly committed incomer, this means that they perceive this person as an ingroup member more (see Hopkins et al, 2009).
Method

Participants and design.

The analyses are based on the data of 61 identified (≥ 5 on 7-point scale) Scottish born undergraduate students. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two cells (Commitment: Low, High) of the between subject design\(^1\).

Materials and procedure.

The manipulations and questions were contained in a questionnaire booklet. The study was introduced as one interested in first impressions from interviews. Participants first read an interview ostensibly held with Mr. J. In the interview J. explained he was born in England, but had been living in the Glasgow area for 8 years. He further claimed Scottishness (“.. so I would say I’m Scottish, and I do feel Scottish, yes”).

The manipulation of the interviewee’s level of commitment to Scotland was embedded in the remainder of the interview. In the Low Commitment condition J. was for example described to, amongst other things, be volunteering for a local charity and considering moving across the border for a new job. In the High Commitment condition, for the same statements a more highly committed alternative was inserted, e.g. J was said to volunteer for a Scottish charity and not considering moving across the border for a new job. Finally, at the end of the interview J. criticised the Scots. He stated that Scots can be quite conventional, inward looking, not flexible, too bound up with traditions and very cautious. He continued to express that he thinks it would be nice if Scots could be more imaginative and more ambitious.

Dependent measures.

In line with earlier research on the ingroup sensitivity effect, participants indicated to what extent they agreed with the views put forward by the interviewee, the extent to which the criticism elicited negative feelings, and whether they saw the criticism as constructive. The participants were further asked to indicate the extent to which they saw the interviewee as Scottish. In order to check the effectiveness of the manipulation, participants were asked

\(^1\) The study also had a condition in which the interviewee did not claim Scottish identity. This will not be discussed in the current paper. In line with the focus groups, another similar study showed that the level of commitment did not influence the acceptance of criticism from a Scottish born other.
how committed to Scotland the person seemed. All answers were given on 7 point Likert type scales, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

**Results**

The manipulation proved to be successful. The interviewee was perceived as being more committed to Scotland in the High Commitment condition than in the Low Commitment condition.

As expected, in the High Commitment condition the participants showed higher levels of agreement with the speaker, experienced fewer negative emotions and believed the criticism was meant in a more constructive way than in the Low Commitment condition.

As found previously (Hopkins et al, 2009), when asked directly there was no significant difference in the perceived Scottishness of the interviewee.

**General discussion**

Taken together the studies presented here show that a. lay people have ideas about what constitutes commitment to a national group and b. that displaying high levels of commitment substantiates civic claims to national group membership.

The focus groups revealed some more general underlying dimensions of commitment. Behaviours were taken as indicators of group commitment to the extent that they were seen as contributing to society, becoming actively involved and taking a genuine interest.

Behaviours were not seen as showing commitment when they weren’t specifically Scottish, believed to occur automatically or in case the person would do the same things in any other country. Furthermore, feeling Scottish or being proud was seen as necessary, but these are not taken as an indicator of commitment.

The results from the experimental study showed that showing higher levels of commitment to the national group does lead to higher levels of ingroup inclusion. Following the logic of the ingroup sensitivity effect, an English person (the most common incomer group in Scotland) claiming Scottish identity was seen as more of an ingroup member by the Scottish participants when showing high levels of commitment rather than low levels of commitment. Thus when commitment is defined in “lay terms” incomers displaying higher levels of commitment to the group are accepted as group members more.
Of course the second study only focused on one particular group of incomers. In future studies we will continue to investigate the role of commitment in the inclusion of other important migrant groups in Scotland, such as Europeans, and people with an Asian background born in Scotland.

References

