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### Ironic Effects of Invoking Common Ingroup Identity

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# Ironic Effects of Invoking Common Ingroup Identity

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Establishing a common ingroup identity (CII) can reduce intergroup bias. Appeals to CII made by an outgroup member could, however, *increase* negative intergroup outcomes if perceivers believe that the speaker defines the superordinate group differently than they do. Study 1 demonstrated that people believe that Democrats and Republicans have different conceptions of the superordinate group “Americans.” In Study 2, persuasive appeals invoking CII made by outgroup members were unsuccessful; moreover, differences in shared conceptions of American identity negatively impacted the appeal’s success, but only if the speaker invoked CII. These studies describe a theoretical and practical boundary condition on CII as an approach to reducing intergroup bias.

There is not a liberal America and a conservative America—there is the United States of America.

— Barack Obama

Scorn sectarianism and hoist the banner of unity.

— Muqtada Al-Sadr

In two very different contexts, President Barack Obama and Iraqi cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr attempted to influence their audiences using the same strategy: encouraging people to think of themselves in terms of shared rather than distinct identities. This approach is reasonable, as inducing people in different groups to think of themselves in terms of an overarching common identity can reduce intergroup bias (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993). However, sharing group membership is more than simply belonging to the same nominal category. People from different groups can share a superordinate identity literally without sharing its psychological meaning.

Does “being an American” mean the same thing for the liberal and the conservative? Does the conservative believe that she and Obama have the same definition of what it means to be an American? In this article,

we investigate the implications of the nature of superordinate group identity for interventions that seek to improve intergroup relations. Specifically, we suggest that when explicitly encouraged to focus on common group identity, people are likely to consider the *meaning* of that group identity. If they believe that the person appealing to common identity defines the superordinate group differently than they do, this line of thought will accentuate, rather than diminish, the importance of intergroup differences. Invoking common ingroup identity would then lead to more, rather than less, intergroup bias.

## THE COMMON INGROUP IDENTITY MODEL

Social categorization is a necessary precursor to intergroup disharmony. Unless a set of people is defined as an outgroup, group-based discrimination against them cannot occur. It follows, then, that anything that disrupts ingroup–outgroup distinctions could ameliorate intergroup conflict.

Several alternatives to simple ingroup–outgroup social categorization exist. First, people could interact as individuals rather than as members of opposing groups. Interactions between groups may inherently promote more conflict than interactions between individuals (Schopler et al., 1995), perhaps because people

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expect intergroup interactions to be competitive (Insko et al., 1993). Decategorization, deemphasizing the bonds between individuals and groups, should therefore mitigate intergroup conflict; indeed, when sufficiently motivated, people can see one another primarily as individuals and thereby reduce stereotyping and other negative intergroup processes (Neuberg & Fiske, 1987). This approach, however, is not always realistic; group memberships are often too powerful or too salient to be deemphasized. This is particularly likely when, as is often the case in real-world conflict, the groups are clearly delineated and central to their members' identities (Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992). It is not easy to induce people to set aside who they are.

A second potential alternative is a shift in focus from two opposing groups to one shared superordinate group. For example, Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland could focus on their common identity, thinking of themselves as Irish more than as Protestants or Catholics. The most developed account of this process is the Common Ingroup Identity model (Gaertner et al., 1993). This theory states that, to the extent that people's memberships in superordinate groups are more salient than their subgroup memberships, intergroup conflict will be reduced, as (former) outgroup members are evaluated more positively when they are part of an inclusive superordinate group.

There is considerable empirical support for this perspective. Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, and Dovidio (1989) manipulated a variety of features of the intergroup context (e.g., colored labels and seating configurations) to encourage common ingroup, individuated, or ingroup-outgroup construals. People in the common ingroup condition evaluated (former) outgroup members more favorably, reducing intergroup bias. Moreover, this reduction in bias is mediated by the extent to which perceivers have cognitive representations of a common ingroup (Gaertner, Mann, Dovidio, Murrell, & Pomare, 1990; Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman, & Anastasio, 1994). This suggests that when people from different groups are able to construe themselves as members of a common ingroup, their interactions will be less biased and more productive (Cunningham & Chelladurai, 2004).

One barrier to establishing common ingroup identity is motivational; subgroups may not have equal interest in forming a common identity. There is considerable evidence that different subgroups have different preferences for the definition and relative importance of sub- and superordinate groups. For example, compared to Whites, Blacks are more likely to prefer multiculturalism, which emphasizes distinctions between ethnic and cultural identities, to colorblindness, which emphasizes disregarding group differences (Dovidio, Gaertner, Niemann, & Snider, 2001; Ryan, Hunt, Weible,

Peterson, & Casas, 2007; Wolsko, Park, & Judd, 2006). Saguy, Dovidio, and Pratto (2008) conceptually replicated this finding using Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Israelis. When engaged in intergroup discussions, Mizrahim (the lower status group) preferred to discuss differences and disparities between the groups, whereas Ashkenazim preferred to discuss the groups' commonalities. In theory, establishing common identity does not require the loss of identification with subgroups (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000). Nonetheless, highly identified people may perceive superordinate identification as a threat to subordinate identity (Crisp, Stone, & Hall, 2006) and may not be motivated to identify with a common ingroup.

In the current article, we suggest that attempts to invoke a common ingroup identity may also encounter a less motivational obstacle. We argue that, for common ingroup identity appeals to be successful, the representation of the superordinate group held by the person invoking common identity and that held by the recipient of the appeal must correspond. It is not enough to simply categorize oneself as a member of a superordinate group; one must believe that the proposed superordinate group represents an identity that one truly shares.

## THE QUALITATIVE MEANING OF IDENTITY

A person may recognize that she belongs to a particular group, and feel that it is important, but how do we understand what the group means to her? Groups can be defined in qualitatively different ways, and these distinct definitions allow identity to manifest cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally. Identification with a group includes a shared understanding of the group's core values; the content of a social identity informs people of what is expected of them as group members (Citrin, Wong, & Duff, 2001). Similarly, self-categorization theory proposes that the meaning and form of social category memberships depends on the social context (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). Despite the importance of this idea, considerations of social identity rarely focus on the specific content of identity (see Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004, and Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley & Chavous, 1998, for more extensive discussions).

The relatively little research on the content of identity demonstrates that people often differ in their understanding of the group's identity. For example, the multidimensional model of African American identity (e.g., Sellers et al., 1998) proposes that there are different ideologies about being African American and how that should affect life and interactions in society. An assimilationist ideology emphasizes similarities between

African Americans and the rest of American society, and a person with this ideology attempts to blend into the American mainstream; conversely, a person with a nationalist ideology emphasizes the uniqueness of being Black and views the African American experience as different from that of any other group. These conceptualizations are differentially related to outcomes like the impact of perceived discrimination (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). As another example, women who consider themselves traditional and those who consider themselves feminists feel equally positively about their gender group membership. However, for feminists, identification with the group is related to liberal beliefs about the roles and responsibilities of women in society, whereas identification is unrelated to sex-role ideology for traditional women (Cameron & Lalonde, 2001; see also Gurin & Townsend, 1986); beliefs about sex roles are part of the content of gender identity for feminists but not for traditionalists.

Just as there is variation among individuals in the meaning of ingroups, there is variation among subgroups in the meaning of superordinate groups. For example, Blacks are more likely than Whites to say that being a true American means being Christian (Citrin et al., 2001). Mummendey and Wenzel (1999) proposed that people define the superordinate group according to the attributes of their own subgroup. That is, people construe meaning based on their subgroup's norms, goals, and attributes, and therefore represent the superordinate group differently. The ingroup is the prototypical representation of the superordinate category, and outgroups are evaluated negatively for failure to confirm the category prototype. In the case of Black and White Americans just mentioned, then, Black Americans may be more likely to see being Christian as essential to being American, because Black Americans are likely to be Christian. Regardless of the specific mechanism responsible, it is evident that people can nominally share an identity without actually sharing a conception of that identity.

Under some circumstances, the belief that one does not truly share the conception of an identity can have important consequences. Specifically, we argue that when explicitly instructed to think of themselves as a member of an inclusive superordinate group, people first define the meaning of that group. When told to do so via experimental instructions, this definitional process is straightforward: Perceivers call to mind their own conception of the superordinate group. In the real world, however, rather than being externally imposed, such inductions are typically initiated by a member of one of the relevant subgroups. In these situations, differences between the speaker and the perceiver are highly salient because an appeal to common identity is, in essence, an assertion that the speaker and the perceiver are similar in an important way.

We propose that, for many groups, people have clear beliefs about the way that ingroup members, outgroup members, and they themselves define the superordinate group. Moreover, they often believe that members of the other subgroup have different conceptions of the superordinate group than they themselves do. If this is true, common identity appeals initiated by outgroup members should be unsuccessful, because perceivers will believe that they do not truly belong to the superordinate group that the speaker is attempting to form. In essence, ingroup and outgroup speakers appealing to common identity are initiating different cognitive processes in perceivers. In the former case, the speaker asks a fellow ingroup member to expand their mutual existing ingroup, to make it more inclusive and include members of the other subgroup. In the latter case, the speaker asks an outgroup member to enter the superordinate group that the speaker has defined. If the definition of this group does not match the one that the perceiver holds, the perceiver will likely resist the appeal, refusing to set aside the primacy of her own subgroup membership.

Therefore, we argue that when there is a perception that subgroups do not have a shared conception of the superordinate group, appeals to the common ingroup identity made by an outgroup member are likely to backfire. By calling attention to important differences between the subgroups, these appeals undermine the speaker's message and exacerbate intergroup discord. On the other hand, common ingroup identity appeals initiated by ingroup members may not face this obstacle, as perceivers are more likely to believe that they and the speaker hold relatively corresponding views of the superordinate group.

In the current studies, we examined the group "Americans." Its political subgroups, Democrats and Republicans, have become increasingly polarized (McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006). America is perceived as sharply divided, frequently depicted as "Red" and "Blue" states (Seyle & Newman, 2006); in effect, Red and Blue have become distinct ways of being "American." Fiercely contested presidential elections in 2000 and 2004 have reinforced these perceptions; although the 2008 election may have softened interparty disharmony to an extent, the Red/Blue division is still prominent in American political discourse. In Study 1, we sought to demonstrate that people believe that Republicans and Democrats have different conceptions of the superordinate group "Americans." In this way, we could establish that if a person's political affiliation is known, perceivers have clear expectations about what that person's conception of American identity is likely to be (and, by extension, the degree to which this conception overlaps their own). In Study 2, we investigated the implications of perceived differences in

superordinate identity construal. Participants read about a bipartisan movement to increase political participation; it was presented by an ingroup or outgroup member who did or did not appeal to common ingroup identity. We hypothesized that appeals invoking common identity made by outgroup members would be particularly unsuccessful. We further predicted that the degree of difference in shared conceptions of American identity would negatively impact the appeal's success, but only when the speaker invoked common ingroup identity.

## STUDY 1

This study examined whether people believe that members of different subgroups (Democrats and Republicans) define their superordinate group (Americans) differently, a critical theoretical assumption underlying the ironic effect that we hypothesize. If, as we argue, people have clear beliefs about how the two subgroups define the superordinate group, participants should generate distinctly different descriptions of the definitions held by a Democrat and a Republican. Moreover, these generated descriptions should contain diagnostic information, such that judges viewing them are able to infer the political affiliation of the person whose beliefs are being described.

### Method

In Phase 1 of the study, 30 participants (students in introductory psychology classes, ages 18–22, 70% female) were told that they were participating in a study of “theory of mind” and that they would make inferences about another person’s beliefs. They read a description of the target person (“Patrick Ford”), including information about where he lived, his job, and his hobbies. Participants also viewed a picture of Ford standing outside his house. For half of the participants, Ford was pictured wearing a T-shirt that displayed the logo of the 2004 Republican National Convention; for half, the T-shirt displayed the logo of the 2004 Democratic National Convention. The study took place in 2007, during the presidency of George W. Bush.

Participants then answered a series of questions about Ford’s beliefs. These questions included the key question, “What does Ford think it means to be an American?” and several filler items (e.g., “What is Ford’s favorite thing to do in his spare time?”). The 30 responses to the key question were then typed onto separate sheets of paper and arranged in packets. These responses varied widely in form and content. For example, one respondent, for whom Ford was depicted

as a Republican, wrote, “football, BBQs, friends, fireworks, and lots of pride and the willing[ness] to fight for our country.” Another respondent, for whom Ford was depicted as a Democrat, wrote, “For Patrick, being an American means positively contributing to a community, being a good citizen, and fighting for positive changes in the community.” Phase 1, then, yielded 30 responses to the question, 15 generated by participants for whom Ford was depicted as a Republican and 15 generated by participants for whom Ford was depicted as a Democrat.

In Phase 2, 30 new participants (also students in introductory psychology classes, ages 18–21, 63% female) served as judges and rated each of the 30 responses generated by the participants in Phase 1. The judges were told that the responses were descriptions of a person’s beliefs about what it means to be an American. Their task was to make judgments about the political affiliation of the person about whom the description was written. Ratings were made on a scale ranging from 1 (*definitely a Democrat*) to 7 (*definitely a Republican*), and served as the primary dependent measure. If the Phase 2 judges could infer Ford’s political affiliation by reading Phase 1 participants’ judgments about his beliefs, it would constitute strong evidence that people perceive Republicans and Democrats to hold different definitions of the superordinate group.

### Results and Discussion

For each judge, the 15 ratings of the target’s political affiliation (based on his beliefs about what it means to be an American) when he was depicted as a Democrat, and the 15 ratings of his political affiliation when he was depicted as a Republican were averaged, creating two summary scores. These scores, then, reflected each judge’s overall inferences about the descriptions of Democrats’ and Republicans’ beliefs about what it means to be an American.

As predicted, the judges in Phase 2 were able to infer Ford’s party affiliation based on Phase 1 participants’ description of his beliefs. The descriptions generated (by Phase 1 participants) when Ford was depicted as a Republican led the judges in Phase 2 to perceive his party affiliation ( $M = 4.81$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ) differently than descriptions generated when Ford was depicted as a Democrat ( $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ),  $t(29) = 8.59$ ,  $p < .01$ . Inferences about the party affiliation of both Republican and Democratic targets also differed significantly from the scale midpoint, both  $t(14) > 5.72$ ,  $p < .01$ .

After reading other participants’ inferences about Ford’s beliefs about American identity, judges could determine the party affiliation on which these inferences were based with impressive accuracy. Thus, Study 1

provides evidence that people believe that there are differences between the conceptions of American identity held by Republicans and Democrats. That is, if a person's political affiliation is known, perceivers have clear expectations about how the person defines American identity, and by extension the extent to which the person's conception of the superordinate group differs from their own.

## STUDY 2

Having determined that people believe that Republicans and Democrats construe the superordinate group "Americans" differently, we next examined the consequences of this belief. This study directly examined our central hypothesis: Appeals invoking common ingroup identity will be ineffective, and may have an ironic effect, if introduced by an outgroup member. We presented participants with a persuasive appeal made by either an ingroup or outgroup member; the appeal either did or did not invoke common ingroup identity. As the subgroups are perceived to hold different conceptions of the superordinate identity, we hypothesized that outgroup members whose appeals invoked common ingroup identity would fail. On the other hand, because ingroup members are presumed to share conceptions of the superordinate group and already share a common identity, ingroup members' invocation of common ingroup identity should not influence the success of their persuasive appeal. Further, we hypothesized that perceived differences between the perceiver's and the speaker's conceptions of the superordinate group identity would be inversely related to the appeal's success when the speaker invoked common ingroup identity. On the other hand, these perceived differences would be unrelated to the appeal's success if common identity was not explicitly invoked.

### Method

Sixty-four psychology students (ages 18–43, 78% female) participated in the study. They were told that the experiment investigated factors contributing to political participation and voting. Participants read what was ostensibly a newspaper article about the founder of a movement to increase political participation among college students. They then answered a series of questions about the founder, the movement, and their own beliefs.

The article was a profile of Patrick Ford, a student at "Pacific University," who founded the movement. The movement was described as originating from Ford's concerns about "apathy among people my age about politics, and about our country's future in general"; Ford was described as being "more motivated by people

participating in the political process than by individuals of a particular party being elected". In the Common Ingroup Identity (CII) appeal condition, the movement was called "UniVote" and included several statements in which Republicans' and Democrats' superordinate identity, Americans, was referenced. For example, the CII appeal contained the following statement:

Whether we are Republicans or Democrats, we are all Americans, and there are many issues that must be addressed. In our changing world, we need to think of ourselves as Americans first and foremost; many issues face all of us, and we must come to a decision and participate in the democratic process. Every American must vote!

In the control condition, the movement was called VIP (Voting Increase Project), and Ford did not appeal to common ingroup identity. For example, the equivalent section of the non-CII appeal contained the following statement:

Whether you are a Republican or a Democrat, there are many issues that must be addressed. In our changing world, we need to think about our values; many issues face each of us, and we must come to a decision and participate in the democratic process. Every person must vote!

Participants were randomly assigned to receive one of the two appeals. In addition, Ford was described as the vice president of either the Campus Republicans or the Campus Democrats; this constituted the manipulation of Speaker Affiliation.

After reading the article, participants evaluated the extent to which Ford believed each of various elements was an important part of what it means to be an American. There were nine key elements based on the responses generated by participants in Study 1 (e.g., "being concerned for the poor"). In generating these elements, we examined the responses, looking for consensual themes. We selected themes that were distinct from one another, spanned various aspects of American identity, and were representative of the inferred beliefs of both Republicans and Democrats. Responses were edited for grammar and concision to produce the nine key elements. There were also four filler items (e.g., "being polite and courteous"), which did not appear in the responses generated by participants in Study 1. Participants rated each element on a scale ranging from 0 (*not at all what it means to be an American*) to 6 (*an essential part of what it means to be an American*). A separate pilot study ( $n = 56$ ) revealed that participants do in fact believe that Republicans and Democrats endorse the key elements to different extents, multivariate  $F(13, 42) = 3.95, p < .01$  (please see Table 1 for the full list of elements and ratings).

TABLE 1  
Key Elements of American Identity as a Function of Target's Political Party Affiliation, Study 2 Pilot Data

|  | <i>Democrat</i> | <i>Republican</i> |
|--|-----------------|-------------------|
| Supporting American troops in Iraq*        | 3.11 (1.59)     | 4.93 (.98)        |
| Supporting the administration*             | 2.68 (1.66)     | 4.46 (1.20)       |
| Being knowledgeable about American history | 4.18 (1.19)     | 4.07 (1.18)       |
| Being patriotic                            | 4.71 (1.36)     | 5.18 (.98)        |
| Being concerned for the poor*              | 3.71 (1.01)     | 3.04 (1.10)       |
| Being knowledgeable about other cultures*  | 3.61 (1.07)     | 2.89 (1.17)       |
| Being proud of America                     | 4.86 (1.30)     | 5.29 (.94)        |
| Believing in God*                          | 3.00 (1.41)     | 4.50 (1.26)       |
| Supporting equality for all people*        | 4.57 (1.17)     | 3.96 (1.14)       |

Note. Standard deviations are indicated in parentheses. Ratings were made on scales ranging from 0 (*not at all what it means to be an American*) to 6 (*an essential part of what it means to be an American*).

\*Democrat and Republican significantly different at  $p < .05$ .

Participants then completed the primary dependent variables, three items assessing the effectiveness of Ford's appeal: their agreement with Ford, their support for Ford's movement, and their likelihood of participating in a local chapter of the movement. These ratings were made using 9-point scales anchored at *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree* (or *strongly oppose/strongly support* or *very unlikely/very likely*, respectively). Next, participants rated the elements of American identity with respect to themselves, that is, they rated the extent to which they personally believed that each element was an important part of what it means to be an American. These ratings were made on 7-point scales anchored at 0 (*not at all part of what it means to be an American*) and 6 (*an essential part of what it means to be an American*). Participants then reported demographic information, including their own political affiliation.

## Results

For each participant, the speaker's party affiliation was recorded with respect to the participant. That is, the participant's response to the items assessing their party identification were compared to the speaker's party affiliation, and coded as matching (ingroup) or not matching (outgroup); this ingroup/outgroup coding of Speaker Affiliation was used in analyses. We analyzed these data using analyses of variance in which Appeal Type (CII or control) and Speaker Affiliation (ingroup or outgroup) were the independent variables and the three items assessing the speaker's effectiveness were the dependent variables.

**Speaker effectiveness.** Agreement with the speaker was lowest when an outgroup speaker appealed to common identity. Overall, the CII appeal was less effective

than the control appeal,  $F(1, 60) = 3.95$ ,  $p = .05$ , and Speaker Affiliation did not predict agreement with the speaker,  $F(1, 60) = 1.57$ ,  $p = .22$ . More importantly, the Appeal Type  $\times$  Speaker Affiliation Interaction was significant,  $F(1, 60) = 4.74$ ,  $p = .03$ ; this effect was driven by particularly low agreement with outgroup members who used CII appeals. Specifically, participants were less likely to agree with the outgroup speaker when he invoked the common identity compared to when he did not,  $t(60) = -2.67$ ,  $p = .01$ . On the other hand, participants' agreement with the ingroup speaker was not affected by appeal type,  $t(60) = .15$ ,  $p = .88$ . Means for each condition are reported in Table 2.

Participants' support for the speaker's movement was also lowest when an outgroup members made a CII appeal. Neither Appeal Type,  $F(1, 60) = 1.77$ ,  $p = .27$ , nor Speaker Affiliation,  $F(1, 60) = 0.93$ ,  $p = .34$ , impacted support. Again, consistent with the central prediction, there was a significant Appeal Type  $\times$  Speaker Affiliation Interaction,  $F(1, 60) = 6.29$ ,  $p = .02$ ; support for the outgroup speaker was lower when he invoked CII compared to when he did not,  $t(60) = -2.33$ ,  $p = .02$ , but support for the ingroup speaker was unaffected by appeal type,  $t(60) = 1.09$ ,  $p = .28$ .

Likewise, participants' likelihood of participating in the speaker's movement was particularly low when an outgroup speaker appealed to common identity. There was a significant main effect of Appeal Type,  $F(1, 59) = 4.05$ ,  $p = .05$ , and no main effect of Speaker Affiliation,  $F(1, 59) = 1.39$ ,  $p = .24$ . As with the other measures of the appeal's success, the central finding was the significant Appeal Type  $\times$  Speaker Affiliation Interaction,  $F(1, 60) = 4.36$ ,  $p = .04$ ; participants were less likely to indicate that they would participate when the

TABLE 2  
Mean Scores on Measures of Support for Speaker as a Function of Speaker Affiliation and Appeal Type, Study 2

|   | <i>Ingroup Speaker</i>   | <i>Outgroup Speaker</i>  |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Agreement with speaker                  |                          |                          |
| Control appeal                          | 7.00 (1.23) <sub>a</sub> | 7.29 (1.07) <sub>a</sub> |
| Common ingroup identity appeal          | 7.06 (1.09) <sub>a</sub> | 6.00 (1.41) <sub>b</sub> |
| Support for speaker's movement          |                          |                          |
| Control appeal                          | 6.82 (1.05) <sub>a</sub> | 7.29 (1.14) <sub>a</sub> |
| Common ingroup identity appeal          | 7.24 (.97) <sub>a</sub>  | 6.18 (1.66) <sub>b</sub> |
| Likelihood of participating in movement |                          |                          |
| Control appeal                          | 5.14 (1.86) <sub>a</sub> | 5.62 (2.26) <sub>a</sub> |
| Common ingroup identity appeal          | 5.18 (1.94) <sub>a</sub> | 3.45 (2.16) <sub>b</sub> |

Note. Standard deviations are indicated in parentheses. Ratings were made on 9-point scales on which higher scores indicate greater agreement, support, or participation. For each dependent variable, means with different subscripts within rows and columns are significantly different at  $p < .05$ .

outgroup speaker invoked CII,  $t(59) = -2.61$ ,  $p = .01$ , but support for the ingroup speaker was unaffected by appeal type,  $t(59) = .06$ ,  $p = .95$ .

*Impact of perceived differences in the meaning of American identity.* To investigate the proposed mechanism for this effect, we computed a composite index of the difference perceived by each participant between his or her own beliefs about American identity and those of the speaker. For each element of American identity, we subtracted participants' rating of the element from their ratings of the speaker's beliefs about the element; the absolute values of these differences were summed to create an index of differences in perceptions of American identity.

Overall, participants perceived greater differences between themselves and the speaker when he was a member of the outgroup ( $M = 11.56$ ,  $SD = 4.56$ ) than when he was a member of the ingroup ( $M = 9.08$ ,  $SD = 5.02$ ;  $p = .05$ ). Moreover, as hypothesized, these differences were more important to the appeal's success when the speaker appealed to CII. That is, when the speaker appealed to CII, greater differences between his beliefs and those of the perceiver predicted less agreement with him ( $\beta = -.37$ ),  $t(26) = 2.01$ ,  $p = .05$ . Support for the speaker's movement showed a similar relationship; greater difference predicted less support ( $\beta = -.32$ ),  $t(26) = 1.73$ ,  $p = .10$ , though this relationship was only marginally significant. Greater difference also predicted perceivers' likelihood of participating in the movement ( $\beta = -.48$ ),  $t(26) = 2.75$ ,  $p = .01$ . However, when the speaker did not appeal to CII, the difference between his beliefs and those of the perceiver was unrelated to agreement with him, support for the movement, or likelihood of participating in the movement (magnitude of all  $\beta < .13$ , all  $t < 0.74$ , all  $p > .47$ ).

It is clear, then, that persuasive appeals from outgroup members were less effective—but only when the speaker appealed to the superordinate identity. When common identity was invoked, the extent to which the speaker and listener shared a conception of the superordinate group was associated with the appeal's success. As members of different subgroups are perceived as having different conceptions of the superordinate group, and thus as not sharing the identity beyond a nominal sense, common ingroup identity appeals made by outgroup members were less successful.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

We argue that when encouraged by a member of a relevant subgroup to think about their superordinate identity, people consider the meaning of that identity for both themselves and the speaker. As people believe

that subgroups differ in their perceptions of the shared identity, being encouraged by a member of the opposing subgroup to think about the superordinate identity will emphasize, rather than minimize, the importance of intergroup differences. Study 1 demonstrated that there are clear and consensual beliefs about the content of Republicans' and Democrats' conceptions of what it means to be American; specifically, and of importance, Study 1 demonstrated that these conceptions of American identity are perceived to differ. Study 2 demonstrated that persuasive appeals made by outgroup members that invoked common ingroup identity were unsuccessful, compared to appeals made by outgroup members who did not appeal to CII and to appeals made by ingroup members. Moreover, when common ingroup identity was invoked, the more participants perceived differences between themselves and the speaker in the meaning of the common identity, the less effective was the appeal.

The current studies illustrate the impact of differences in *perceptions* of the meaning of shared identity, not of actual differences in the meaning of superordinate groups. Nonetheless, these studies add to the literature suggesting that it is important to consider variation in the substantive meaning of a given social category (e.g., Citrin et al., 2001; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Sellers et al., 1998). Well-established subgroups may have their own norms and values regarding the superordinate group. Although we focused on American political parties and their shared national identity, the tendency for subgroups to differ in their conception of the superordinate group also characterizes other groups. For example, as previously described, Blacks and Whites differ in their beliefs about the centrality of certain factors in defining American identity (Citrin et al., 2001). Even if there is no question about the literal existence of a common group that subsumes multiple subgroups, people may nonetheless believe that, overarching labels notwithstanding, they belong to fundamentally different groups. Although infrequently explicitly discussed or articulated, a person's personal conception of his or her group is an important part of group identification.

The nature of this conception is important if one is attempting to unify groups of people who share a category label. The essence of the Common Ingroup Identity model's approach to reducing intergroup bias is to encourage categorization at a higher level of category inclusiveness, such that members of separate groups envision one group (Gaertner et al., 1993). One obstacle to this approach is that contexts that focus on the common group identity may make differences between subgroups more meaningful. Indeed, differences in conceptions of the common identity may be an important way by which subgroups are differentiated in many intergroup contexts.



The primary limitation of the current studies is that both experiments used Americans as the superordinate group and Democrats and Republicans as subordinate groups, and the studies were conducted at a time (2007) when relations between American political parties were particularly contentious and competitive. It is possible that differences between subgroups in the meaning of the superordinate group are especially likely (and particularly important) among groups that are in an explicitly competitive relationship, such as political parties. Indeed, competing groups overestimate the extent to which their ideological beliefs differ from one another (Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995) and this overestimation could well extend to perceived conceptions of the superordinate group. Although the reduction of intergroup bias is perhaps most important for groups that are in competitive relationships, future research should determine the extent to which subgroups in various types of relationships differ in their conceptions of superordinate identity and examine the impact of common ingroup identity invocations in a wider set of groups.

In addition, we directly manipulated neither the speaker's beliefs nor the extent to which beliefs were shared between subgroups. However (as shown by Study 1), for the particular subgroups used in this study, there are widely shared perceptions about each group's view of the superordinate identity. Given this, the speaker's subgroup affiliation served as an effective proxy for his perceived beliefs about the superordinate group. Directly manipulating these perceptions, perhaps using minimal groups, would be a useful future step in further examining the mediating role of shared conceptions in the invocation of common ingroup identity and reduction of ingroup bias among subgroups.

The current studies suggest an important theoretical and practical boundary condition on common ingroup identity as an approach to reducing intergroup conflict. Common ingroup identity as a persuasive tool will be particularly unsuccessful if presented by an outgroup member because, under such circumstances, shared conceptions of superordinate identity (or the lack thereof) take on great significance. This obstacle is particularly relevant to practical conflict reduction, as common ingroup identity inductions typically come from a source that is itself linked to one of the relevant identities. Thus, although efforts to engage common identities to reduce conflict can be effective, would-be invokers of common identity like Obama and al-Sadr should be aware that these appeals can sometimes backfire—and that the most important targets of their influence, outgroup members, are most likely to experience this ironic effect.

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