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# Negational Categorization and Intergroup Behavior

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*Individuals define themselves, at times, as who they are (e.g., a psychologist) and, at other times, as who they are not (e.g., not an economist). Drawing on social identity, optimal distinctiveness, and balance theories, four studies examined the nature of negational identity relative to affirmational identity. One study explored the conditions that increase negational identification and found that activating the need for distinctiveness increased the accessibility of negational identities. Three additional studies revealed that negational categorization increased outgroup derogation relative to affirmational categorization and the authors argue that this effect is at least partially due to a focus on contrasting the self from the outgroup under negational categorization. Consistent with this argument, outgroup derogation following negational categorization was mitigated when connections to similar others were highlighted. By distinguishing negational identity from affirmational identity, a more complete picture of collective identity and intergroup behavior can start to emerge.*

**Keywords:** *social identity; negational categorization; intergroup behavior; outgroup derogation; ingroup favoritism*

“No man is an island,” claimed John Donne (1624), a phrase famous for communicating the significance of other people to an individual’s sense of self. We routinely identify ourselves by shared characteristics: demographics such as race or gender, organizational affiliations such as church membership, or

even minimal group memberships established arbitrarily in a laboratory.

However, possessed characteristics or group memberships may not be the only source of identification: Characteristics that we do not possess or groups to which we do not belong may be equally informative to our sense of self. Individuals may at times identify *negationally*, focusing on who or what they are not—I am not an economist or I am not a Republican. These negational identities can arise instantaneously in social settings. For instance, conservatives may focus on their common negational category—not being a liberal—to unite a fragmenting constituency. A Midwest talk radio show advertises itself on billboards with a slogan, “Liberals Hate It!” hoping to draw audiences from the entire conservative base without alienating any subgroup. Through the theoretical lens of balance theory (Heider, 1958) and optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991), we explore the nature and consequences of negational categorization.

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Negational categorization refers to the process by which an individual's identity is defined by outgroups, by what people are not (e.g., not liberals). This is in contrast to affirmational categorization, where the self and the ingroup are defined by what they represent (e.g., Republicans). Compared to affirmational categorization, negational categorization has not received commensurate attention from the literature, perhaps because outgroup differentiation is typically seen as a derivative of ingroup identification (Allport, 1954; Karniol, 2003; Turner, 1987). Researchers generally agree that the ingroup is psychologically primary, whereas the outgroup is defined after ingroup identification (Allport, 1954). In fact, some have questioned the necessity of recognizing a specific outgroup (L. Gaertner, Iuzzini, Witt, & Orina, 2006) because people may represent the outgroup as a homogenous, all-inclusive category of "not me" (Simon, 1993).

In this article we stress the role of outgroups in social identity. We argue that an individual's identity can form around outgroups and that common nonmembership can motivate intergroup behaviors as much as common membership. First, the ability for people to identify negationally through contrasting themselves against others is rooted in basic cognitive systems. Studies have shown that knowledge in human minds is often organized by the features an item or a person lacks as much as by the features it possesses (see Minsky, 1997). Thus, people can form identifications based on information that distinguishes themselves from others (Karniol, 2003). In fact, it has been well documented that negational identities are developed at early stages of childhood (Damon & Hart, 1988; McGuire & McGuire, 1986).

Second, negational identification can forge interpersonal or intergroup bonds against a common outgroup. Balance theory (Heider, 1958) suggests that people strive for cognitive balance in their network of likes and dislikes. A state of balance is achieved when two parties both like or dislike a third party. Considering the case of two individuals and a group, Heider (1958) postulated that a balanced state exists if both individuals belong to the group and they have positive attitudes toward each other; this cognitive balance reflects affirmational identification. In addition, balance also exists if both persons reject membership in the group and they have positive attitudes toward each other; this cognitive balance reflects negational identification. The same logic applies to the group level where a negational categorization of "not them" can serve as a superordinate identity that transcends the original categorical boundary. For example, two independent groups (e.g., Blacks and Asians) may come to bond with each other in the presence of a third group from which they both reject membership (e.g., Caucasians). Under this superordinate

identity, former ingroups and outgroups can be recategorized into a common ingroup (e.g., non-Caucasians), reducing the conflict between them (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Validzic, 1998; S. L. Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989).

A number of studies support the social implications of negational categorization. Bosson, Johnson, Niederhoffer, and Swann (2006) found that sharing a negative, as compared to a positive, attitude about a third party is particularly effective in promoting closeness between people. Similarly, Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) investigated a group of individuals who strongly identified themselves as not belonging to the National Rifle Association (NRA), a nonprofit organization dedicated to the right to bear arms. For those individuals, the negational identity of "not being a member of the NRA" itself carries significant meaning.

Negational categorization seems to occur in many sociopolitical activities. People, nations, and civilizations often are defined in terms of who and what they are not: not the barbarian, not the primitive, not the Oriental, not the fundamentalist (Purdue, 2005). In one captivating historical example, the role of negational categorization has been identified as a critical force driving the major shifts in Iranian political community (Duara, 1997). In Iran, political identity was classically defined by language—those who spoke Persian and those who did not. In the 16th century, however, speaking Persian ceased to be the most salient factor. Instead, Iranian distinctiveness came to be defined by religion (i.e., Shiism) in relation to perceived threats from Sunni neighbors. Yet after the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, Iranian popular national spirit quickly turned from anti-Sunni sentiment to Muslim solidarity in the face of Israel. Although each of these major transitions resulted in a new affirmational identity (i.e., Shiism, Muslim solidarity), the shifts in Iranian identity can be seen as initially driven by a negational categorization process (i.e., non-Sunni or non-Jewish). In contemporary American politics, people who were once supporters of unsuccessful Democratic candidates in the 2004 presidential Democratic primary, such as Howard Dean and John Edwards, united over their common lack of support for the current president, George W. Bush (i.e., "anybody but Bush") in the general election.

The current research explores negational categorization as a form of social identification in four studies. Study 1 examines whether people identify negationally and attempts to answer the question of when negational identities become accessible, looking at the need for distinctiveness as one potential motivator. Studies 2, 3, and 4 examine the consequences of affirmational and negational categorization. Specifically, using the minimal group paradigm, we test whether merely assigning

people to a negational category can intensify outgroup derogation relative to assigning them to an affirmational category.

### STUDY 1: WHEN DO PEOPLE IDENTIFY NEGATIONALLY?

We believe that there are both methodological and theoretical reasons for why negational identity may be underrepresented in the literature as compared to affirmational identity. Methodologically, the questions that researchers typically ask to solicit salient social identities may limit the report of negational identities. For example, for decades researchers have relied on the Twenty Statements Test (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954) to understand individuals' personal and collective identities, which operates by having individuals finish the statement "I am . . ." or answer the question "Who am I?" 20 times (Watkins, Yau, Dahlin, & Wondimu, 1997). Likewise, Roccas and Brewer (2007) asked participants to check various social categories to which they belong in a study investigating identity complexity. It is not surprising then that participants in past studies did not volunteer negational identities. This affirmational bias in social identity research may be due to the tendency to interpret others' actions as reflecting their preference for or attraction to one object (i.e., approach motivations) rather than their dislike or avoidance of another object (i.e., avoidance motivations), even when choices are clearly driven by avoidance or dislike (Miller & Nelson, 2002). In the context of social interaction, researchers often assume that people have chosen to be members of Group A rather than B because they were attracted to characteristics of Group A, when in fact their identity may have been driven by dislike or avoidance of Group B.

There are also theoretical reasons why negational identities are not as common as affirmational identities. Optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991) assumes that individuals strive to meet two fundamental and competing human needs—the need to be different and distinct from others and the need to feel included. According to this theory, individuals should prefer membership in groups that meet the needs for both distinctiveness and inclusion, that is, identities that are optimally distinct.

Affirmational and negational identities may differentially meet the need for inclusion and distinctiveness. Affirmational identity can reconcile the conflicting needs for inclusion and distinctiveness: The need for inclusion is satisfied through intragroup similarity, and the need for distinctiveness is met through intergroup differences. Negational identity, however, may satisfy the need for distinctiveness to a greater extent than the

need for inclusion because it focuses on differentiating and contrasting the self from outgroups rather than through assimilation to ingroups. Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) hinted at this potential relationship when they argued that individuals may maintain positive social identities by cognitively separating one's identity from an organization's identity. Thus, even though negational identity can serve as a meaningful source of identity, it may not necessarily provide a strong and lasting sense of inclusion.

Because people prefer to have identities that are optimally distinct, we expect affirmational identity to be more common than negational identity in general. However, there may be times when negational identities become accessible. Given that negational identity satisfies the need for distinctiveness better than the need for inclusion, we argue that negational identity will become relatively more accessible when people's need for distinctiveness is high. Study 1 explores whether people identify negationally by asking them to list identities (affirmational or negational) that are important to their sense of self. To explore whether the need for distinctiveness increases the salience of negational identities, we adopted a well-established procedure to manipulate the needs (i.e., need for distinctiveness, need for inclusion, no need; Pickett, Bonner, & Coleman, 2002; Pickett & Brewer, 2001) before participants reported their identities.

### Method

#### *Participants and Design*

A total of 126 Northwestern University (NU) undergraduate students (50 male) participated in this study. Among them, 62 were Caucasian, 46 were Asian, 11 were African American, and 7 were other ethnicities. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 23 with a median of 19 and represented a diverse set of majors at the university. This study consisted of a one-factor (need state: need for distinctiveness, need for inclusion, or no need) between-subjects design.

#### *Procedure*

Upon arrival, participants were told that the experiment was examining the personality characteristics of NU students as a group and of Evanston residents (the city where the university is located) and they would receive feedback about their responses to the Self-Attributes Questionnaire (SAQ; Pelham & Swann, 1989) in relation to those of other NU students and Evanston residents. We chose Evanston residents to serve as the outgroup because we wanted participants to believe that the outgroup members were also participating in the same experiment.

After these instructions, participants were led to a separate room and were asked to complete the SAQ, in which they rated themselves relative to other college students of a similar age on a set of attributes such as intellectual ability, physical attractiveness, and social skills. Following the procedure by Pickett et al. (2002), this questionnaire was used as part of a false feedback manipulation. We chose this scale as the bogus personality measure because it measures a wide variety of self-domains and the use of the global measure (averaging across many specific domains) would lead participants to assume that their score on the SAQ reflected how generally similar or different they were from other students (Pickett et al., 2002).

*Need manipulation.* After the SAQ, participants completed an irrelevant filler task while the experimenter ostensibly tabulated their scores. The experimenter returned after approximately 5 min with a feedback sheet, which contained the manipulation of need state (Pickett et al., 2002). To make the feedback personally relevant, participants were told that each of them would engage in a discussion with another NU student and that his or her SAQ results would be shown to the other student to facilitate their discussion in a later part of the experiment. In actuality, participants were properly debriefed and dismissed after they received feedback and reported their salient identities.

Participants in the *no need* condition were told that they had a score of 61 on the SAQ and that the mean for NU students was 62; however, Evanston residents had a mean score of 36. Thus, participants in this condition would see their score as sufficiently close to their ingroup members but quite different from their outgroup members, meeting both the need for inclusion (similarity to ingroup) and the need for distinctiveness (differences from outgroup; Brewer, 1991), and consequently, no need state would be activated or salient in this case. Participants in the *need for inclusion* condition were told that whereas NU students and Evanston residents scored 62 and 36, respectively (as in the no need condition), their own score was 48 (instead of 61 as in the no need condition). It has been shown that by scoring between the ingroup (NU students) and the outgroup (Evanston residents), people see their own score as quite different from those of their ingroup members, triggering a need for inclusion, and yet sufficiently different from the outgroup so that the need for distinctiveness is still met (Pickett et al., 2002). Finally, participants in the *need for distinctiveness* condition were told that their score was 61 and that the mean score for NU students was 62 (as in the no need condition); however, the mean score for Evanston residents was 58 (instead of 36 in the no need condition). Participants in this condition would see little difference among the self, ingroup, and outgroup

scores, thereby activating a need for distinctiveness. Previous studies (Pickett & Brewer, 2001; Pickett et al., 2002) have shown that these manipulations reliably activate these different needs.

*Identity measure.* Following the feedback, participants were asked to complete another unrelated filler task while the experimenter ostensibly prepared materials for subsequent tasks. They were told that people sometimes identify themselves as being members of a group whereas at other times as *not* being members of certain groups. They were provided with an example, “A professor at Northwestern University may regard him/herself as a faculty member of this university, and identify with Northwestern. At the same time, this professor may feel a stronger connection to the identity of ‘not being a Republican’ than the identity of ‘being a Democrat.’” Participants were then told: “List up to 20 groups that are *important* to your identity. Please indicate whether each group is one with which you identify as being a member (I am a member of X), or one with which you identify as not being a member (I am not a member of X).” Explicitly defining negational identity was important because participants might otherwise assume that the researchers were only interested in affirmational identity. It is also crucial that participants did not see the link between the need manipulation and the identity measure because we wanted to show that even a need for distinctiveness solicited by a completely unrelated situation can affect the salience of negational identities in general. Indeed, during debriefing no participants discovered the link between the manipulation and the identity measure.

## Results and Discussion

Participants generated as few as 4 and as many as 20 identities ( $M = 13.94$ ,  $SD = 5.48$ ); the number of negational identities generated ranged from 0 to 12 ( $M = 4.95$ ,  $SD = 2.91$ ). All identities could be classified as either affirmational or negational and thus our main dependent measure was the percentage of negational identities listed (the percentage of affirmational identities is simply equal to 100 minus the percentage of negational identities). Across the three need conditions, about 30% of the identities listed were negational identities. Consistent with our predictions, affirmational identities were more prevalent than negational identities; across all three conditions, the percentage of negational identities listed was significantly below 50%,  $t(125) = -14.78$ ,  $p = .00$ .

Not surprising, most participants reported that being an NU student was an important identity. Ethnicity was another common source of affirmational identity—62% of participants reported belonging to an ethnic



group (e.g., “I am an Asian American”) as an important identity. With regard to negational identity, a considerable number of participants mentioned political parties (e.g., “I am not a member of the Republican party”; 82%), fraternity or sorority (e.g., “I am not a member of a sorority”; 38%), or religious groups (e.g., “I am not a fundamentalist”; 25%). It is also noteworthy that 18% of participants identified themselves as not a member of the NRA (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). Thus, even though the total number of negational identities generated was smaller compared to the number of affirmational identities, the content of those negational identities seemed to capture significant political, social, and spiritual experiences.

Most important, we predicted that the activation of the need for distinctiveness would increase the accessibility of negational identities. The omnibus ANOVA demonstrated that the proportion of negational identities varied by need state,  $F(2, 123) = 3.07, p = .05$ . As expected, participants in the need for distinctiveness condition reported a greater percentage of negational identities ( $M = .35, SD = .13$ ) than those in the no need condition ( $M = .27, SD = .15$ ) and need for inclusion condition ( $M = .29, SD = .16$ ). Orthogonal contrasts (Keppel, 1991) supported our hypothesis. The mean percentage of negational identities for participants in the need for distinctiveness condition was significantly higher than the mean percentage of negational identities in the other two conditions,  $t(123) = 2.46, p = .02$ , but the mean percentage of negational identities between the no need condition and need for inclusion condition did not differ,  $t(123) = -.41, p = .68$ .

The implications of Study 1 are twofold. First, people do identify negationally. However, because negational identity meets the need for distinctiveness better than the need for inclusion and is therefore not optimally distinct, it is less common than affirmational identity (Brewer, 1991). Second, there are situations where negational identification may become particularly likely: when individuals’ need for distinctiveness is heightened.

## STUDY 2: CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIONAL CATEGORIZATION

It has long been established that members of affirmational identities tend to exhibit ingroup favoritism (i.e., preferential treatment toward their ingroup members; see Brewer, 1979, for a review). Evidence for outgroup derogation, where individuals disadvantage the outgroup relative to the ingroup, is more elusive, leading some to suggest that intergroup behavior is really driven by favoring the ingroup rather than derogating the outgroup (Brewer, 1979; Mummendey, Otten, Berger, & Kessler,

2000). For example, Mummendey et al. (2000) found that participants assigned to affirmational social categories were reluctant to derogate outgroup members. This asymmetry between ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation in the lab has intrigued scholars who study intergroup conflict, for outgroup derogation and catastrophic conflict is an all too prevalent consequence of real-world intergroup interactions. Consequently, Brewer (2001) concluded that social categorization itself (i.e., salient group membership) is insufficient to elicit outgroup derogation; rather, the outgroup must be seen as blocking and hindering ingroup goals.

We argue that part of the reason why outgroup derogation is elusive in the lab but prevalent in the real world is that scholars tend to focus on affirmational identity in their lab explorations of social identity. In contrast, many real-world situations may be driven by negational identity. We contend that negational categorization is more likely to induce outgroup derogation than affirmational categorization because it focuses on differentiating from and contrasting the outgroup. When affirmational categorization is salient, according to self-categorization theory (Turner, 1987), there is a perceptual accentuation of intragroup similarities and intergroup differences, leading to an enhanced perceptual connection between self and ingroup members (i.e., ingroup assimilation) and perceptual contrast between ingroup and outgroup members (i.e., outgroup contrasting). However, ingroup assimilation and outgroup contrasting do not occur with the same intensity. The effect of affirmational categorization is greater assimilation of the self to the ingroup than differentiating the self from the outgroup. Thus, ingroups are “psychologically primary” when affirmational identities are salient, in the sense that similarity, attachment, and preference for one’s ingroup, comes before the development of attitudes toward outgroups (Allport, 1954; S. L. Gaertner et al., 1989). It is therefore expected that when opportunities for unequal treatment between ingroups and outgroups arise, individuals tend to preferentially favor their ingroup rather than derogate their outgroup (Brewer, 1979).

Unlike affirmational identities, negational identities focus on intergroup differences, defining individuals in terms of characteristics of others that they do not possess. With negational categorization, the outgroup becomes the central focus. Thus, the effect of negational identification is more of contrasting from the outgroup than assimilating to the ingroup. For negational identity, outgroups are “psychologically primary,” in the sense that dissimilarity or distance from one’s outgroups comes before similarity to or attachment with ingroups. Consequently, opportunities for unequal treatment should lead people who identify themselves negationally to derogate outgroup members. It is important to note that we are

not suggesting that contrasting from the outgroup will be completely absent in the affirmational categorization condition or that there will be no assimilation in the negational categorization condition. Instead, contrasting and assimilation coexist in social situations (Cadinu & Rothbart, 1996; Turner, 1987), and the difference we are proposing between affirmational and negational categorization is a relative one.

Thus, unlike previous research that argues that blocking and hindering ingroup goals are necessary to elicit outgroup derogation (e.g., Brewer, 2001; Sassenberg, Kessler, & Mummendey, 2003), we suggest that outgroup derogation can be a natural consequence of the negational categorization process. Study 2 tested whether negational categorization would increase outgroup derogation using a modified version of the minimal group paradigm (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). In the typical minimal group paradigm, participants are randomly categorized into one of two groups (e.g., Group A or Group B). We adapted this paradigm to fit the parameters of negational identification by employing a variation of Simon and Pettigrew's (1990) one-group paradigm, where individuals are placed into affirmationally or negationally defined categories; however, Simon and Pettigrew left the negational categorization in their paradigm unexplored. Using the minimal group paradigm is important because we hypothesize that the negational categorization process itself can lead to more outgroup derogation than can affirmational categorization, without evoking obstacles to ingroup goals. By randomly assigning participants to affirmational or negational identification conditions, we also avoid any concerns of tautology (dislike of outgroup leads to negational identity, which is more likely to display outgroup derogation).

We predicted that negational categorization would lead to more outgroup derogation than would affirmational categorization. Regarding ingroup favoritism, one might expect more ingroup favoritism for affirmational identification than for negational identification. However, if negational identities are a meaningful source of identification, members of both categories may exhibit the same levels of ingroup favoritism.

## Method

### *Participants and Design*

A total of 72 NU undergraduate students (24 male) responded to our invitations for voluntary participation. Among them, 42 were Caucasian, 23 were Asian American, and 5 were African American. The majority of the participants were 19–22 years old. Participants were paid \$10 for their involvement in the hour-long

study. The study consisted of a 2 (categorization type: affirmational vs. negational)  $\times$  2 (valence: positive traits vs. negative traits)  $\times$  2 (group rating: ingroup vs. outgroup) mixed design with categorization type as the between-subjects factor.

### *Procedure*

Upon arrival at the laboratory participants were led to a separate room equipped with a computer. They were told that the experiment would examine people's estimation patterns and were asked to estimate the number of small dots appearing on 10 computer screens. Participants were also told that some individuals display a consistent pattern in the dot estimation task and that this pattern has been called Type M. Therefore, each individual's estimation pattern did or did not belong to the Type M pattern. Furthermore, it was emphasized that the Type M pattern does not relate to accuracy but simply represents a pattern of responding.

After the dot-estimation task, participants were randomly categorized into one of the two groups. Those in the *affirmational categorization* condition were told that they belonged to the Type M group according to their estimation pattern. Those in the *negational categorization* condition were told that according to their estimation pattern they did not belong to the Type M group. To control for the effect of relative group size, participants were further told that, in general, about 50% of the population would display the Type M pattern (Leonardelli & Brewer, 2001). Participants then completed three dependent measures—a group identification measure, followed by an ingroup favoritism measure and an outgroup derogation measure—and then were debriefed.

### *Dependent Measures*

*Identification measure.* We assessed identification with the group using the four-item identity subscale from the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). This measure evaluates the emotional significance people associate with their membership or nonmembership in a social category (e.g., "Being one of the people who are not Type M is an important part of my self-image"). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with the statements on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Scores on the four items were averaged to create a composite score for identification, with higher numbers indicating higher identification (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .84$ ).

*Trait evaluation.* Participants next completed a measure in which they evaluated the ingroup and outgroup on positive and negative traits. These evaluations served

as our measure of intergroup behavior (Locksley, Ortiz, & Hepburn, 1980). Participants were asked to evaluate their ingroup and the outgroup on three positive traits and three negative traits on a 7-point scale (1 = *never true*, 7 = *always true*). The positive traits were honest, cooperative, and friendly. The negative traits were greedy, stingy, and conceited. The six traits were randomly ordered. Following earlier studies (e.g., Dion, 1973; Mummendey et al., 2000; Rabbie & Wilkens, 1971), ingroup favoritism was present if participants' positive-trait ratings for the ingroup were higher than those for the outgroup. Likewise, outgroup derogation was present if participants' negative-trait ratings for the outgroup were higher than those for the ingroup. It is important to have both positive and negative traits because previous studies have shown that the lack of positive evaluation is not equivalent to increased negative evaluation and vice versa (e.g., Mummendey et al., 1992; Sassenberg et al., 2003).

## Results and Discussion

### *Identification Measure*

Members of the negational category (i.e., not Type M) reported levels of identification with their ingroup ( $M = 2.70$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ) that were similar to levels reported by members of the affirmational category ( $M = 2.66$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ),  $F(1, 70) = .02$ ,  $p = .89$ , suggesting that negational categorization can be as much a basis for social identification as affirmational categorization. Note that because we used the minimal group paradigm, participants did not indicate strong identification with either of these categories. Nevertheless, the focus here is on the lack of difference in identification between conditions rather than on the absolute value of identification.

### *Outgroup Derogation and Ingroup Favoritism*

Ratings of the ingroup and outgroup were independent of each other. The correlation between ratings of the ingroup and outgroup on positive traits was  $r = .05$ ,  $p = .65$ , and between ingroup and outgroup on negative traits was  $r = -.12$ ,  $p = .31$ . There were moderate correlations between positive and negative trait ratings for both ingroup members ( $r = -.35$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and outgroup members ( $r = -.33$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

We predicted a three-way interaction among categorization type, valence, and group rating, with individuals categorized in negational terms being more likely to exhibit outgroup derogation than those categorized in affirmational terms. Consistent with our predictions, we found a significant three-way interaction,  $F(1, 70) = 5.23$ ,  $p = .03$ . To further decompose this interaction, we examined the two-way interactions between categorization

type and group rating separately for outgroup derogation and ingroup favoritism.

*Outgroup derogation.* We submitted negative trait ratings to a 2 (categorization type: affirmational vs. negational)  $\times$  2 (group rating: ingroup vs. outgroup) mixed model ANOVA with group rating as a within-subjects factor. The results showed a main effect of group rating,  $F(1, 71) = 10.17$ ,  $p = .002$ . In general, participants rated the outgroup more negatively ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = .75$ ) than the ingroup ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = .75$ ). However, this main effect was qualified by a significant interaction between categorization type and group rating,  $F(1, 70) = 5.14$ ,  $p = .03$ . Replicating past findings (Brewer, 1979), participants in the affirmational condition showed no difference in their ratings of the ingroup ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = .76$ ) and outgroup ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = .76$ ),  $F(1, 70) = .47$ ,  $p = .50$ . In contrast, those in the negational identity condition rated the outgroup more negatively ( $M = 4.27$ ,  $SD = .69$ ) than the ingroup ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = .73$ ),  $F(1, 70) = 13.74$ ,  $p < .001$ .

*Ingroup favoritism.* We submitted the positive trait ratings to a 2 (categorization type: affirmational vs. negational)  $\times$  2 (group rating: ingroup vs. outgroup) mixed model ANOVA with group rating as a within-subjects factor. The analysis revealed a significant main effect for group rating: Participants rated the ingroup higher ( $M = 4.62$ ,  $SD = .63$ ) than the outgroup ( $M = 4.18$ ,  $SD = .62$ ) on these positive traits,  $F(1, 71) = 20.05$ ,  $p = .001$ . The main effect for categorization type was not significant,  $F(1, 70) = 1.16$ ,  $p = .29$ . More important, there was no interaction between categorization type and group rating,  $F(1, 70) = 1.56$ ,  $p = .22$ , indicating that members of affirmational and negational categories were equally likely to exhibit ingroup favoritism. Given that both affirmational and negational identities exhibited equivalent levels of identification, the lack of difference in ingroup favoritism is not surprising.

The results of Study 2 show that the elusive search for outgroup derogation can be found in negational categorization. In addition, participants categorized negatively displayed levels of ingroup favoritism that were similar to those categorized affirmationally. It is possible that psychological primacy is not the only factor that determines ingroup favoritism. Given the strong relationship between ingroup favoritism and self-concept (Otten, 2002; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998), participants in both affirmational and negational conditions may experience the need to favor their ingroup members. This provides further evidence that participants in the negational condition considered others who did not belong to the reference group as their ingroup members.

Our research agenda focuses on how a negational categorization that contrasts the self from others can overcome people's general aversion to evaluate others negatively (Mummendey et al., 1992) and license outgroup derogation. Our results clearly show that only participants experiencing negational categorization displayed significant levels of outgroup derogation; the affirmational categorization condition replicated the typical finding of ingroup favoritism in the absence of outgroup derogation.

### STUDY 3: REDUCING OUTGROUP DEROGATION FOLLOWING NEGATIONAL CATEGORIZATION

Thus far we have demonstrated that people can identify negationally and that negational categorization induces outgroup derogation. Even the random assignment of participants to an arbitrary negational category induced participants to view outgroup members more negatively than ingroup members. We believe that the difference between negational and affirmational categorization in outgroup derogation is due at least in part to a differential focus on contrasting versus assimilating. For affirmational identity the focus is on assimilating the self to the ingroup, which emphasizes the similarities between the self and ingroup members, whereas for negational identity the focus is on contrasting the self from the outgroup, which emphasizes dissimilarities between the self and outgroup members (Mussweiler, 2003).

Because focusing on the outgroup and contrasting from it, in self-categorization terms, are what produce outgroup derogation, we predict that by highlighting negationally categorized individuals' similarities and connections to others we might attenuate this contrasting focus on the outgroup and thereby reduce the outgroup derogation that results from negational categorization.

To explore whether increasing the focus on similarities between the self and others can reduce outgroup derogation following negational categorization, we adopted the *we* prime paradigm created by Brewer and Gardner (1996). These authors demonstrated that priming relational pronouns such as *we*, *us*, or *ours*, versus priming singular pronouns such as *I*, *me*, or *mine*, focused participants' attention on the similarities and away from the dissimilarities between the self and others. Thus, we expect that the *we* prime will increase the focus on similarities and attenuate the contrasting focus following negational categorization and therefore reduce outgroup derogation. For outgroup derogation, we predicted a three-way interaction among categorization type, *we* versus *I* prime, and ingroup or outgroup rating. By contrast, for ingroup favoritism, we predicted

a main effect of group rating, where group members will evaluate the ingroup more positively than the outgroup, replicating Study 2. Because we expected to find a three-way interaction for outgroup derogation that would not be evident for ingroup favoritism, we predicted a four-way interaction among categorization type, prime, group rating, and trait valence.

## Method

### *Participants and Design*

A total of 62 NU and University of Toronto students (25 male) voluntarily participated in this study. Participants were paid \$10 for their participation in this hour-long study. Among them, 27 were Caucasian and 31 were Asian American. The majority of the participants were 19–22 years old. The study consisted of a 2 (categorization type: affirmational vs. negational)  $\times$  2 (*we* vs. *I* prime)  $\times$  2 (group rating: ingroup vs. outgroup)  $\times$  2 (valence: positive traits vs. negative traits) mixed design with group rating and valence being within-subjects factors.

### *Procedure*

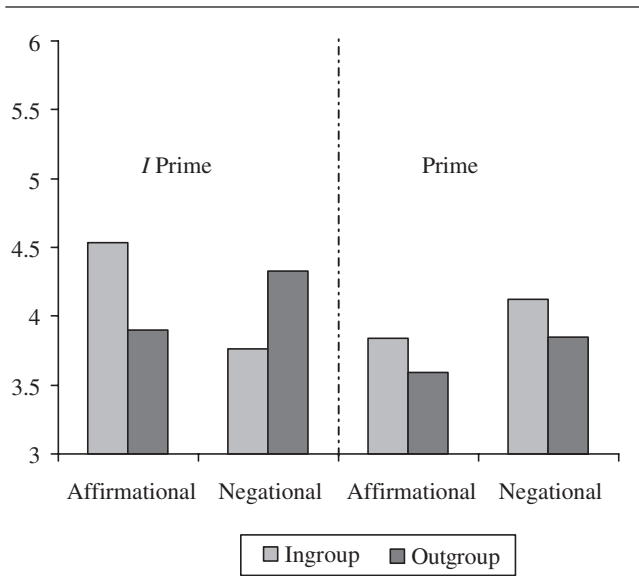
As in Study 2, we used the dot-estimation task to create the minimal group category (i.e., Type M). Participants went through a procedure similar to that of Study 2 up to the point of being categorized as either a member of the Type M group or the not Type M group.

Following the categorization task, participants then read through a paragraph and circled all the pronouns in the paragraph (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). In the *we* condition, all pronouns of the paragraph were in plural first person (i.e., *we*, *us*, *our*, *ourselves*). In the *I* condition, participants read an identical paragraph except that all of the pronouns were singular, first person (i.e., *I*, *me*, *my*). After the pronoun-circling task, participants rated the ingroup and outgroup along both positive and negative traits as used in Study 2.

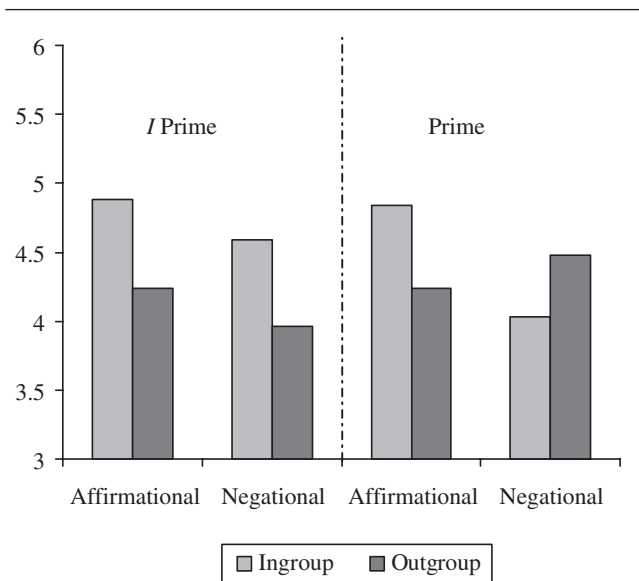
## Results and Discussion

We conducted 2 (categorization type: affirmational vs. negational)  $\times$  2 (*we* vs. *I* prime)  $\times$  2 (group rating: ingroup vs. outgroup)  $\times$  2 (valence: positive traits vs. negative traits) mixed model ANOVA, where group rating and valence were within-subjects factors. A significant four-way interaction emerged,  $F(1, 58) = 5.57, p = .02$ . To further probe this interaction, we examined the three-way interactions among categorization type, group rating, and *we* vs. *I* prime on outgroup derogation and ingroup favoritism separately.





**Figure 1a** Outgroup derogation after the *I* or *we* prime.



**Figure 1b** Ingroup favoritism after the *I* or *we* prime.

As predicted, a significant three-way interaction emerged for outgroup derogation,  $F(1, 58) = 4.16, p = .046$ . Consistent with Study 2, in the *I* condition, the two-way interaction was significant for the negative traits,  $F(1, 32) = 9.38, p = .004$  (see Figure 1a). Members of negational category rated the outgroup more negatively ( $M = 4.33, SD = .60$ ) than the ingroup ( $M = 3.76, SD = .83$ ),  $F(1, 32) = 4.24, p = .048$ .

However, members of the affirmational category rated their outgroup less negatively ( $M = 3.90, SD = .92$ ) than their ingroup ( $M = 4.53, SD = .91$ ),  $F(1, 32) = 5.16, p = .03$ . By contrast, in the *we* prime condition, the interaction between categorization type and group rating was no longer significant,  $F(1, 26) = .002, p = .97$ . For both the affirmational and negational conditions, there were no differences between ratings of the ingroup and the outgroup: for negational categorization ( $M$ s = 4.12 and 3.85,  $SD$ s = .89 and .55 for ingroup and outgroup ratings, respectively),  $F(1, 26) = .60, p = .45$ , and for affirmational categorization ( $M$ s = 3.84 and 3.59,  $SD$ s = 1.05 and 1.00 for ingroup and outgroup ratings, respectively),  $F(1, 26) = .81, p = .38$ .

For positive traits, consistent with the previous literature, we found a general tendency of ingroup favoritism. There was a significant main effect for group rating on the positive traits,  $F(1, 58) = 4.02, p = .05$ . Participants rated their ingroup more positively ( $M = 4.64, SD = .96$ ) than the outgroup ( $M = 4.20, SD = .82$ ), regardless of their categorization type: The interaction between group rating and categorization type was not significant,  $F(1, 58) = 2.31, p = .13$ . Furthermore, the three-way interaction among group rating, categorization type, and the *we* versus *I* prime on positive traits was also not significant,  $F(1, 58) = 2.15, p = .15$  (see Figure 1b).

Study 3 established that for participants categorized with a negational identity, reducing the contrast focus by highlighting similarity and connection to others decreased outgroup derogation. Unlike Study 2, Study 3 found that affirmational categorization in the *I* condition led participants to rate their outgroup less negatively than their ingroup. This might have been due to some unexpected effects of the *I* prime. For example, the *I* prime might have dampened the ingroup–outgroup difference by shifting self-definition away from the group and collective level to the personal and individual level. Conversely, we also observed that the *we* prime did not increase ingroup favoritism compared to the *I* prime, a difference that social categorization theory would have predicted. We suspect that this lack of difference might be due to the connection between ingroup favoritism and self-concept. It is possible that when a particular social identity (affirmational or negational) is made salient, the need to favor ingroup members is strong enough that it persists in the presence of subsequent cues that shift the attention between the individual (*I* prime) and the collective self (*we* prime). Even though these observations do not affect the interpretation of our main results—only negational categorization leads to outgroup derogation—it is important to replicate the pattern from Study 3 using a different manipulation that is not subject to the same peripheral effects, which is what we do in Study 4.

### STUDY 4: A REPLICATION

Study 3 found that outgroup derogation following negational categorization can be decreased by reducing the focus on contrasting the self from the outgroup. Study 4 sought to replicate this result using a different manipulation to highlight similarity and connection to others. A similarity among all participants in our experiments is being a college student. We predicted that by depersonalizing participants as an undifferentiated representative of college students, we would focus their attention on similarities to other participants and reduce outgroup derogation.

To explore this possibility, we adopted the depersonalization manipulation used by Brewer, Manzi, and Shaw (1993). We should note that this manipulation has often been used to induce the need for distinctiveness. However, optimal distinctiveness theory suggests that individuals strive to simultaneously meet two fundamental but countervailing needs (i.e., inclusion and distinctiveness). As a result, the satisfaction of one need moves the other need into the spotlight on the motivational stage (Brewer, 1991). Thus, when individuals have their distinctiveness need satisfied, as is the case with negational identification, depersonalization will not activate a need for distinctiveness. Rather, reminding negationally categorized individuals of their superordinate connectedness to other college students should highlight similarity and satisfy the pressing need for a sense of inclusion.

#### Method

##### *Participants and Design*

A total of 172 NU students (68 male) voluntarily participated in this study. Participants were paid \$10 for their participation in this hour-long study. Among them, 80 were Caucasians, 69 were Asians, 10 were African Americans, and 13 were other ethnicities. The majority of the participants were 19–22 years old. Similar to Study 3, this study consisted of a 2 (categorization type: affirmational vs. negational)  $\times$  2 (depersonalization: yes vs. no)  $\times$  2 (group rating: ingroup vs. outgroup)  $\times$  2 (valence: positive traits vs. negative traits) mixed design with a within-subjects factor on the last two factors.

##### *Procedure*

Participants went through a procedure similar to that of Study 2 up to the point of being categorized as either a member of the Type M group or the not Type M group. Following the categorization task, participants in the *depersonalization* condition were told that “in this study we are not interested in you as an individual but as a member of the college student population. . . .

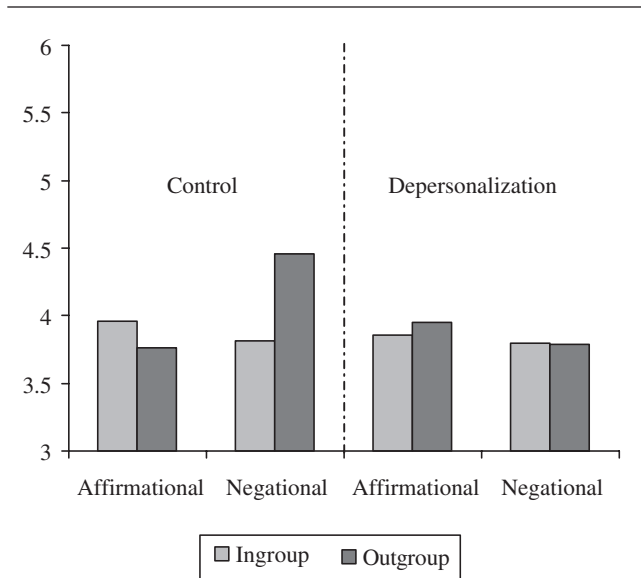
So that we are clear, it is not you the individual we are interested in, but students in general . . . you represent an example of the average student no matter what your major is, and thus will help us understand the general category and not individual differences.” Those in the control condition did not receive any further instructions before the trait rating task.

We expanded the list of traits by adding sincere and trustworthy to the positive traits and suspicious and critical to the negative traits.

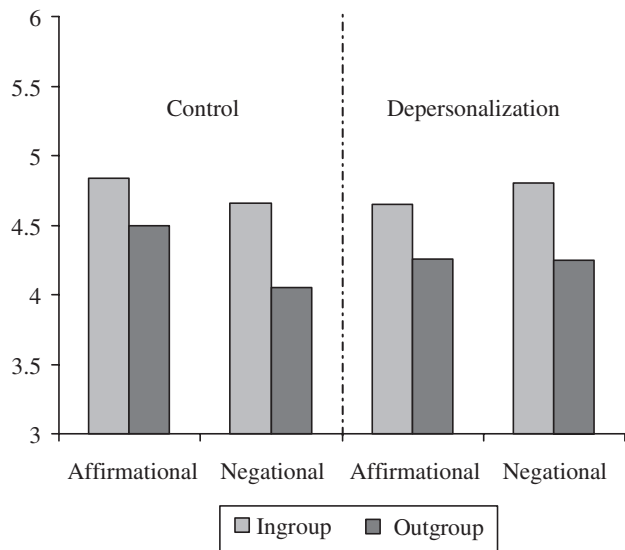
#### Results and Discussion

Similar to Study 3, we conducted 2 (categorization type: affirmational vs. negational)  $\times$  2 (depersonalization: yes vs. no)  $\times$  2 (group rating: ingroup vs. outgroup)  $\times$  2 (valence: positive traits vs. negative traits) mixed model ANOVA with group rating and valence as within-subjects factors. A significant four-way interaction emerged,  $F(1, 168) = 4.26, p = .04$ . To further decompose this interaction, we examined the three-way interactions among categorization type, group rating, and depersonalization on outgroup derogation and ingroup favoritism separately.

Analysis of the negative trait ratings revealed the predicted three-way interaction,  $F(1, 168) = 6.63, p = .01$  (see Figure 2a). To understand this three-way interaction on negative trait ratings, interaction contrasts between categorization type and group rating were performed in the depersonalization condition and control condition. Consistent with Studies 2 and 3, in the control condition (in which the college student superordinate identity was not highlighted), the two-way interaction between categorization type and group rating was significant,  $F(1, 59) = 7.81, p = .007$ . Members of the negational identity rated their outgroup members ( $M = 4.46, SD = .86$ ) more negatively than ingroup members ( $M = 3.81, SD = .70$ ),  $F(1, 59) = 8.28, p = .006$ . Members of the affirmational identity, however, rated the outgroup ( $M = 3.96, SD = .84$ ) no more negatively than the ingroup ( $M = 3.76, SD = .71$ ),  $F(1, 59) = 1.00, p = .32$ . In the depersonalization condition in which participants were reminded of their college student identity, however, the two-way interaction between categorization type and group ratings was no longer significant,  $F(1, 109) = .19, p = .66$ . This is mainly due to the reduction in outgroup derogation among members of the negational category, where ratings of the outgroup were now just as low ( $M = 3.79, SD = .83$ ) as ratings of the ingroup ( $M = 3.80, SD = .78$ ), and a simple effect test revealed no difference,  $F(1, 109) = .002, p = .96$ . Thus, as in Study 3, when similarity and connection were highlighted, negational categorization no longer led to outgroup derogation.



**Figure 2a** Outgroup derogation in the control and depersonalization conditions.



**Figure 2b** Ingroup favoritism in the control and depersonalization conditions.

For the positive traits, we replicated the ingroup favoritism effect. There was a main effect of group rating such that participants rated their ingroup more positively ( $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = .73$ ) than the outgroup ( $M = 4.27$ ,  $SD = .74$ ),  $F(1, 168) = 38.46$ ,  $p = .00$ . The two-way interaction between group rating and categorization type was again not significant,  $F(1, 168) = 1.90$ ,  $p = .17$ , indicating that participants in the negational

and affirmational conditions displayed similar ingroup favoritism. Furthermore, the three-way interaction among group rating, categorization type, and depersonalization on positive traits was also not significant,  $F(1, 168) = .12$ ,  $p = .73$  (see Figure 2b).

The results from Studies 3 and 4 not only provide insight into why negational categorization leads to outgroup derogation but also introduce ways to mitigate outgroup derogation following negational categorization. Because focusing participants on their similarities to others following negational categorization mitigated outgroup derogation, we believe that a contrasting focus on the outgroup plays an important role in inducing outgroup derogation. Both interventions were relatively subtle, consisting of tasks that were independent of the experimental manipulations and the evaluation measures. It is possible that each of these two interventions alone might activate concepts that are not directly related to our theory. But together they provide evidence in support of the role of a contrast focus in driving outgroup derogation among individuals categorized negationally.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Four experiments provide converging evidence that negational categories can produce meaningful social identities. Study 1 supported the prediction that negational identities become most salient when the need for distinctiveness is high, presumably because negational identification satisfies the need for distinctiveness to a greater extent than it satisfies the need for inclusion. Studies 2, 3, and 4 documented the unique intergroup implications of negational identity by showing that members of minimally constructed negational categories exhibited the elusive outgroup derogation effect: Participants who were categorized in negational terms were more likely to derogate the outgroup compared to participants who were categorized in affirmational terms. This tendency by members of negational categories to derogate the outgroup, however, was reduced when their similarities with and connections to others were highlighted through either a pronoun-circling task or a depersonalization instruction. In sum, this work demonstrates the value of distinguishing negational from affirmational categories and the implications these categories have for intergroup behavior.

### Personal Versus Social Identity

The question of whether negational identity can be a form of social identity or is simply personal identity deserves further discussion. Whereas personal identity defines the individual as a unique person in terms of

their differences from other individuals (Turner, 1999), social identity refers to the aspects of the self that are based on social group membership. One of the key differences between personal identity and social identity is that the former motivates interpersonal behaviors whereas the latter motivates intergroup behaviors (Tajfel, 1974). When individuals identify negationally, they tend to focus on the difference between nonmembers and members on relevant dimensions. Their behaviors and attitudes toward outgroup members are better predicted by the nonmembership than by individual differences. Indeed, across three studies, we have consistently shown that negational identity induces ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation. From this perspective, negational identity should be thought of as more of a social rather than a personal identity.

Furthermore, it may not be the most productive approach to dichotomize identities into personal versus social. Researchers have increasingly realized the need to replace the conceptualization of personal and social identities as forming a bipolar continuum by the notion that they represent different levels (of inclusiveness) of self-categorizations (see Turner, 1999). Thus, individuals can define themselves at many different levels. What better distinguishes these levels of identity is not the absolute dichotomization of personal versus social but the different extent of inclusiveness and self and other stereotyping (Turner, 1999). Negational identity, by definition, may be less inclusive than affirmational identity but would still be considered more “social” than personal identity.

#### When Do Affirmational and Negational Identifications Occur?

The studies presented here have shed light on when negational identification is likely to occur. Study 1 revealed a motivational route to negational identification, where individuals with a high need for distinctiveness were more likely to describe themselves through negational identities. This research suggests that although negational identities may provide a source of distinctiveness, they are less likely to lead to feelings of inclusiveness. There are other motivations and contexts that may play a part in the activation of negational identification. One question that deserves further inquiry is the role of status and power in the negational identification process. For example, both East and West Germans see West Germans as more representative of the “German” identity (Waldzus, Mummendey, Wenzel, & Boettcher, 2004); as a result, East Germans may characterize their collective identity as negational when making comparisons to West Germans (i.e., “We are not West Germans”). Culture may also affect the occurrence of negational identities. For example, in cultures with an

interdependent view of the self (e.g., Japan), it is important to identify one’s discrepancies from the standards of excellence or ideal role models (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997). This process of self-criticism may induce a negational frame on what one has not achieved. Our samples contained a somewhat large representation of Asian participants, and tests comparing them with other participants revealed no meaningful differences. That said, these studies were not designed to systematically explore the role of culture in negational identification. Future research would benefit from a more systematic program of research on the role of culture in negational and affirmational identification.

Although in four studies we have shown that negational and affirmational identities are clearly products of distinct identification processes—they have distinct precedents and produce different consequences—we are by no means suggesting that they are orthogonal. The occurrence of negational identification may interact with affirmational identification in a reciprocal fashion. Individuals who primarily identified as not being members of a group may, over time and through repeated interactions, form a group that defines itself by what it is and not just what it is not. Similarly, strong affirmational identities may provoke negational identification. This effect might be most likely to occur in situations of what Freud called the “narcissism of small differences,” or what recent researchers have called horizontal hostility (White, Schmitt, & Langer, 2006), where similar groups exaggerate their differences to establish a clear sense of identity. Clearly, social identification (whether affirmational or negational) is a fluid process, with negational identifications transforming into affirmational ones and affirmational identities provoking negational ones.

#### Social Political Implications

This article attempts to demonstrate the psychological processes that differentiate negational identity from affirmational identity. Future research should explore the social and political implications of negational and affirmational identities. In our studies we have shown that simply categorizing people into arbitrary negational or affirmational groups led to different intergroup consequences. Given that most identities can be either affirmational or negational (e.g., not Republicans or Democrats), political leaders can frame identity type to mobilize social support for their agendas. It is also possible that political leaders can frame the identities of minorities (e.g., Asians or African Americans vs. non-Americans) to increase or lessen the ties among other minority members. Indeed, in their analyses of speeches by political parties, Reicher and Hopkins (1996) showed how political leaders can act as entrepreneurs of particular types of identity to legitimize specific forms



of social relationship. During the British miners' strike of 1984–1985, for example, British politicians (Margaret Thatcher and Neil Kinnock) represented their party as a group defined in opposition to an “organized revolutionary minority” of “thugs and bullies” to their respective party conferences (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996). Finally, understanding when and how political leaders leverage negational identifications may shed light on the phenomenon of genocide and other extreme forms of outgroup oppression.

## Conclusion

Across four studies we have shown the causes and consequences of negational identification. Negational categorization produces meaningful social identities that have important implications for intergroup behavior. Because the outgroup is the focus of attention, negational identification licenses the typically elusive phenomenon of outgroup derogation. The present research highlights the pressing need to study affirmational and negational identity independently. By understanding when and why an individual will identify in negational versus affirmational terms, a more complete understanding of social identification and intergroup behavior can start to emerge.

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