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Identity Fusion, Extreme Pro-Group Behavior, and the Path to Defusion

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Abstract

Identity fusion refers to a visceral sense of oneness with an ingroup. For fused individuals, group membership is not a means to an end (e.g., a positive social identity). Rather, membership is an all-absorbing goal in itself; little other than the group matters. Group membership is also seen as enduring, sustained by chronically activated psychological structures as well as features of the context. Fellow group members are likewise seen as permanent members of the group, as they are members of the ingroup "family". And just as family members are compelled to make extreme sacrifices for their family, so too are highly fused individuals – including even the ultimate sacrifice. These efforts to protect the ingroup can have negative consequences when, for example, people become strongly fused to groups that are devoted to extreme, anti-social behaviors. In such instances, it may be prudent to encourage "defusion" from the group, but the emotional investment associated with fusion may thwart such efforts. We discuss the implications of these and related considerations.

> During WWII, four members of a B-17 bomber crew formed a pact that they would never abandon one another no matter how dire the situation. Not long afterwards, their plane was shelled and went into a terminal dive. The pilot ordered everyone to parachute to safety. As the crewmen donned their parachutes, they discovered that one member of the pact (the ball-turret gunner) was trapped, and there was no time to release him. Realizing this, the other three pact members aborted their plans to parachute to safety, remaining on the plane to await their fiery deaths. (From S. Junger's *War*)

The deaths of the three crewmen seem inspiring, tragic, and unsettling. After all, their allegiance to the pact helped no one, not even the ball turret gunner (who was doomed no matter what the other pact members did). But if their joint decision defied rationality, it may nevertheless illustrate a powerful and profoundly important phenomenon, one we have dubbed "identity fusion" (Swann & Buhrmester, 2015; Swann, Jetten, Gómez, Whitehouse, & Bastian, 2012). The defining quality of identity fusion is a visceral sense of oneness with a group. This sense of oneness is marked by a perception that the self and group members are kindred spirits who share deep essential qualities and work to strengthen one another.

For strongly fused individuals, group membership tends to transcend competing considerations. Group membership is not a means to an end (e.g., a positive social identity) but an end in itself. Furthermore, there is a conviction that membership in the group is lasting, not only for the self but for all members of the ingroup family. As such, it is challenging to imagine the self or other members being split off from the group. Similarly, it is difficult to imagine the self or other group members failing to make extreme sacrifices for their family, no matter what that sacrifice may be.

Recent research has established that identity fusion is associated with endorsement of extreme pro-group behaviors in more than ten countries across six continents (Swann et al., 2014a). Moreover, strongly fused persons do not merely *say* that they will engage in extreme behavior; they actually enact extreme "real-world" behaviors. In a study of 179 Libyan revolutionaries working to oust the Gaddafi regime during the 2011 revolution, we found ceiling levels of fusion with the battalion among members actively engaged in the conflict (Whitehouse, McQuinn, Buhrmester, & Swann, 2014). Furthermore, some of the combatants who served on the front lines were more strongly fused to their battalion than to their own families. Similarly, in a study of transsexuals undergoing treatment for gender identity issues at a hospital in Barcelona, we first measured how fused they were with their cross-gender group. Two years later, we accessed their medical records. Those who were initially fused with their cross-gender group were more than twice as likely to have undergone irreversible surgical change of their primary sexual characteristics than those who were non-fused, and this applied regardless of natal sex (Swann et al., 2015).

In light of this evidence that identity fusion motivates extreme actions, it is imperative to learn more about the mechanisms that underlie it. This is our goal here. Exploring processes deliberately excluded from social identity formulations (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) such as the personal self, relational ties, and deontological reasoning, we explicate the nature of identity fusion and supporting evidence. Next, using the lens of dual process approaches, we examine the emotional and cognitive processes that give rise to extreme behavior. Whereas forms of pro-ingroup behavior such as intergroup bias (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002) are presumed to be based on cost–benefit, utilitarian considerations, the extreme behaviors associated with fusion are based on deontological principles. Finally, in response to evidence that fusion can be associated with potentially harmful or dangerous forms of aggression, we discuss the process of "defusion" and how it might be achieved.

Identity Fusion Theory

The intellectual ancestors of identity fusion are several. Perhaps the closest conceptual cousins are the notion of mechanical solidarity and collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1893/1964), but there are also clear parallels in more recent concepts such as communal sharing (Fiske, 1991; Sahlins, 1974), spontaneous communitas (Turner, 1969), self-expansion (Aron & Aron, 1996; Aron, Aron, & Norman, 2001), shared identity (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997), and the "imagistic" mode of religiosity (Whitehouse, 1995). Of related constructs, however, "group identification" has been researched most extensively. In fact, researchers working within the social identity perspective (i.e., including theories of social identity and self-categorization; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987) have conducted dozens of studies designed to elaborate the relationship between identification and numerous social psychological phenomena (for reviews, see Ellemers, 2012; Hornsey, 2008; Hornsey & Jetten, 2004).

Identification and fusion are similar in two key ways. First, as does group identification, identity fusion refers to a close relationship between two aspects of identity: "personal identity" (which refers to those aspects of self that make people unique, such as "intelligent" or "tall") and "social identity" (which refers to those aspects of self that align people with groups, such as "democrat" or "American"). Second, people can become identified or fused with a limitless variety of groups and even with abstractions.

Nevertheless, the social identity perspective (as originally articulated[1]) and fusion theory make four distinct assumptions regarding what happens when personal and social identities

become aligned. First, whereas the social identity perspective contends that the personal self contributes minimally to pro-group behavior when the social self is salient, fusion theory's *agentic personal self* principle argues that the personal self can motivate pro-group behavior even when the social self is salient. Second, just as the social identity perspective assumes that personal and social identities compete for psychological salience, fusion theory's *identity synergy* principle assumes that both identities can be highly salient at the same time. Third, while the social identity perspective suggests that identification routinely changes in response to shifts in the social context, fusion theory's *irrevocability* principle assumes that strongly fused persons tend to maintain their relative standing toward the group over time. Fourth, whereas the social identity perspective assumes that alignment to the group is based entirely on collective ties (reflecting the degree to which members embody the prototypic qualities of the group), fusion theory's *relational ties* principle also emphasizes the contribution of relationships with other members of the ingroup to alignment with the group (for a discussion of various forms of allegiance to groups, see Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Caporael, 2001).

In what follows, we will briefly review support for each of these principles of identity fusion. Note that we included measures of identification in all of these studies. In several studies, identification was associated with the outcome, but the association was always weaker than fusion. In other studies, such as those in which we activated or measured a conceptual variable unique to fusion theory (e.g., salience of personal self, increasing physiological arousal, relational ties), fusion interacted with the conceptual variable, but identification did not.

At first blush, it might seem that fusion is simply identification "on steroids". Nevertheless, this would be an impoverished and misleading way of thinking about the distinction because the two constructs. Most important, fusion is qualitatively as well as quantitatively different from identification. That is, whereas fusion is motivated by personal agency, relational ties, and collective ties and inspires deontological thinking, identification is motivated by collective ties only and leads to utilitarian thinking. By analogy, although galloping could be considered "fast walking", to do so would be to overlook the fact that distinct mechanisms are involved in galloping and walking. For example, when horses begin galloping, they shift from using the slow- to fast-twitch muscle fibers, their gait changes, they become recurrently airborne, and so on.

Agentic personal self principle

Fusion theory assumes that even when the group identities of strongly fused persons are highly salient, the personal self can motivate pro-group behavior by channeling personal agency into pro-group action (see also Haggard & Tsakiris, 2009). The results of several studies support this proposition. In one series of studies, researchers experimentally increased physiological arousal through physical exercise (through sprinting, riding an exercycle, and playing dodgeball). As expected, increased arousal bolstered endorsement of sacrificing one's life for the group among strongly fused individuals but not among weakly fused persons (Swann, Gómez, Huici, Morales, & Hixon, 2010). In other studies, researchers assessed participants' self-reported feelings of group-directed agency (e.g., "I am responsible for my group's actions"). They discovered that perceptions of personal agency mediated the links between fusion and pro-group behavior (Gómez et al., 2011). Such findings offer converging evidence for the causal role of the personal self in the pro-group actions of strongly fused persons.

Identity synergy principle

The personal identities of strongly fused individuals not only may independently bolster group-related sacrifices but also may combine synergistically with social identities to motivate extreme

pro-group behavior. Support for this idea comes from an experiment in which the researchers independently activated participants' personal or social self-views and then assessed endorsement of pro-group behavior. As predicted, activating either the personal selves (by asking them how they would react to a threat to their personal well-being) or the social selves (by asking them how they would react to a threat to their group) of strongly fused persons increased their subsequent endorsement of sacrifices for the group (Gómez et al., 2011; Swann, Gómez, Seyle, Morales, & Huici, 2009).

The irrevocability principle

Strong fusion with a group brings with it a considerable amount of emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal inertia. The result is that strongly fused persons should be steadfast in their allegiance to the group. In fact, when ostracized for their group membership, strongly fused persons *reaffirmed* their commitment to the ingroup by increasing their endorsement of fighting and dying for the ingroup. This pattern emerged even when participants were ostracized by members of *their own ingroup* (Gómez, Morales, Hart, Vázquez, & Swann, 2011).

Research therefore suggests that efforts to significantly diminish fusion will almost certainly meet resistance. Nevertheless, it would be overstated to say that fusion is completely irrevocable, just as it would be mistaken to argue that any social contract (e.g., marriage, treaties between countries, and even service contracts with cable providers) is *completely* irrevocable. For one thing, the irrevocability principle does not imply that strongly fused people are unaware of, or insensitive to, what is going on in the world around them. To the contrary, the powerful allegiance that strongly fused persons feel toward their group should make them *more* attentive to ingroup-relevant events than weakly fused individuals. They may respond accordingly. In a recent study, for example, the average fusion scores of strongly fused Spaniards changed more following important national events (Spain's victory in the World Cup) than weakly fused persons (Vázquez, Gómez, & Swann, 2015).

This evidence that the average fusion levels of strongly fused people may wax and wane in response to significant ingroup-relevant events is important, as it suggests that it may be possible to systematically raise or lower the fusion scores for a given subset of individuals (i.e., foster either fusion or defusion). At the same time, it is just as important to note that although the *average* fusion scores of strongly fused persons shifted over time, their *rank orderings* remained remarkably stable. When Swann et al. (2012) followed four independent samples of participants for up to 18 months ($N > 1000$ participants), the scores of strongly fused persons (i.e., those in the upper tertile) remained more stable up to 18 months later than those of moderately and weakly fused participants (i.e., those in the middle and lower tertiles, respectively). Considering in conjunction with the evidence that mean levels of fusion shift in response to significant events (Vázquez et al., 2015), these data suggest that fusion may manifest in the tendency for strongly fused persons to maintain their standing relative to other group members over time. This makes sense, as what often matters for group functioning is that the strongly fused group members remain more strongly fused than less fused members. As long as the rank orderings of the fusion scores of its members persist, the integrity of the hierarchy within the "family" will not suffer. A tendency for the entire group to shift fusion levels can be readily tolerated as long as the shift is not dramatic (for a discussion of the utility of defining stability in terms of average group scores or rank ordering within the group, see Mathieu & Gosling, 2012). Furthermore, although strongly fused persons shift their fusion scores slightly in response to significant group-relevant events, they remained steadfast in their stated willingness to fight and die for their country (Vázquez et al., 2015).

The relational ties principle

The *relational ties principle* assumes that strongly fused persons feel attached to individual members of the group as well as to the abstract "collective". As such, strongly fused persons should be especially inclined to endorse sacrificing their lives not only for the group as an abstract collective but also to save the lives of individual members of the group (e.g., when imperiled by a runaway trolley). The results of over a dozen studies have shown that strongly fused individuals endorse sacrificing their lives to save individual members of the group (Gómez et al., 2011; Swann, Gómez, Dovidio, Hart, & Jetten, 2010; 2014).

Additional support for the relational ties principle comes from several forms of evidence. Among strongly fused persons, self-reported feelings of familial connection to other group members statistically mediated links between fusion and (a) endorsement of fighting and dying for the group (Swann et al., 2014a) and (b) actual pro-group behavior such as writing letters to support victims of the Boston Marathon bombings (Buhrmester, Fraser, Lanman, Whitehouse, & Swann, 2014). In addition, when strongly fused participants learned that ingroup members might be killed in a hypothetical trolley dilemma, they became emotionally aroused in ways that were reminiscent of how people react when a family member is imperiled. Moreover, these emotional reactions predicted subsequent endorsement of self-sacrifice for the group (Swann et al., 2014b). Together, these data offer converging evidence that strongly fused people come to view members of the ingroup as family and these perceptions motivate them to make sacrifices for the group.

Together, the four principles of identity fusion highlight the properties of the construct that distinguish it from other forms of alignment with groups. For strongly fused persons, group membership invokes the agentic personal self and the powerful emotions associated with familial ties. The result is a visceral sense of oneness with the group, a constellation of feelings that are supported by abstract thoughts but are not *dependent on* logic or other higher level thought processes. Instead, in the language of dual process approaches (e.g., Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Gawronski & Creighton, 2013; Greene, Morelli, Lowenberg, Nystrom, & Cohen, 2008; Haidt, 2001), identity fusion is associated with relatively automatic, intuitive, and reflexive processes as compared to controlled, considered processes. As we show in the next section, these processes help explain why strongly fused individuals are uniquely willing to enact moral behaviors in the service of group membership.

Identity Fusion and Morality

Many past analyses of group processes have emphasized the role of cognitive processing and cost–benefit, utilitarian principles in morality-related decision-making. For example, the social identity perspective has assumed that the tendency for people to favor their ingroup grows out of ingroup–outgroup comparisons and either a desire for a positive and distinctive social identity or a desire to reduce uncertainty (for a review, see Hewstone et al., 2002). More recently, some have challenged this emphasis on cognitive, utilitarian reasoning in moral decision-making, arguing instead for the importance of intuitive, emotional processes (Graham et al., 2013; Haidt & Kesebir, 2010; Iyer, Jetten, & Haslam, 2012). In this same vein, others have argued that consequential moral decisions are based on other "intuitive" mental structures such as "sacred values" (Sheikh, Ginges, & Atran, 2013) or "moral mandates" (Skitka, 2010). These intuitive structures are largely immune to appeals to personal gain and exert effects that are independent of identity fusion (Atran, Sheikh, & Gómez, 2014).

Our approach assumes the existence of both "deliberative" and "intuitive" pathways to moral behavior, but some individuals – namely, strongly fused persons – are particularly inclined to base their moral decision-making on intuitive, deontological reasoning (see also Greene,

Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001; Greene, Nystrom, Engell, Darley, & Cohen, 2004). The predominance of deontological reasoning is particularly important when one is focused on extreme behaviors, such as risking one's life to save someone. For instance, consider analyses of retrospective reports of extreme behaviors ranging from the efforts of combat troops to save their compatriots (Cashman, 2014; Junger, 2010; "Private Epstein, Shlomo", 2010) to the self-sacrificial behaviors of Carnegie hero medal recipients (Rand & Epstein, 2014). Commentaries of such individuals revealed that systematic assessment of the costs and benefits of their actions played little role in motivating their actions. Instead, such individuals report that in the moments leading up to their heroic acts, they knew intuitively what to do and acted immediately; when reflection did occur, it was after rather than before the action.

Similarly, research on intragroup versions of the trolley dilemma (Swann et al., 2014b) also cast doubt on the role of conscious reasoning in endorsement of self-sacrifice. In an initial study, when participants learned of a dilemma in which five ingroup members would die unless a single individual sacrificed themselves, most people acknowledged that the "correct" or "moral" course of action was for the single individual to sacrifice oneself. Nevertheless, in follow-up studies in which participants indicated what they themselves would do, only strongly fused persons tended to endorse self-sacrifice. In one follow-up, the presence of a concern with saving group members rather than the absence of a concern with self-preservation motivated strongly fused participants to endorse sacrificing themselves for the group. Another follow-up experiment was designed to lay bare the thoughts and feelings of people by having them think aloud as they responded to the dilemma. Analyses of tape recordings of their thoughts suggested that strongly fused participants were uniquely inclined to become quite emotional. Specifically, they displayed signs of tension, distress, and anxiety as they moved down the path to endorsement of self-sacrifice. In contrast, weakly fused persons appeared to be relatively unemotional and were instead compelled by utilitarian considerations ("better that I should die rather than five others") in the (relatively rare) instances in which they endorsed self-sacrifice.

The results of a follow-up experiment suggested that the timing of our participants' decisions was important (see also Suter & Hertwig, 2011). For strongly fused persons, self-sacrifice grew out of immediate, emotional responses. Hence, hurrying the responses of strongly fused persons *increased* self-sacrifice. In contrast, among weakly fused persons, self-sacrifice grew out of conscious reflection. As a result, hurrying the responses of weakly fused persons *decreased* self-sacrifice (Swann et al., 2014b).

A final set of studies revealed that identity fusion influenced the degree to which participants were sensitive to identity-based versus utilitarian manipulations. The moral decisions of strongly fused persons were acutely sensitive to activating their personal identity (by having them write down what they are personally like, things they personally like, and words that best describe personal features) but immune to a utilitarian manipulation (whether self-sacrifice would save five as compared to one ingroup member). That is, activating the personal identities of strongly fused persons increased their endorsement of self-sacrifice, but the utilitarian manipulation had no impact. In contrast, weakly fused persons were immune to personal identity activation but endorsed self-sacrifice more when it would save five as compared to one person.

What is the source of the reflexive reactions that motivate extreme pro-group behavior among strongly fused persons? Our answer begins with the tendency for strongly fused individuals to think of the group as family. There is a widely shared consensus that family ties transcend all other human connections. In fact, the US legal system accords privileged status to family loyalty by stipulating that spouses cannot be compelled to testify against each other. As such, when a moral dilemma involves the ingroup "family", fused persons become highly emotional – much as if their own personal fate were on the line. These emotional reactions

motivate them to display unquestioned allegiance to those considered family (i.e., "family comes first"; "family is special").

The allegiance of strongly fused persons to ingroup members makes perfect sense when the group involves genetically related kin. After all, evolutionary theory states that people should sacrifice themselves for genetic relatives – those for whom they develop familial ties (Hamilton, 1964). We have referred to fusion that develops in such small, homogenous groups as "local fusion". Less obvious is why, in relatively large groups, strongly fused individuals make the ultimate sacrifice for group members with whom they have little or no contact. How can such "extended fusion" exert powerful effects in the absence of relational ties?

One possibility is that in extended groups, individuals who are strongly fused *project* the relational ties they feel toward group members they feel they know onto those with whom they are unacquainted, thereby transforming them into fictive kin (Vázquez, Gómez, Ordoñana, & Paredes, in press). To test this reasoning, we conducted a series of studies. In the initial investigation, we asked participants if they would be willing to die to save members of their family versus members of relatively large groups (e.g., nation or religious group). No matter what country they come from, most people endorsed dying for their family (Swann et al., 2014a).

But how might people come to project their familial ties onto large, heterogeneous groups? It appears that when strongly fused people believe that group members share core characteristics, they are more likely to project the familial ties commonly found in smaller groups onto the extended group. Consistent with this reasoning, encouraging strongly fused persons to focus on shared core characteristics of their people from their country increased their endorsement of making extreme sacrifices for their country (Swann et al., 2014a). This finding emerged whether the core characteristics were biological (genes) or psychological (core values) and whether participants were from China, India, the US, or Spain. Furthermore, priming shared core values increased the feeling of familial ties among strongly fused group members, which, in turn, mediated the influence of fusion on endorsement of extreme sacrifices for the country. Apparently, for strongly fused persons, recognizing that other group members share core characteristics makes larger extended groups seem "family like" and worth dying for.

Although researchers are beginning to understand the relationship of fusion to moral behavior, much remains to be learned. One important issue is how strongly fused persons respond to pressure from other group members (i.e., "groupthink"; Janis, 1972) and authority figures (Milgram, 1963). For example, analyses of the Enron debacle have attributed it to the enormous pressure that management placed on employees to conform to group norms of turning a blind eye to malpractice and irregularities (e.g., Sherman, 2002; Tourish & Vatcha, 2005). Conceivably, the familial ties that strongly fused people have to the group may cause them to resist such pressure and blow the whistle in an effort to do what they believe is in the best interest for the group at great personal risk (Buhrmester, 2013). On the other hand, under certain circumstances, strongly fused persons may be tempted to engage in morally dubious pro-group action such as covering up evidence of wrongdoing (Besta, Gómez, & Vázquez, 2014). One key moderator may be whether the moral action (reporting wrongdoing) risks destroying the "family" that strongly fused persons feel so compelled to protect. If so, this phenomenon may offer an important example of how contextual factors (i.e., the anticipated consequences of various actions for the fate of the ingroup) interact with characteristics of identity (e.g., strength of fusion) to determine social good versus evil.

Defusion in the Service of Reducing Problematic Pro-Ingroup Behavior

At times, group members act in ways that are unjust, illegal, or in some way harmful to themselves or others. Violent gangs and terrorist groups immediately come to mind, but there are

many additional examples. Consider, for instance, traders who artificially distort stock prices or animal poachers who murder workers who are protecting endangered creatures. When governments recognize that fusion with a group is emboldening actions that threaten the lives of their citizens, it is incumbent upon them to reduce pro-ingroup behavior by encouraging defusion from the ingroup (Vidino, 2010).

Previous efforts to reduce extreme pro-ingroup behavior through defusion have met with limited success. For example, in the months following the destruction of the New York trade towers, a plethora of counter-radicalization programs sprang up around the world. Even among programs considered to be fairly successful, such as Saudi Arabia's program, such successes were mostly limited to soft Jihadists and did not extend to militants (Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, & Boucek, 2011). We suspect that a key reason for these failures is that identity fusion tends to be irrevocable, which means that efforts to defuse strongly fused individuals from their ingroup will meet with strong resistance.

We believe that the key to overcoming such resistance is somehow degrading perceptions of familial ties to the ingroup. This may be achieved when ingroup members encounter evidence that trusted ingroup members are enacting behaviors that are decidedly unfamily like. Mosab Hassan Yousef, son of Hamas founder's son, had just such an experience. He was arrested by the Israeli military and detained with other Hamas members. While there, he bore witness to Hamas leaders torturing, and even killing, his fellow members of Hamas. Although the perpetrators justified their actions by accusing their victims of cooperating with the Israelis, Yousef suspected that their motivation was self-serving. His feelings of betrayal initiated a process of defusion. If the leaders of the "family" could engage in such immoral behavior, he reasoned, then this was a family he no longer wished to associate with (Kaminski, 2010; Yousef, 2010).

If one cannot degrade the existing familial ties of strongly fused individuals, another option may be to *replace* those ties with new relationship partners. The logic here is that identities can survive only insofar as they receive nourishment from the social environment. If people "switch worlds" by immersing themselves in a new support structure, their identities may shift accordingly (Swann, 1983). The aforementioned case of Yousef illustrates this idea. In the run-up to his defusion from Hamas, he began spending increasing amounts of time with Christians in a Bible group. This new group gradually came to replace the increasingly frayed familial ties he had with Hamas.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that people make astonishing sacrifices for their group, sometimes including even their own lives. Yet behavioral scientists have just begun to understand the proximal mechanisms that give rise to such extreme pro-ingroup behaviors. We suggest that identity fusion – a visceral sense of union with an ingroup – may help explain such behavior. We suggest further that it is the tendency for strongly fused persons to perceive the ingroup as "family" that is an essential ingredient in the decision to enact sacrifices for the ingroup. In fact, militiamen who are strongly fused with their fighting group report feeling more fused with their fellow fighters than they are to their actual families (Whitehouse et al., 2014).

Perhaps not surprisingly, early in this work, we recognized that our focus on extreme pro-group behavior would require the development of a novel explanatory framework. That is, the familiar cognitive calculus wherein people carefully weigh the benefits of their behavioral options was clearly not up to the task of explaining the decisions of strongly fused individuals. Instead, the processes that led to self-sacrifice were rapid, automatic, and intuitive. Further, their decisions seemed to be driven by a simple rule – "anything for the family", rather than utilitarian

considerations such as the number of people who might be saved should they sacrifice themselves (Swann et al., 2014b). This also suggests that traditional strategies of persuasion – based on tit-for-tat bargaining – will be ineffective in dissuading strongly fused individuals from enacting pro-ingroup behaviors that pose a threat to the larger society (Ginges, Atran, Medin, & Shikaki, 2007). Rather, the key to reducing such pro-ingroup behavior may be to untie the relational bonds that are foundational to the state of fusion.

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Short Biographies

Leah Fredman is working on her PhD in Social and Personality Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin and is the recipient of a National Science Foundation graduate fellowship. Her current interests include the biological underpinnings of fusion, as well as differences between fusion and identification. Her previous published work focused on the underpinnings of prejudice against pregnant women. She holds undergraduate degrees from Hadassah College in photography and City University of New York (CUNY's) Lehman College in psychology.

Dr. Michael D. Buhrmester is a post-doctoral researcher at the Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology at the University of Oxford. He earned his BA in Plan II Honors and Psychology (2007) and his PhD in Social and Personality Psychology (2013) from the University of Texas at Austin. His current work focuses on the antecedents, nature, and consequences of group bonding, prosociality, and conflict. He has published broadly on the nature of self-motives, the interplay of the personal and social self, and the suitability of online methods of data collection in the social sciences.

Ángel Gómez is an Associate Professor of Social Psychology and the director of the Research group "Social psychology of inter and intragroup relations, Strategies for improvement" at Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, UNED, Madrid, Spain, where he received his PhD in 1998. Together with Prof. William B. Swann Jr., he is one of the initiators of identity fusion research. He is also known for his work with international experts on strategies for improving intergroup relations and reducing intergroup conflicts and violence, applying strategies as direct and extended intergroup contact, recategorization, and verification of in-group identities.

William Fraser's research focuses on group processes and extreme group behavior. In a paper to appear in Self and Identity, he showed that familial ties mediated the impact of fusion with America on efforts to aid the victims of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings. He is currently a graduate student in social-personality psychology at the University of Texas at Austin and holds a BA in Psychology and Philosophy from the George Washington University.

Sanaz Talaifar is a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin and a research assistant in the Identity Fusion Lab of Professor Bill Swann. She is interested in studying fusion in the context of non-traditional groups. Sanaz was previously a research assistant at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington DC, where she conducted research on Pakistani

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Skylar M. Brannon is a doctoral student at the University of Texas at Austin. Her current research interests include social cognition, cognitive consistency, identity fusion, and implicit measures. Specifically, she is interested in studying the factors that contribute to belief change, contextual encoding, and defusion. She holds a BA in psychology from Baylor University where she studied religiosity, prejudice, and environmental issues.

William B. Swann, Jr. is a professor of Social, Personality and Clinical Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin. He received his PhD from the University of Minnesota and an undergraduate degree from Gettysburg College and has been a fellow at Princeton University and the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. He has received research grants and research scientist development awards from the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Science Foundation, and National Institute of Drug and Alcohol Abuse. He is primarily known for his work on identity, especially his development of two theories, self-verification, and identity negotiation. He has also done research on relationships, social cognition, group processes, accuracy in person perception, interpersonal expectancy effects, personality, and attitudes. His recent work has focused on identity fusion.

Note

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[1] In recent years, many theorists working within the social identity perspective have disputed various aspects of the original theory, including the principle of functional antagonism (e.g., Abrams, 1994; Baray, Postmes, & Jetten, 2009; Pickett, Silver, & Brewer, 2002; Postmes & Jetten, 2006; Reid & Deaux, 1996; Stephenson, 1981; see also J. C. Turner, Reynolds, Haslam, & Veenstra, 2006), the depersonalization hypothesis (e.g., Deaux, 1993; Simon, 2004; Spears, 2001), the contribution of personal relationships to identification (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Hogg, 1993; Hogg, CooperShaw, & Holzworth, 1993; Prentice, Miller, & Lightdale, 1994), and the notion that identification typically fluctuates markedly in response to contextual changes (e.g., Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, Halevy, & Eidelson, 2008).

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