

Deep Alignment with Country Shrinks the Moral Gap Between Conservatives and Liberals

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Moral foundations theory suggests that relative to liberals, conservatives care more about values that are believed to bind group members together: loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and purity/degradation. In contrast, we propose that individuals who are deeply aligned (“fused”) with their group should display elevated commitment to group-oriented moral values, regardless of their political orientation. The results of three studies supported this hypothesis. The tendency for conservatives to endorse the binding foundations more than liberals only emerged among weakly and moderately fused Americans. In fact, liberals strongly fused with the United States endorsed “binding” foundations more than average conservatives and to the same extent as strongly fused conservatives. These results indicate that to fully understand moral prerogatives, one must consider the nature of the connections people form to the group, as well as their political orientation.

KEY WORDS: identity fusion, moral foundations theory, morality, political orientation

Conservatives and liberals seem to have fundamentally different visions of what is right and wrong. For example, evidence suggests that conservatives are especially inclined to view the status quo as just (e.g., Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003), eschew outcome-based moral judgments (e.g., Piazza & Sousa, 2014), and value tradition over universalism (e.g., Piurko, Schwarz, & Davidov, 2011). Even more provocatively, tests of moral foundations theory (MFT) have shown that conservatives care more about the “binding foundations” than liberals (e.g., Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). As the binding foundations inspire people to prioritize and protect the interests of their group, it would appear that liberals are morally limited social animals.

Or are they? A moment’s consideration reveals that at least some liberals care a great deal about their group and hold moral values that reflect such priorities. Take, for example, John F. Kennedy’s injunction, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” Like other liberal American presidents, Kennedy likely possessed a deep, visceral alignment with his country that led him to encourage his fellow Americans to transcend individualistic concerns for the sake of the collective. In this report, we propose that Kennedy’s sentiments demonstrate that the binding foundations know no political boundaries. Instead, individuals who are deeply aligned (i.e., “strongly fused”) with their group should endorse the “binding” foundations irrespective of their political orientation. In addition, we propose that this tendency will be broad enough to generalize to fusion with one’s country as well as one’s political party.

Moral Foundations Theory

MFT (Graham et al., 2013) organizes five moral foundations into two superordinate categories. The “individualizing foundations” (care/harm and fairness/cheating) are believed to sensitize people to the suffering and equitable treatment of individuals. In contrast, the “binding foundations” (loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and purity/degradation) are thought to sensitize people to the needs of the collective (Graham et al., 2011).

MFT argues that these foundations are “binding” in that they encourage prioritization of group cohesion over the interests of the individual in numerous ways (Graham & Haidt, 2010; Smith, Aquino, Koleva, & Graham, 2014). For example, groups should thrive when their members are loyal, trustworthy team players and deferential to the authority of group leaders. Valuing purity fortifies the group by allowing members to “mark off the group’s cultural boundaries” (Soler, 1973/1979, as cited in Graham et al., 2009, p. 1031) and stay responsive to threats to those boundaries. Furthermore, purity-related practices, rituals, symbols, and objects can also unite group members around the sacred.

Although MFT has inspired thoughtful critiques (e.g., Kugler, Jost, & Noorbaloochi, 2014; Schein & Gray, 2015), in this report we raise a different concern. Specifically, we question the striking and well-supported claim that conservatives care more about the binding foundations than liberals (e.g., Iyer, 2009). We suggest that political orientation alone cannot explain endorsement of the binding foundations; rather, the degree to which people are aligned with the group also plays a crucial role. Work on identity fusion provides the theoretical backdrop for this possibility.

Identity Fusion Theory

Identity fusion is characterized by deep, visceral feelings of oneness with a group (Swann, Jetten, Gómez, Whitehouse, & Bastian, 2012). For strongly fused individuals, the group is an integral part of their personal identity. Individuals may belong to a variety of groups, both local (e.g., immediate family, worship group) and extended (e.g., nation, religion) but may feel strongly fused with only one or a few of these ingroups. Fusion with a specific group should be related to valuing group cohesion for that ingroup but not necessarily for other ingroups with which one is not fused.

Identity fusion is a stronger predictor of progroup behavior (Swann & Buhrmester, 2015) than rival constructs such as group identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) because strongly fused individuals maintain a potent personal self (e.g., Heger & Gaertner, 2018) and strong relational ties to other group members (e.g., Whitehouse, McQuinn, Buhrmester, & Swann, 2014). Indeed, strongly fused people are so deeply aligned with the group that they come to view fellow group members as family (Swann, et al., 2014), prioritize and protect (i.e., fight and die for) the group (Buhrmester, Fraser, Lanman, Whitehouse, & Swann, 2014), and even support violence and discrimination against outgroup members (Fredman, Bastian, & Swann, 2017). Strongly fused individuals’ hostility towards outgroup members reflects strong attachment to the ingroup rather than conservatism (Fredman et al., 2017). In short, regardless of where they fall on the political spectrum, strongly fused individuals have all the markings of endorsers of the binding foundations (e.g., Smith et al., 2014). Because moral foundations research most frequently refers to binding morals in the context of political groups, we measured fusion with one’s country and political party.

Current Research

We conducted three studies in which the primary predictor variables were political orientation, identity fusion (with both the United States and political party), and their interaction. The major

outcome variable was binding scores on the moral foundations scale.¹ We expected to replicate previous evidence such that overall, conservatives would endorse the binding foundations more than liberals. However, this pattern should hold among weakly fused individuals, with strongly fused liberals reporting valuing the binding foundations just as much as conservatives.

Studies 2 and 3 served as replications of Study 1. They also established the discriminant validity of identity fusion with respect to two variables that have been associated with increased endorsement of the binding foundations: threat-sensitivity (e.g., Van de Vyver, Houston, Abrams, & Vasiljevic, 2016) and religiosity (e.g., Johnson et al., 2016). Study 2 was conducted in the run-up to and aftermath of the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, which naturally induced threat in both liberals and conservatives. Study 3, in addition to measuring and controlling for religiosity, attempted to replicate past evidence of a positive association between identity fusion and willingness to make extreme sacrifices for the group. We examined whether the binding moral foundations mediated this relationship.

In light of the between-study similarity in methods and results, we report a pooled analysis based on data from all three studies. (We report the results of each study individually in the online supporting information [Appendices A, I, II, and III]). This approach reduces redundancy, provides a stronger basis for interpreting null differences between conservatives and strongly fused liberals, resolves minor inconsistencies between studies,² and increases statistical power (Curran & Hussong, 2009). Following the pooled results, we present the nonredundant results of Study 2 and 3 as well as the results of an independent sample we obtained.

Our decision to pool the results successfully increased power. A sensitivity analysis showed that combining the data from all three studies ($N = 919$) would allow us to detect effect size $f^2 = .009$ with .80 power. The observed effect sizes for our identity fusion \times political-orientation interactions on the binding foundations in Studies 1–3 ranged from $.01 \leq f^2 \leq .03$ (see the online supporting information [Appendix S2, VII]), comparable to the mean moderation effect size ($f^2 = .009$) found in a 30-year review of published papers (Aguinis, Beaty, Boik, & Pierce, 2005). While in each study we had enough power to detect a relatively small interaction effect as defined by Cohen (1988) ($f^2 = \sim .02$), only in the combined analysis do we have sufficient power to detect our smallest observed effect size ($f^2 = 0.01$) or Aguinis et al.'s (2005) mean moderation effect size ($f^2 = 0.009$).

Method

Participants

We pooled data from Study 1 ($n = 233$), Study 2 ($n = 383$), and Study 3 ($n = 303$) for a combined total of 919 American participants ($M = 36.6$ years old; $SD = 13.0$ years old; majority white; 513 female). All participants were recruited from through Amazon's Mechanical Turk for a nominal fee. MTurk has been found to be a valid tool for psychological research on political ideology and comparable to benchmark national samples (Clifford, Jewell, & Waggoner, 2015; Buhrmester, Talaifar, & Gosling, 2018). In total, there were 266 self-identified Republicans, 450 were Democrats, and 198 independents/other party. Study 1 was conducted in March of 2015, Study 2 from November 5 to 11 of 2016, and Study 3 in May 2017. Because at least six months passed between each study, the likelihood of repeat participants was small (Stewart et al., 2015). Only participants who were residents

¹We report all measures and exclusions in all studies. All statistical analyses in this article were performed using R (version 3.4.1) statistical software. Power analyses were performed using G*Power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) unless otherwise specified.

²Only one between-study difference emerged in our primary analyses: Liberals fused with the United States cared about the binding foundations more than average conservatives in Study 1, but as much as conservatives in Studies 2 and 3.

of the United States and had HIT approval ratings of at least 67% (Studies 1 and 2) or 95% (Study 3) were qualified to participate.

Data exclusions. For Study 1, we initially recruited 248 participants, but participants were excluded for failing to complete the survey (2), completing the survey in less than two minutes (6), and completing the survey twice (6; as indicated by repeat IP addresses), leaving a final sample size of 233 participants. In Study 2, we recruited 470 participants, but participants were excluded for failing to complete the survey (20), completing the survey twice (66; based on double IP addresses), and completing the survey in less than two minutes (1), leaving a final sample size of 383 participants. In Study 3, we recruited 341 participants but excluded 38 participants who did not complete the study, leaving a final sample of 303 participants. Including the deleted participants in the analysis did not alter any conclusions in any of the studies (see the online supporting information Appendix S2, VI).

Procedure

In all studies, participants completed the 30-item Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ-30, Graham et al., 2011). On scales ranging from 1 (*not at all relevant*) to 6 (*extremely relevant*), participants first rated the extent to which each of the 15 considerations (e.g., “whether or not someone suffered emotionally,”) was relevant to deciding whether something was right or wrong. On scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*), they then indicated their agreement with 15 different statements (e.g., “respect for authority is something all children need to learn”). In total, six items corresponded to each of the five moral foundations.

We averaged the loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and purity/degradation subscales to form an aggregate “binding foundations” score ($M = 3.61$, $SD = .91$, $\alpha = .84$, 95% CI [.83, .86]). Similarly, we averaged the care/harm and fairness/cheating to form an aggregate “individualizing foundations” score ($M = 4.56$, $SD = .72$, $\alpha = .80$, 95% CI [.77, .82]). Going forward, we will report analyses for the aggregated binding and individualizing foundations scores. Reliability details and major regression analyses for each foundation separately are reported (for Studies 1, 2, 3, and the pooled analysis) in the online supporting information Appendices S2 (I and V). Results analyzing the foundations individually support the conclusions reported here.

After completing the MFQ-30, participants completed two seven-item verbal identity-fusion scales: one for fusion with the United States ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.44$), the other for fusion with political party ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.55$). On a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), participants rated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements such as “I am one with the United States.” The second identity-fusion scale was identical to the first, but asked participants to respond to statements with respect to their political party (e.g., “I am one with my political party.”). In Study 3, we counterbalanced the fusion with political party and fusion with U.S. scales.

To ensure that identity fusion predicted the binding foundations even when controlling for group identification, participants then completed measures of group identification with the United States and with their political party. We used both a six-item identification scale (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) and a one-item scale (Postmes, Haslam, & Jans, 2013; “I identify with the United States” and “I identify with my political party”).

Finally, participants answered several demographic questions, including a question about their party affiliation (“If you had to choose, which party would you say you normally affiliate with?” 1 = *Republican Party*, 2 = *Democratic Party*, 3 = *Other, please specify*) and their political orientation (“How would you describe yourself?” 1 = *very liberal*, 6 = *very conservative*). In Study 3, the political orientation question included a moderate option as well (1 = *very liberal*, 7 = *very conservative*).

As a result, we standardized the political-orientation scale by study before conducting the pooled analyses.

Measures unique to Study 2: Perceived threat during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. We used the same procedure for Study 2 as previously described except that we added a measure of perceived threat (to account for a potential confounding variable) following the moral foundations, fusion, and identification scales but prior to the demographic questions, which included political orientation. Participants responded on a 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*) scale to the following questions: “I feel that my values are currently under threat,” “I feel that my political party is currently under threat,” and “I feel that the United States is currently under threat.” We treated the three items measuring perceived threat to values, to party, and to the United States as one composite threat factor, $\alpha = .80$, 95% CI [.76, .83]. The mean score ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.58$) in response to the statement “I feel that my political party/values/United States is currently under threat” fell between “*somewhat agree*” and “*mostly agree*,” showing that people did feel threatened during the week of the 2016 U.S. presidential election. We also asked participants to respond to the open-ended question “What do you consider to be the biggest threat to the United States?” Due to an oversight, in the demographics section of Study 2, we also asked about half of the participants “How religious would you say you are?” (1 = *not at all religious*; 4 = *extremely religious*) and which presidential candidate they had voted for or intended to vote for.

Of the participants in Study 2, 137 completed the survey before Election Day, 172 on Election Day, and 74 after Election Day. Of the 222 participants for whom we have candidate-preference data, 117 supported Hillary Clinton, 59 supported Donald Trump, 28 supported a different candidate, and 18 said they were not voting. Participants did not vote perfectly along party lines: Four Clinton supporters self-identified as Republicans, and 10 Trump supporters self-identified as Democrats.

Measures unique to Study 3: Endorsement of fighting/dying for group; religiosity. The procedure for Study 3 deviated from that of the other studies in that we added a measure of willingness to fight and die for political party and willingness to fight and die for country. These scales immediately followed the moral foundations and fusion scales. This would allow us to examine whether the binding foundations mediate the relationship between identity fusion and willingness to fight and die for the group. Participants were asked to rate the following statements on a 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) scale: “I would fight someone physically threatening a fellow member of the United States”; “I would fight someone insulting or making fun of the United States”; and “I would sacrifice my life if it saved a member of the United States.” The same three questions were also asked replacing “the United States” with “my political party.” The average of the three items was taken to calculate willingness to fight and die for the United States ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.52$, $\alpha = .79$, 95%CI [.75, .83]) and willingness to fight and die for the political-party score ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.42$, $\alpha = .83$, 95% CI [.80, .87]), respectively.

Regarding the Study 3 mediation analyses, a Monte Carlo power analysis for indirect effects (Schoemann, Boulton, & Short, 2017) revealed that we would need about 630 and 1,250 participants, respectively, for fusion with the United States and fusion with political party, to achieve .80 power. Given that these sample sizes were not feasible for us and recognizing that our mediations are thus underpowered, we report these analyses but treat them as exploratory and descriptive.

We also asked all Study 3 participants to rate their level of religiosity ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 1.09$) in the demographics section. Fusion with the United States and with political party were both positively related to religiosity ($r(300) = .20$, 95% CI [.089, .31], $p = .0005$; $r(300) = .17$, 95% CI [.056, .28], $p = .004$, respectively) as was conservatism ($r(300) = .28$, 95% CI [.17, .38], $p < .001$). We also asked participants which presidential candidate they had voted for as in Study 2.

Results

Pooled Analysis of Studies 1, 2, and 3

Moral foundations and political orientation. To test whether political orientation was related to the binding and individualizing foundations, we conducted two linear regressions. As in previous MFT research, we found that conservatism positively predicted the binding foundations ($b = .42$, 95% CI [.37, .48], $\beta = .46$, $t = 15.7$, $F(1, 913) = 247.8$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .21$). Also, true to MFT, conservatism negatively (and more modestly) predicted the individualizing foundations ($b = -.21$, 95% CI [-.26, -.17], $\beta = -.30$, $t = -9.37$, $F(1, 913) = 88.2$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .087$).

Identity fusion with United States moderated relationship between conservatism and binding foundations. Identity fusion with the United States, political orientation, and their interaction were entered into a simultaneous regression model predicting endorsement of the binding foundations. The results, showing a significant fusion with U.S. \times political-orientation interaction and two significant main effects, are depicted in Table 1 and in Figure 1.³ This interaction model accounted for a greater amount of variance ($R^2_{\text{adj}} = .39$, $F(3, 911) = 195.5$, $p < .001$) and better model fit (AIC = 1982) than the simple regression model with political orientation alone ($R^2_{\text{adj}} = .21$, $F(1, 913) = 247.8$, $p < .001$, AIC = 2213). All results held even when controlling for group identification, and there was no identity fusion (with United States or political party) \times political-orientation interaction on the individualizing foundations, p 's $> .4$ (see the online supporting information Appendices S2 [III and IV]).

Figure 1 shows that political orientation was a better predictor of endorsement of the binding foundations among those who were weakly fused with the United States than among those who were strongly fused with the United States. Fusion was associated with increased endorsement of the binding foundations regardless of political orientation. However, simple slope tests indicated that the relationship between fusion with the United States and increased endorsement of the binding foundations was stronger for liberals (1 *SD* below the political orientation mean, $b = .34$, 95% CI [.30, .39], $\beta = .54$, $t = 14.9$, $p < .001$) than it was for conservatives (1 *SD* above the political orientation mean, $b = .20$, 95% CI [.15, .25], $\beta = .32$, $t = 8.29$, $p < .001$).

MFT argues that conservatives are the ones who care most about the binding foundations. To test the proposition that strongly fused liberals care about the binding foundations as much as conservatives, we conducted a post hoc contrast of endorsement of binding foundations between liberals who were strongly fused and average conservatives. We coded individuals as strongly fused if they scored more than a standard deviation above the mean on identity fusion with United States. We coded participants as "liberal" if they marked themselves as "very liberal," "liberal," or "slightly liberal" on the political-orientation scale and "conservative" if they marked themselves as "very conservative," "conservative," or "slightly conservative" on the political-orientation scale. We identified 93 strongly fused conservatives, 39 strongly fused liberals, 113 weakly fused liberals, and 28 weakly fused conservatives. A post hoc contrast showed a significant difference between average conservatives and strongly fused liberals' endorsement of the binding foundations such that strongly fused liberals endorsed the binding foundations ($M = 4.39$) more than conservatives generally ($M = 4.05$), $t(45.3) = -2.41$, 95% CI [-.61, -.083], $p = .016$. A second post hoc contrast comparing strongly fused liberals with strongly fused conservatives ($M = 4.40$) showed no significant difference in their endorsement of the binding foundations ($t(61.6) = .098$, 95% CI [-.28, .31], $p = .92$).

Following the fusion with country analyses, we conducted the same analyses with fusion with political party. Identity fusion with party, political orientation, and their interaction were entered

³The fusion (with United States and party) \times political-orientation interactions on the binding foundations remain virtually unchanged when we exclude the five binding foundation items that refer to "country," "society," and the military (see the online supporting information Appendix S2, XII).

Table 1. Summary of Pooled Multiple Regression Analyses for Effect of Fusion with United States and Political Orientation on Binding Foundations

	95% Confidence Interval for <i>b</i>			β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>b</i>	Lower	Upper			
(Intercept)	2.50	2.33	2.64	.038	31.7	< .001
Political Orientation	.59	.45	.74	.32	8.04	< .001
Fusion United States	.27	.24	.31	.43	15.5	< .001
Fusion United States \times Political Orientation	-.071	-.10	-.04	-.11	-4.49	< .001

$R^2_{adj} = .39, F(3, 911) = 195.5, p < .001$

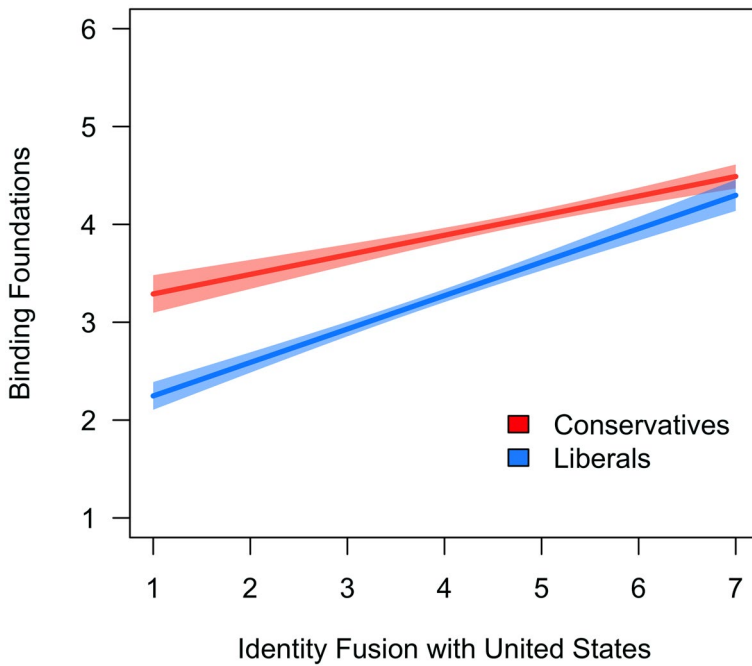


Figure 1. Identity fusion with the United States interacts with political orientation on the binding foundations. Conservatives are those who scored 1 *SD* above the standardized (by study) political orientation mean. Liberals are those who scored 1 *SD* below the standardized (by study) political orientation mean. Shaded regions indicate 95% confidence intervals. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

into a simultaneous regression model predicting endorsement of the binding foundations. The results showed a significant fusion with party \times political-orientation interaction ($b = -.053, 95\% \text{ CI}[-.085, -.023], \beta = -.091, t(3, 911) = -3.38, p = .0008, R^2_{adj} = .28$) and two significant main effects of political orientation ($b = .60, 95\% \text{ CI} [.48, .73], \beta = .47, t(3, 911) = 9.50, p < .001$) and identity fusion with party ($b = .15, 95\% \text{ CI} [.12, .18], \beta = .25, t(3, 911) = 8.96, p < .001$). The pattern of results was similar to the fusion U.S. \times political-orientation interaction depicted in Figure 1.

Identity fusion with the United States was significantly greater than identity fusion with political party ($t(1826) = 14.1, p < .001$) and, of note, the two fusions were relatively strongly and positively correlated with each other ($r(917) = .53, 95\% \text{ CI} [.48, .58], p < .001$), as depicted in the Table 2 correlation matrix. (For correlation matrices for Studies 1–3 studies individually, see the online

Table 2. Correlation Matrix for Pooled Analysis

<i>Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations</i>		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>								
1. Political Orientation	3.29	1.52								
2. Care/harm	4.57	0.81	-.20**							
3. Fairness/cheating	4.55	0.76	-.33**	.66**						
4. Loyalty/betrayal	3.49	0.95	.32**	.17**	.05					
5. Authority/subversion	3.83	0.94	.43**	.15**	.06	.71**				
6. Purity/degradation	3.52	1.22	.45**	.16**	-.01	.59**	.69**			
7. Individualizing	3.61	0.91	.46**	.18**	.03	.86**	.90**	.89**		
8. Binding	4.56	0.72	-.29**	.92**	.91**	.12**	.12**	.09**	.12**	
9. Fusion United States	4.25	1.44	.36**	.06	.02	.54**	.50**	.42**	.54**	.04
10. Fusion Party	3.26	1.55	.06	.05	.04	.31**	.20**	.22**	.28**	.05

Note. * indicates $p < .05$; ** indicates $p < .01$. *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively.

supporting information Appendix S2 [VIII and IX]). To determine whether the fusion party \times political-orientation interaction was driven by shared variance with the fusion U.S. \times political-orientation interaction, we entered both interactions and their main effects into a regression model predicting the binding foundations. With the fusion with U.S. interaction in the model ($p = .005$), the fusion with political-party interaction was no longer significant ($p = .47$)⁴. The fusion with United States and political-orientation main effects remained significant ($p < .001$), while the fusion with party main effect became marginal ($p = .073$). Thus, going forward we focus on fusion with the United States rather than with political party.

Analyses of Variable Unique to Study 2: Perceived Threat

Identity fusion moderated relationship between conservatism and binding foundations, controlling for perceived threat. We again used multiple regression to determine if identity fusion moderated the association between the binding foundations and conservatism as it did in the pooled analysis, even when controlling for perceived threat. Identity fusion with the United States ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.49$, $\alpha = .93$, 95% CI [.91, .94]), political orientation, the fusion U.S. \times political-orientation interaction, and perceived threat were entered into a simultaneous regression model predicting endorsement of the binding foundations. There was a significant interaction of political orientation and identity fusion with the United States on the binding foundations ($b = -.039$, 95% CI [-.071, -.007], $\beta = -.090$, $t(376) = -2.41$, $p = .016$), suggesting that identity fusion moderated the positive relationship between political orientation and the binding foundations even when controlling for threat. There were also significant main effects of fusion with the United States ($b = .41$, $p < .001$) and political orientation ($b = .36$, $p < .001$), but no main effect of threat ($b = .03$, $p > .2$).

Exploratory Analyses: Predicting perceived threat as a function of political orientation and identity fusion in the 2016 U.S. presidential election week. Although we had measured threat primarily to ensure that threat-sensitivity did not account for the fusion \times political-orientation interaction, we were also interested in exploring how fusion levels and context might influence perceived threat. We conducted an exploratory backwards-elimination stepwise regression starting with fusion with the United States, fusion with political party, political orientation, time (dummy coded before, during, or after the election), and their interactions predicting perceived threat. This process led us to drop all but two significant two-way interactions (time \times political orientation, $p = .002$; fusion party \times political orientation, $p = .003$) and significant main effects of fusion party, time, and political orientation ($ps < .001$) from the model (total $R^2_{adj} = .16$). Our full model with both interactions accounted for a great deal more variance in perceived threat than political orientation on its own ($R^2_{adj} = .01$). In what follows, we describe first the time \times political-orientation interaction followed by the fusion party \times political-orientation interaction in separate models for ease of understanding.

As depicted in Figure 2, an ANOVA revealed a significant time \times political-orientation interaction on perceived threat ($F(2, 375) = 5.08$, $p = .007$) such that perceived threat changed from before to after the election for liberals (those who described themselves as “very liberal,” “liberal,” or “somewhat liberal,” $F(2, 220) = 4.64$, $p = .011$) but not conservatives (those who described themselves as “very conservative,” “conservative,” or “somewhat conservative,” $F(2, 155) = .39$, $p = .68$). Conservatives on average experienced greater threat than liberals ($M_{conservatives} = 4.55$, $M_{liberals} = 4.07$, $t(351) = 2.97$, $p = .003$). Nevertheless, after Election Day the threat levels of liberals swelled to match that of conservatives ($M_{conservatives} = 4.37$, $M_{liberals} = 4.76$, $t(70.8) = -1.00$, $p = .32$). Even though their party had won, conservatives continued to report feeling threatened ($M_{before} = 4.53$, $M_{after} = 4.37$, $t(64.8) = .46$, $p = .65$). Interestingly, increases in threat perceptions of liberals over time were

⁴With fusion with country in the model, the fusion with party interaction remained nonsignificant even when we excluded binding items that refer to “country,” “society,” and the military (see the online supporting information Appendix S2, XII).

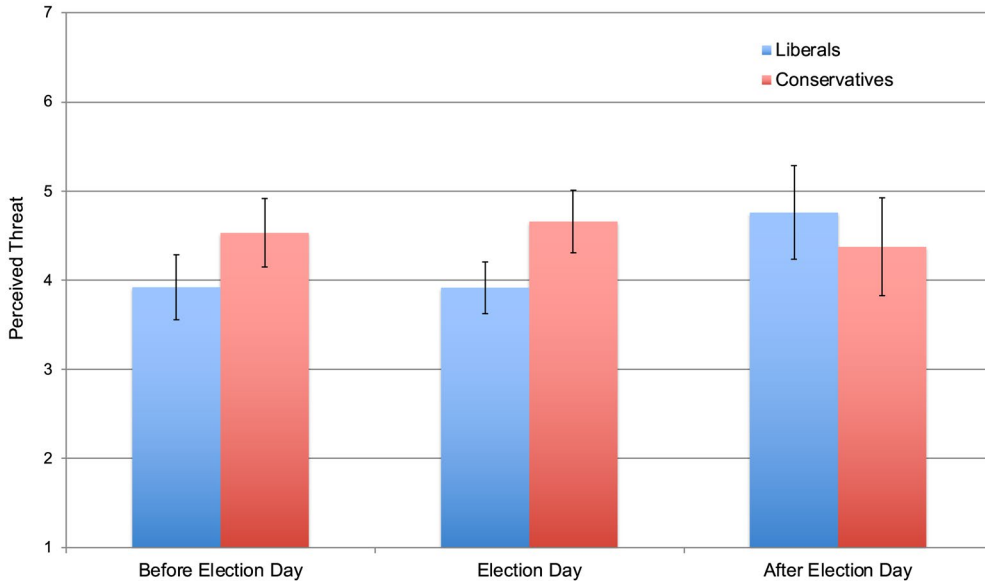


Figure 2. Depicts overall perceived threat before ($n = 137$), on ($n = 172$), and after ($n = 74$) Election Day for liberals and conservatives. Time and political orientation interacted on perceived threat. On average, conservatives perceived greater threat than liberals, but their threat levels did not change significantly over time. On the other hand, liberals' threat levels increased, to match that of conservatives that of conservatives after Election Day. Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

not accompanied by increases in their conservatism, fusion, or binding morals over the course of the election week ($ps > .25$).

Figure 3 depicts the identity fusion with political party \times political-orientation interaction ($b = -.094$, $t(3, 377) = -2.99$, $p = .003$) on perceived threat along with significant main effects of fusion party ($b = .61$, $t(3, 377) = 5.53$, $p < .001$) and political orientation ($b = .46$, $t(3,377) = 3.456$, $p = .0006$). Even though fusion was associated with greater perceived threat for liberals and conservatives, simple slope tests indicated that the relationship between fusion with political party and increased perceived threat was stronger for liberals (1 *SD* below the political orientation mean, $b = .45$, $t = 6.79$, $p < .001$) than it was for conservatives (1 *SD* above the political orientation mean, $b = .18$, $t = 2.69$, $p < .001$). Strongly fused liberals ($M = 5.18$) perceived more threat than conservatives generally ($M = 4.55$, $t(46.2) = -2.37$, $p = 0.02$) and as much threat as strongly fused conservatives ($M = 4.85$, $t(61.9) = -0.94$, $p = 0.35$).

Though the free response question (“What do you consider to be the biggest threat to the United States?”) was not used in our statistical analyses, it did give us a qualitative sense of what participants felt was threatening. For example, 18% of participants listed either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton (mostly along party lines) as the greatest threat to the United States, reflecting the country's state of partisan acrimony. Twenty-seven percent of participants listed some form of terrorism (including ISIS) as the greatest threat to the United States, as compared to only 4% who listed immigration and 1% who listed climate change as the greatest threat. All free responses (as well as data for all three studies) are available in the online supporting information.

Analyses of Variables Unique to Study 3

Identity fusion moderated the relationship between conservatism and binding foundations, controlling for religiosity. We again used multiple regression to determine if identity fusion

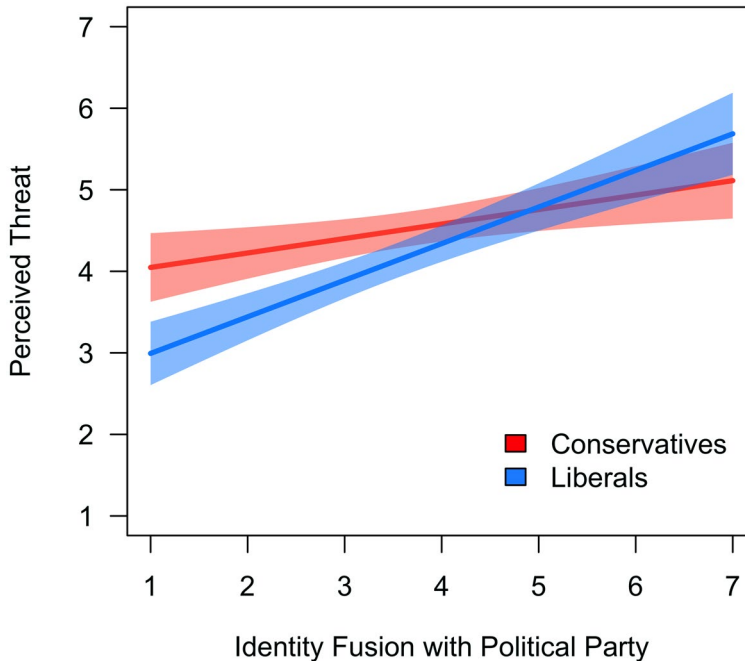


Figure 3. Identity fusion with political party interacted with political orientation on perceived threat. Conservatives are those who scored 1 *SD* above the political orientation mean. Liberals are those who scored 1 *SD* below the political orientation mean. Shaded regions indicate 95% confidence intervals. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

moderated the association between the binding foundations and conservatism controlling for religiosity. Identity fusion with the United States ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.46$, $\alpha = .91$, 95% CI [.89, .92]), political orientation, fusion \times political-orientation interaction, and religiosity were entered into a simultaneous regression model predicting endorsement of the binding foundations. Again of primary interest, there was a significant interaction of political orientation and identity fusion with the United States on the binding foundations ($b = -.037$, 95% CI [-.069, -.008], $\beta = -.11$, $t(297) = -2.51$, $p = .013$), even when controlling for religiosity.⁵ There were also significant main effects of fusion with the United States ($b = .33$, $p < .001$), political orientation ($b = .36$, $p < .001$), and religiosity ($b = .19$, $p < .001$).

Did binding foundations statistically mediate the relationship of identity fusion and fighting/dying for the group? As in previous identity-fusion research, identity fusion with the United States positively predicted willingness to fight and die for the country, $b = .48$, 95% CI [.37, .58], $\beta = 0.46$, $t(300) = 8.91$, $p < .001$. The binding foundations also predicted willingness to fight and die for the United States, even when controlling for identity fusion with the United States, $b = .21$, 95% CI [.015, .40], $\beta = 0.12$, $t(299) = 2.12$, $p = .035$. To determine if the relationship between identity fusion with the United States and willingness to fight and die for the United States was mediated by strongly fused individuals' increased endorsement of the binding foundations, we conducted a mediation analysis (Tingley, Yamamoto, Hirose, Keele, & Imai, 2014), running 10,000 simulations using non-parametric bootstrapping. We found that the willingness to fight and die increased only marginally as a result of the binding foundations mediator (ACME = .06, 95% CI [-.007, .13], $p = .052$) and that a marginal 12.6% (95% CI [-.002, .27]) of the total effect of fusion on willingness to fight and die

⁵This interaction effect on the binding foundations was driven by loyalty and authority. The interaction on purity was no longer significant controlling for religiosity (see the online supporting information Appendix S2, V).

was accounted for by the binding foundations. The direct effect of identity fusion on willingness to fight and die remained significant, $ADE = .42$, 95% CI [.30, .53], $p < .001$.

Analysis of an Independent Sample

In response to concerns about biased reporting of statistically significant studies (Ioannidis, Munafo, Fusar-Poli, Nosek, & David, 2014), we report results from an additional study that addressed this article's hypotheses. This study was conducted in March 2017 on a website people visit to learn more about their moral values by completing psychological questionnaires. It was run for an entirely different research project exploring different questions about the relationship between identity fusion and morality than those explored here. However, in addition to several other measures, it included the variables necessary (identity fusion with the United States and political party, political orientation, and the binding foundations) to test the fusion \times political-orientation interaction on the binding foundations. Of 607 total American participants, we had the relevant variables for 407 participants.

A multiple regression with identity fusion with the United States, political orientation, and their interaction predicting the binding foundations yielded a nonsignificant interaction effect ($b = .012$, 95% CI [-.019, .043], $\beta = .026$, $t = .76$, $p = .45$), a significant main effect of political orientation ($b = .24$, 95% CI [.12, .36], $\beta = .55$, $t = 3.98$, $p < .001$), and a significant main effect of fusion with the United States ($b = .25$, 95% CI [.14, .36], $\beta = .34$, $t = 4.37$, $p < .001$). There was a significant difference between conservatives' and strongly fused liberals' endorsement of the binding foundations ($p < .001$), such that conservatives' binding scores were higher.

Though the main effects of fusion and political orientation replicated the findings from our previous studies, the interaction effect showing that fusion matters more for liberals than conservatives did not replicate. Several factors may have contributed to this. The procedure was different from that of the studies reported in the article and was less controlled: Participants may have completed the measures in whatever order they chose, at different times, in different locations, and with other tasks or surveys in between. In addition, fusion with country was more right-skewed and thus lower in this sample than in our MTurk samples—the fusion U.S. mean (3.39) was below the midpoint of the scale (3.5). Alternatively, the nonreplication of the interaction may have simply been due to lack of power. As discussed previously, with a sample of about 400, we could have detected an effect size of $f^2 = .02$ (a conventionally defined small effect size) with .80 power but not an $f^2 = .01$, the smallest observed interaction effect size in Studies 1–3. Ultimately, future replication studies should assess the generalizability of our findings in other samples.

However, several considerations bolster our confidence in the validity of the pooled findings from Studies 1–3. First, and most important, the fusion with U.S. \times political-orientation interaction effect remains significant even when pooling the nonreplicating sample with Studies 1–3, $\beta = -.07$, 95% CI [-.11, -.03], $t(1318) = -3.27$, $p = .001$. Second, MTurk is likely a more appropriate sample for our hypotheses. Self-selection seems like it would be a larger problem for the nonreplicating sample since visitors come to the site specifically to learn about their moral values, and the range of the nonreplicating sample was more restricted (and hence less likely to be representative of the population) than the MTurk samples. MTurk has been shown as representative as benchmark national samples (i.e., American National Election Studies) *specifically* in the domain of political ideology and values (Clifford et al., 2015).

General Discussion

Moral foundations theory's proposition that conservatives embrace the binding foundations more than liberals implies a deficit in liberal philosophy: Liberals overlook the importance of

group-oriented values. Our findings indicate that depth of group alignment, specifically identity fusion, may sensitize liberals to the importance of the binding foundations. Overall, fusion predicted increased endorsement of the binding foundations for both liberals and conservatives, but especially for liberals. That is, whereas conservatives endorsed the binding foundations somewhat even if they were weakly fused, only liberals who were strongly fused with their country displayed strong endorsement of the binding foundations. Three studies showed that overall, liberals who were strongly fused with their group embraced the binding foundations more than average conservatives and as much as strongly fused conservatives.

Our findings, therefore, go beyond Graham et al.'s (2009, p. 1030) qualification that “the individualizing–binding distinction does not necessarily correspond to a left-wing versus right-wing distinction for all groups and in all societies” by specifying why and for whom this generalization does not always hold. People seem to prioritize group-related values to the extent that being a group member is an integral part of their identity.

Theoretical Implications

That some liberals strongly endorse the binding foundations counters the notion that morality can be reduced to political ideology (see, also, Miles & Vaisey, 2015) and furthers understanding of moral similarities between liberals and conservatives (e.g., Frimer, Biesanz, Walker, & MacKinlay, 2013; Wright & Baril, 2011). We show that liberals and conservatives can both endorse a group-based ethos, even when measured on the same scale rather than on distinct scales designed to capture liberals' and conservatives' unique group-based concerns. We believe this is an important contribution because most research showing any convergence of liberal and conservative values has only been able to do so by altering the content of those values to match participants' ideologies. For example, Frimer, Gaucher, and Schaefer (2014) show that liberals and conservatives value authority equally, but only when deferring to authorities aligned with their ideology (e.g., liberals feel positively about obeying civil rights activists' while conservatives feel positively about obeying commanding officers). Likewise, Frimer, Tell, and Motyl (2017) show that liberals and conservatives both value sanctity, but only for ideology-congruent issues (e.g., liberals value maintaining the purity of the environment; conservatives value maintaining the purity of traditional marriage). Similarly, Janoff-Buldmann and Carnes (2016) argue that both liberals and conservatives care about group-based binding morality, but liberals care about group values that ensure social justice while conservatives care about those that ensure social order.

Thus, while some previous research has shown liberals and conservatives endorsing the same moral value (e.g., authority, purity), the meaning that liberals and conservatives impute to the value is so different in those studies that it is difficult to conclude that they are really exhibiting similar attitudes. This has important implications for interventions seeking to reduce political discord. If liberals and conservatives can agree that a given value is important but systematically disagree about its meaning or the domains to which it applies, then compromise and reconciliation will continue to prove difficult. Strongly fused liberals' and conservatives' endorsement of the *same* binding scale in our studies might be more robust evidence of common ground that transcends ideology and thus may be a more fruitful basis for cooperation. That said, future research should investigate to what extent liberals and conservatives construe the same binding foundations items similarly or differently.

Note that our findings do not suggest that conservatives and liberals care about all the same moral values. After all, liberals (strongly fused or otherwise) still cared about individualizing foundations more than conservatives, and the average conservative endorsed the binding foundations more than the average liberal. Rather, the results suggest that conservatives and *a minority* of liberals hold similar *group-oriented* moral values.

Because only a minority of liberals were fused with their country and thus endorsed the binding foundations, critics might correctly point out that the generalization that conservatives care more about binding foundations on average still holds. We would counter that establishing generalizations are important but so too are establishing exceptions and boundary conditions. Further, some scholars contend that political psychology has had “a pre-occupation with explaining conservatives to the neglect of liberals” and a “bias towards discovering differences rather than similarities” (Washburn & Skitka, 2018). These scholars advocate for testing “conditions when one might expect to find evidence of ideological similarities versus differences.” We similarly feel that examining how even a minority of liberals may be similar to conservatives is a worthwhile endeavor. Furthermore, any commonality between liberals and conservatives in the United States is notable given increasingly apparent partisan strife. Lay intuitions exaggerate actual differences between conservatives and liberals (Graham et al., 2012; Westfall, Van Boven, Chambers, & Judd, 2015), so research that challenges such intuitions about partisan differences is particularly important in our increasingly polarized era.

Indeed, depth of group alignment may serve as a useful construct for explaining other exceptions (Greenberg & Jonas, 2003) to psychological asymmetries between liberals and conservatives (Jost, 2017). Strongly fused liberals and conservatives are similar in other ways beyond their binding values. For example, outgroup hostility is more often attributed to conservatives than liberals, but those strongly fused with a liberal cause (pro-choice) and a conservative cause (pro-gun) were both likely to discriminate against their opponents (Ashokkumar et al., 2018). Furthermore, conservatives are generally more threat-sensitive than liberals, but in the current research strongly fused liberals and conservatives were similarly threat-sensitive. Future research could investigate whether such similarities between conservatives and strongly fused liberals are motivated by the same processes. Specifically, some liberals may have heightened epistemic or existential needs to manage uncertainty, needs that are usually thought to be characteristic of conservatives (Jost et al., 2003). These liberals may be motivated to reduce ambiguity in a dubious world not by crossing party lines but through staunch allegiance to a collective (Federico, Ekstrom, Tagar, & Williams, 2016). Indeed, recent work (Federico & Malka, 2018) argues that insufficient attention has been paid to evidence that heightened epistemic and existential needs are not unique to conservatives and vary substantially by context and issue.

The theory of dyadic morality could also explain the underlying mechanisms driving strongly fused liberals’ and conservatives’ endorsement of binding morality (Gray, Young, & Waytz, 2012). If the essence of morality is perceiving harm and ascribing agency for the promulgation/prevention of that harm (Gray & Wegner, 2018), it may be that strongly fused individuals’ binding morals are driven by greater sensitivity to the suffering of group members and a subsequent greater inclination to do something about that suffering. In support of this possibility, a study by Segal, Jong, and Halberstadt (2018) found that strongly fused individuals’ prosociality was linked to their greater perceptions of harm in an agentless event (i.e., an earthquake) to which fused individuals nevertheless ascribed an agent. Indeed, identity fusion has consistently been linked to heightened feelings of both progroupproxy agency (Swann et al., 2012) and prosociality (e.g., Misch, Fergusson, & Dunham, 2018). Thus, from a dyadic morality perspective, fused individuals’ moral sensibility may be undergirded by heightened feelings of moral responsibility *and* blame in response to the perceived suffering of group members.

Perceptions of Threat During the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election and Future Directions

Although conservatives and strongly fused individuals were more religious and perceived greater threat overall, neither of these variables explained fused individuals’ endorsement of the binding foundations (with the exception of purity which was accounted for by religiosity; see also Haidt,

Graham, & Joseph, 2009). However, exploratory analyses revealed two interesting threat-related phenomena. First, conservatives perceived more threat overall, but the results of the 2016 presidential election increased the threat levels of liberals to match conservatives' threat levels. This finding lends itself to two possible interpretations. The first is that conservatives are more dispositionally threat-sensitive (explaining their generally higher perceived threat), but liberals can be contextually threat-sensitive (explaining their high threat-sensitivity after their candidate had lost) (Wright & Baril, 2013). The second interpretation is that threat levels of both parties were shaped by current events rather than disposition. Prior to the election, conservatives displayed elevated threat due to the widespread perception that Clinton would win; after the election, liberals displayed elevated threat due to the fact that Trump had won. That said, we are inclined to endorse the first interpretation because if threat was merely a matter of context, we would expect conservatives to report less threat once their candidate had won, but this was not the case.

Liberals' heightened threat levels after the election are also interesting because, contrary to prior research, they were not accompanied by greater conservatism (Landau et al., 2004; Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011; Wright & Baril, 2013) or group cohesion as measured by fusion and the binding foundations (Sherif, 1956; Stein, 1976). Perhaps threat does not make liberals more conservative when it emanates from a conservative rather a politically neutral or a foreign source (as has been the case in other studies). A conservative shift for liberals in the present context would be like "joining the enemy," producing cognitive dissonance. And perhaps liberals did not respond with increased cohesion immediately after the election because such solidarity would do little to reverse Trump's election. While threat usually increases cohesion, Hamblin (1958) argued that cohesion actually "decreases during a crisis if a likely solution to the crisis problem is unavailable" (pp. 75).

The second threat-related phenomena that emerged from exploratory analyses was that only among the weakly fused with political party did conservatives feel greater threat relative to liberals. Among those strongly fused with their political party, liberals and conservatives reported similar levels of threat, even when accounting for context by controlling for the day participants completed the study. This finding, if replicated, has important implications for identity fusion theory. That is, heightened perceptions of threat could explain why strongly fused individuals are more willing than others to fight and die for their group (a finding we replicated in this research), as threat makes the group seem more vulnerable and in need of defense. This complements recent work (Paredes, Briñol, & Gómez, 2018) showing that strongly fused individuals do not self-sacrifice blindly but rather do so when they feel their sacrifice is most needed. This finding may also bear upon Lilienfeld and Latzman (2014) suggestions that "the links between threat sensitivity and political affiliation are only modest, suggesting the presence of unidentified modifying variables" (p. 319). Identity fusion seems to be one such moderator. Indeed, political orientation on its own accounted for only 1% of variance in perceived threat.

In contrast to the dominance of fusion with party when predicting threat (likely due to the partisan nature of the threat), fusion with country prevailed when predicting the binding foundations. Although fusion with country and party both interacted with political orientation on the binding foundations, follow-up analyses revealed that the fusion with party effect was driven by shared variance with fusion with country. Apparently, deep alignment with country is a more potent predictor of the binding foundations than deep alignment with party. *Why* binding morality was more strongly predicted by fusion with country than fusion with political party remains unclear. One explanation is that the moral foundations scale specifically emphasizes binding to the country because it explicitly mentions society, government, and the military. Although excluding the items that referred to these groups did not alter our results, it is possible that their presence alongside "group-general" items suggested that even the group-general items were referencing the national group. If we had altered all binding items to refer to political party, we may have found that fusion party out-predicts fusion with country.

It seems logical that fusion with a group should be associated with valuing loyalty, authority, and purity within *that* group but not *other* ingroups. It would be interesting to test this assumption. That fusion with country still robustly predicted the binding-foundation items that referred only to “groups” generally could reflect not an implicit nation-as-group attribution, but rather a tendency for strongly fused people to value binding for all their ingroups. Indeed, future researchers might investigate “spillover” effects whereby fusion with a specific group could encourage a more domain-general or context-free binding ethos (e.g., a person strongly fused with one group may become more likely to value group cohesion in other groups with which they are more weakly fused). That fusion with party and with country were related and had similar effects on the binding foundations suggests that such spillover is possible. Thus, researchers interested in the relationship between depth of alignment with a group and the binding foundations should not only examine whether our findings generalize to fusion with other groups (e.g., religious) but also whether binding morality generalizes beyond the group in question.

Conclusion

The importance of group-oriented values for liberals is not only apparent in some of the most iconic twentieth-century Democratic presidencies, but it can even be traced back to the birth of modern liberalism.⁶ The 1789 French Revolution, which gave us the very terms “left” and “right” (Gauchet, 1997), had as its motto “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.” The glorification of Fraternity by these revolutionary leftists, emphasizing the importance of strong ties between group members, is inconsistent with MFT’s claim that those on the left do not care much about binding foundations. For some (strongly fused?) leftists of that era, fraternity was so important that their motto was simply “Fraternity, or Death!” (David, 1987).

Upon reflection, it seems difficult to imagine how any group, liberal or conservative, can sustain itself without at least some group members valuing and promoting group cohesion. And so, it is unsurprising that liberal and conservative groups alike have their stalwart believers. Of course, parochialism can have its pitfalls. But those invested in the liberal agenda might take a cue from their strongly fused compatriots and their binding values. When liberals have much to lose, prioritizing group cohesion may be essential to preserving the individualizing values liberals hold so dear: protecting the weak and promoting fairness for all.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was funded by National Science Foundation grant BCS1528851 to William B. Swann, Jr. Many thanks to Michael Buhrmester, Joy Wyckoff, Greg Hixon, Pete Meindl, Leah Fredman, Meagan Khan, Shalini Sarma, Aaron Wood, Ashwini Ashokkumar, and Skylar Brannon. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Sanaz Talaifar, the College of Liberal Arts, University of Texas at Austin, 116 Inner Campus Dr. Stop G6000, Austin, TX 78712. Email: stalaifar@gmail.com

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⁶We acknowledge that the meaning of liberalism is time/context-sensitive (Caprara & Vecchione, 2018).

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's website:

Appendix A

Appendix B