

Using the Language of Groups to Divide and Unite

Chairs: **David Rast III**, University of Alberta, and **Amber M. Gaffney**, Humboldt State University

Group members communicate normative information in a variety of ways, including rhetoric and use of group-specific language, as well as highlighting specific normative information through the use of sharing data that is specific to trends within the group. This type of communication defines the social self in terms of who we are and also who we are not. In this symposium, four speakers discuss different ways language can influence the way people about themselves and their in-groups, as well as their interactions with out-groups. In the first paper, Wilson, Parker, and English present four studies, with the Trump vs Clinton election as the backdrop, showing that dissimilar cross-group definitions of words (e.g., feminism) enhances the partisan divide between liberals and conservatives. Next Gaffney and colleagues present four studies showing how social identity leader rhetoric (affirmational vs negational) impacts followers' support for extremist leadership in times of uncertainty. Third, Rast and colleagues present three studies outlining how elections can communicate consensual perceptions of group norms, allowing members to coalesce behind non-normative leadership. Finally, Gardikiotis and Lipourli present evidence that people communicating and thinking about multiculturalism resulted in worsened intergroup attitudes toward refugees when depending on whether participants thought and wrote about refugees with a concrete or general construal abstraction. These four presentations showcase how language and the communication of group norms both divides and unites groups and electorates.

Definitions that Divide: Partisan Rifts in the Very Meaning of Words

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Political polarization goes beyond mere opinion differences. Partisan differences in definitions of concepts may further bifurcate liberals and conservatives along party lines. For example, liberals tend to define feminism as the quest for gender equity; conservatives define it as the quest for female domination over men. In 4 studies (total N = 500), we examine how liberals and conservatives define concepts including racism, sexism, feminism, sexual violence, and political correctness, and investigate convergence and divergence in definitions. Cross-partisan attitudes move decrease when partisan opponents evaluate a common definition. We consider the role of public rhetoric in producing divergent definitions, and report evidence that some of these definitional divides predicted Trump vs Clinton support prior to and following the US election.

The Rise of Non-normative and Extreme Leaders through Rhetorical Strategies

Amber Gaffney, Humboldt State University; **David Rast**, University of Alberta; and **Michael Hogg**, Claremont Graduate University

Group members generally support group prototypical leaders who are moderate with respect to societal norms. However, contextual factors that communicate identity needs and normative behavior might drive groups toward ideological extremism. In four experiments (total N = 535) we suggest that when group members experience conceptual uncertainty, they are more supportive of extremist leaders who employ social identity affirming (e.g., who we are) vs. negating rhetoric (e.g., who we are not). This support occurs through a process of identification with a group that affirms its identity through this rhetorical strategy. We discuss implications for how leader rhetoric can create a sense of inclusion among followers, which might translate to voting for and supporting non-traditional and even extreme leaders.

Elections Communicate Consensual Views of Leadership and Identity

David Rast, University of Alberta; **Amber Gaffney**, Humboldt State University; **Lily Syfers**, Humboldt State University; **Yunzhu Ouyang**, University of Alberta; and **Michael Hogg**, Claremont Graduate University

A leader's ability to mold and change the identity of a group relies on collective buy-in from group members. Three studies suggest that democratic elections communicate group norms by creating perceptions of voter consensus and empower a new leader with the ability to change the group's identity. Data collected before and after the 2016 U.S. election suggests that Republicans (N = 279) increased their perceptions of Trump's ability to represent them after he became president. Two laboratory experiments (total N = 200) further demonstrate that group members are more willing to support and coalesce behind a newly elected leader who deviated from group norms than a deviant candidate (before election results were communicated).

Levels of Construal Abstraction and Attitudes Toward Multiculturalism

Antonios Gardikiotis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and **Eleni Lipourli**, University of the Aegean

The present study examines how the way people talk and think about refugees affects attitudes toward multiculturalism, an ideology promoting peaceful coexistence and collaboration within ethnic and cultural diversity. The level of social cognitive construal abstraction was manipulated so participants (N = 400, of various age groups) were asked to describe in writing either at a general level, why harmonious relations with refugees are important, or at a concrete level, how these relations can be achieved. Stereotypes of, and emotions toward refugees, as well as, perceived threat (realistic and symbolic) were measured. Results show that intergroup processes (stereotyping, emotion, threat) are related to multiculturalism depending on the level of construal abstraction.