



The importance of social identity content in a setting of chronic social conflict: Understanding intergroup relations in Northern Ireland

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Two studies ($N = 117, 112$) were conducted with school students in Northern Ireland to investigate the neglected relationship between social identity content and intergroup relations. Study 1 tested and found support for two hypotheses. The first was that the association between in-group identification and negative behavioural intentions would be moderated by antagonistic identity content. The second was that the antagonistic identity content mediates the relationship between the experience of intergroup antagonism and negative behavioural intentions. Study 2 replicated these findings at a time of reduced intergroup violence, and supplemented them with a qualitative-quantitative analysis of participants' written responses. In addition, findings demonstrate the importance of appreciating the content and meaning of social identities when theorizing about intergroup relations and developing conflict management interventions.

'An anarchy in the mind and in the heart, an anarchy which forbade not just unity of territories, but also 'unity of being', an anarchy that sprang from the collision within a small and intimate island of seemingly irreconcilable cultures, unable to live together or to live apart, caught inextricably in the web of their tragic history'. (*F. S. L. Lyons*)

The above quotation, from the Irish historian F. S. L. Lyons, articulates something of the psychology of social conflict in Northern Ireland, and in doing so suggests two crucial points about social identity and intergroup relations more generally. First, social identity—that part of the self-concept pertaining to our membership of social groups—consists not just of knowledge and evaluation of our in-group(s) *per se*, but also of an understanding of our in-group's relationship with other groups. Second, this understanding is something that can develop on the back of a history and experience of conflict.

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More generally, the quotation is a reminder that social identities have particular content and meanings that are inextricably tied to intergroup relations. Nevertheless, as Turner (1999) and Lalonde (2002) note, social psychological research on intergroup relations has tended to downplay identity content, focusing instead on more generic constructs and processes such as categorization and identification (see also Hewstone & Cairns, 2001).

In particular, there has been considerable debate over the role of group identification in intergroup relations. This in part stems from a reading of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) that posits a direct association between identification with a social group and tendencies towards bias, discrimination and intergroup conflict (e.g. Brown, 2000; Grant, 1990; Kelley, 1993). While some have argued that higher levels of identification will be associated with greater intergroup hostility (e.g. DeRidder & Tripathi, 1992), others have emphasized the important moderating role that social identity theory sees for a range of other factors (e.g. socio-structural variables; Ellemers, Van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1990; Reicher & Haslam, 2006; Turner & Brown, 1978). Moreover, a meta-analysis by Hinkle and Brown (1990) found that across 14 studies, the overall association between identification and intergroup bias was negligible.

While some researchers have suggested that this association becomes more reliable when groups, group contexts and group members have a particular orientation (e.g. collectivist and relational, as opposed to individualist and autonomous; Brown *et al.*, 1992; Hinkle & Brown, 1990), it is nevertheless clear that the link between identification and particular forms of intergroup behaviour is highly variable. The relationship between psychological group membership (i.e. identification) and particular forms of intergroup behaviour in settings of chronic social conflict is therefore very much a live issue, and one to which the present paper aims to contribute.

Identity and identity content in intergroup relations

The idea we wish to test is that while identification is a vital component of intergroup behaviour, its association with *particular forms* of intergroup behaviour, such as conflict, depends on the *meaning* or *content* of the identity in question (see Turner, 1999). The potential importance of content is highlighted by the social identity approach, and self-categorization theory in particular (Turner, 1985; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Most pertinently, social category salience (i.e. seeing oneself as a category member) initiates a process of self-stereotyping, whereby one takes on the norms and values associated with that category. The result is that particular modes of behaviour are prescribed, which is consistent with the normative content of the category in question (Brown & Turner, 2002; Hogg & Turner, 1987; Postmes & Spears, 1998; Reynolds, Turner, & Haslam, 2000). The upshot is that 'we' (e.g. psychologists) are not merely *different* from 'them' (e.g. physicists) - 'we' are different in specific, meaningful ways (e.g. more sociable, more verbal; see Doosje, Haslam, Spears, Oakes, & Kooman, 1998).

Despite this theoretical framework, relatively little research has examined the role of social identity content in intergroup relations. This is all the more notable when given the small body of research that has confirmed its importance. For example, Jetten, Spears, and Manstead (1996, 1997) found that inducing a

norm of fairness among high identifiers could attenuate tendencies towards discrimination in both real-life and *ad hoc* groups. Field studies on social identity processes in crowd behaviour and collective action have also highlighted the importance of identity content in explaining such phenomena. For example, Reicher (1984, 1987) highlights how the riot in the St. Pauls area of Bristol, England in 1980 was characterized not only by the *existence* of a shared identity among participants, but also by the specific content and meaning of that identity. Thus, in order to explain why financial institutions and businesses owned by outsiders were attacked while locally owned businesses were left relatively untouched, it is necessary to appreciate the shared sense of alienation and exploitation that was part of what it meant to be a St. Pauls resident. Finally, based on Turner's (1991) work on social influence, Terry, Hogg, and Blackwood (2001) found that the behavioural expression of prejudiced intergroup attitudes by group members depends on whether such attitudes are seen as normative for the category to which they define themselves as belonging. Thus, the normative environment created by membership of a social group impacts on group members' expressions of prejudice.

Intergroup relations in identity content

With all this in mind, the aim of the present research is to examine the role of identity content in a setting of chronic social conflict. The research was conducted in Northern Ireland, where conflict is routinely characterized as being between Catholics and Protestants (Cairns & Darby, 1998; Cairns & Mercer, 1984; Trew, 1986; see Muldoon, 2004, and Trew & Benson, 1996, for a discussion of how Catholic and Protestant identities relate to national and other identifications). Such a setting, where the social, political and even physical environment speak to the often hostile divide between communities, is one in which it might be reasonable to expect a direct association between identification with one religious group and negative attitudes towards the other. However, along lines outlined above, we would argue that to account fully for the particular character of any set of intergroup relations, it is also necessary to attend to the content of the protagonists' social identity.

In line with this, Kelman (1999) has argued that chronic social conflicts are characterized by negative identity interdependence between the groups involved, such that the expression of out-group identity comes to be seen as threatening to the integrity and even existence of in-group identity so that, in effect, there is a zero-sum game between identities (cf. perceived zero-sum relations over material resources; Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001; Esses, Jackson, & Armstrong, 1998). More generally, we wish to argue that in such environments the in-group's relationship with the out-group constitutes an important part of in-group identity, such that what it means to be a member of a particular social group (e.g. Protestant) is to be located in a conflictual relationship with a particular out-group or out-groups (e.g. Catholics). Thus, conflict with an out-group may not just be a *consequence* of identification with a social group (although identification is a necessary component of acting as group member)-it may itself actually be *an important part of* in-group identity.

What it means to be a member of a group whose identity is defined in such a way is therefore to see negative, conflictual attitudes and behaviour towards the out-group as being normatively prescribed. When in-group identity is defined in such a

way, then identification with that social group should be associated with more negative behavioural intentions. However, it also follows that changes in the meaning of in-group identity (i.e. identity content) will be accompanied by changes in the extent to which identification is associated with negative behavioural intentions. In other words, the *meaning* of in-group identity (i.e. identity content) will *moderate* the association between identification and negative behavioural intentions (H1). Specifically, we predict that when conflict and a negative relationship with the out-group are important part of in-group identity, then identification will predict more negative behavioural intentions. On the other hand, when conflict and a negative relationship with the out-group are not an important part of in-group identity, then identification will not predict more negative behavioural intentions.

The present research also aims to elucidate some of the intergroup processes in which identity content plays a role. We wish to test the idea that social categories, along with their content and meaning, are as much a *product* of intergroup relations as they are predictive of them (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). The value of conceptualizing social categories and their content in this way has been highlighted by research on the elaborated social identity model of crowd behaviour (ESIM; Drury & Reicher, 1999, 2000; Reicher, 1996; Stott, Hutchison, & Drury, 2001). Specifically, this research suggests that group members' understanding of the meaning of their shared identity can change as a result of interaction with other groups. This changed identity then becomes the basis from which future intergroup interactions are conducted (Reicher, 1995).

An example of this process is provided by Drury and Reicher (2000). Protestors who opposed the construction of a new road initially understood themselves to be engaged in peaceful and legitimate acts, and to be in a benign relationship with police, who were assumed by protestors to have a similar understanding of the context. However, following subjectively violent police intervention, protestors' understanding of their relationship with the police changed profoundly. Specifically, protestors came to characterize this relationship as conflictual, and indicated that this radicalized understanding of their own social position would change their intentions in future intergroup relations. As one respondent put it, 'the day of the tree... made me realize there's no way you're gonna win by just sort of going quietly, you've got to make as much fuss as you can. Really did change me, I think, that day' (Drury & Reicher, 2000, p. 594).

This process suggests that forms of identity content which emphasize conflict with an out-group can arise through the experience of conflict between the in-group and out-group (see Trew, 2004, for a discussion of this point in a Northern Irish context). In-turn, these forms of identity content predict future intentions. In other words, it suggests a specific causal process in which identity content *mediates* the relationship between prior experience of conflict and future behavioural intentions. The present studies therefore provide an opportunity to test this specific process quantitatively in a setting of chronic social conflict. Specifically, we predict that while experiencing intergroup conflict may lead to negative behavioural intentions, it does so by leading group members to define in-group identity in terms of conflict and negative relations with the out-group (H2).

Study 1 tests these two hypotheses by means of a survey administered to Northern Irish students in September 2003. Following from this, Study 2 has two aims. First, using a fresh sample of Northern Irish students recruited in September

2004, it aims to replicate the findings of Study 1 at a time of markedly reduced intergroup violence. Second, it collects qualitative responses from participants in an attempt to illuminate the motivations behind particular responses on quantitative outcome measures.

STUDY I

Method

Participants

Participants were 117 students (age range of 16–18 years) from schools in Northern Ireland recruited during an open day at Queen's University Belfast. There were 69 female and 42 male participants. Six participants did not specify their sex. Forty-nine participants identified themselves as Catholic, 56 as Protestant and 12 as non-Christian.

Filter questionnaire

Since the main questionnaire required knowledge of participants' religious denomination, a short introductory questionnaire was used. Respondents were first asked whether they regarded themselves as belonging to any particular religion (yes or no), and in which, if any, religious body they were brought up (Roman Catholic, Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Church of Ireland, Methodist Church in Ireland, none, other-specified by respondents). They were then asked, 'If you were asked for your religious denomination, which of the following would best describe you?', and given a choice of Protestant, Catholic or non-Christian. The main questionnaire was allocated on the basis of respondents' answer to this last question.

Main questionnaire: Predictor measures

The main questionnaire contained several predictor scales. These included 4-item measures of in-group identification (e.g. 'Being a (in-group member) is an important part of who I am'; $\alpha = .88$) and level of intergroup antagonism in participants' home area (*intergroup antagonism*: e.g. 'In my area, there is often trouble between (in-group members) and (out-group members)'; $\alpha = .89$). A 14-item scale ($\alpha = .82$) measured antagonistic identity content—that is, content emphasizing a negative relationship with the out-group. Five items measured the importance in in-group identity of avoiding out-group activities. For these items, participants were first asked, 'When you think of yourself as an (in-group member), how important are the following?' They then responded on a 7-point scale (1, not at all important; 7, extremely important) to items such as 'Not living according to (out-group) values and ideals' and 'Not living in a mainly (out-group) area'. Five items measured belief that the expression/strength of out-group identity is threatening to in-group identity (e.g. 'When (out-group members) express their identity, it feel like my (in-group) identity is under threat'). Finally, four items measured the belief that in-group and out-group values are opposed (e.g. 'The values of (out-group members) are opposed to those of (in-group members)'). All scales employed a 7-point response format, where increasing scores indicated greater agreement or importance.

Main questionnaire: Behavioural intentions

Outcome measures consisted of three behavioural intention measures. The first was 'If you had a son or daughter, would you object if he/she married an (out-group member)?'¹ (*object if offspring married out-group member*: 1, *not at all*; 7, *very much*). The other two measures took advantage of the fact that two football teams, Glasgow Rangers (Protestant) and Glasgow Celtic (Catholic) are highly identified with the Protestant/Catholic schism in Northern Ireland. The measures were, 'If your child said that they supported Rangers football club, would you be willing to buy them a Rangers football shirt?' and 'If your child said that they supported Celtic football club, would you be willing to buy them a Celtic football shirt?' (1, *Definitely not*; 7, *Definitely*). If a participant identified him or herself as Protestant, then Rangers were regarded as the in-group team and Celtic as the out-group team, and vice versa for Catholic participants. To create a measure of preference for buying an in-group over an out-group football shirt for one's child, scores on the out-group shirt item were subtracted from those on the in-group shirt item. On this measure (*preference for in-group over out-group shirt*), a positive score indicates preference for an in-group shirt and a negative score indicates preference for an out-group shirt.

Procedure

Participants were first presented with the filter questionnaire, and told that the main questionnaire would follow. On the basis of their answer to the filter question discussed above, participants were then given one of the three versions of the main questionnaire. This procedure was performed surreptitiously so that participants were not aware that different forms of the main questionnaire were being distributed.

Results

Moderation analyses

The hypothesis that identity content would moderate the association between identification and negative intentions (H1) was tested using a regression model which included in-group identification, the antagonistic identity content scale and the product term of these two scales. Mean-centred scores were used throughout (Aiken & West, 1991).

The first outcome measure was *object if offspring married out-group member*. Both in-group identification and antagonistic identity content were highly significant predictors ($b = 0.29$, $SE = .083$, $p < .005$ and $b = 1.04$, $SE = .142$, $p < .001$, respectively), as was the interaction term, $b = 0.25$, $SE = .070$, $p < .001$, indicating moderation ($\Delta R^2 = .063$). The overall model ($R^2_{adj} = .44$) was also highly significant, $F(3, 110) = 30.59$, $p < .001$. Consistent with H1, simple slopes analysis revealed that when scores on the antagonistic identity content scale were low (one standard deviation below the mean), then in-group identification was not a significant predictor, $b = 0.05$, $SE = .096$, $p > .05$. However, when scores on the antagonistic

¹ This item also forms part of Pettigrew and Meertens' (1995) blatant prejudice scale. In the present context, it is treated as an intention in view of its inquiry as to the likelihood of an act being performed in the future.

identity content scale were high (one standard deviation above the mean), then in-group identification was a highly significant predictor, $b = 0.54$, $SE = .119$, $p < .001$. These effects are illustrated using uncentred variable scores in the left-hand panel of Figure 1.

The second outcome measure was *preference for in-group over out-group shirt*. Both in-group identification and antagonistic identity content were highly significant predictors ($b = 0.41$, $SE = .110$, $p < .001$ and $b = 0.81$, $SE = .188$, $p < .001$, respectively), as was the interaction term $b = 0.24$, $SE = .092$, $p < .05$, indicating moderation ($\Delta R^2 = .043$). The overall model ($R^2_{adj} = .282$) was also highly significant, $F(3, 108) = 15.51$, $p < .001$. Supporting our hypothesis, simple slopes analysis revealed that when scores on the antagonistic identity content scale were low (one standard deviation below the mean), then in-group identification was not a significant predictor, $b = 0.18$, $SE = .127$, $p > .05$. However, when scores on the antagonistic identity content scale were high (one standard deviation above the mean), then in-group identification was a highly significant predictor, $b = 0.62$, $SE = .158$, $p < .001$. These effects are illustrated using uncentred variable scores in the left-hand panel of Figure 2.

Mediation analyses

Our second hypothesis (H2) was that while *intergroup antagonism* would predict negative intentions, this effect would be mediated by forms of identity content that emphasize a conflictual relationship with the out-group. To test this hypothesis, two mediation analyses (Baron & Kenny, 1986) were performed—one for *object if offspring married out-group member* and another for *preference for*

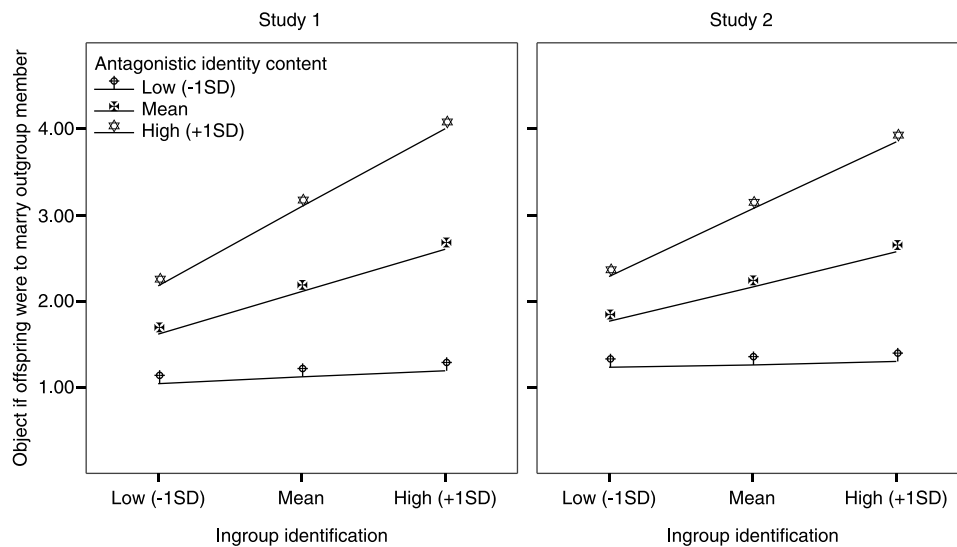


Figure 1. The association between in-group identification and *object if offspring married an out-group member* is moderated by antagonistic identity content. When identity content emphasizes a conflictual relationship with the out-group, the association between in-group identification and *object if offspring married an out-group member* is strong and positive. When identity content does not emphasize a conflictual relationship with the out-group, the association is not significantly different from zero.

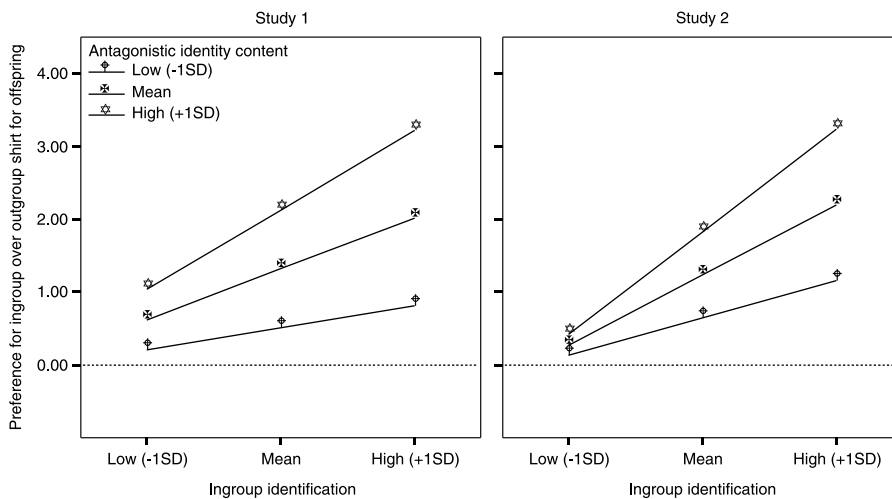


Figure 2. The association between in-group identification and preference for buying an in-group rather than an out-group football shirt for participant's child is moderated by antagonistic identity content. When identity content emphasizes a conflictual relationship with the out-group, the association between in-group identification and preference for buying an in-group rather than an out-group football shirt for participant's child is strong and positive. When identity content does *not* emphasize a conflictual relationship with the out-group, the association is not significantly different from zero.

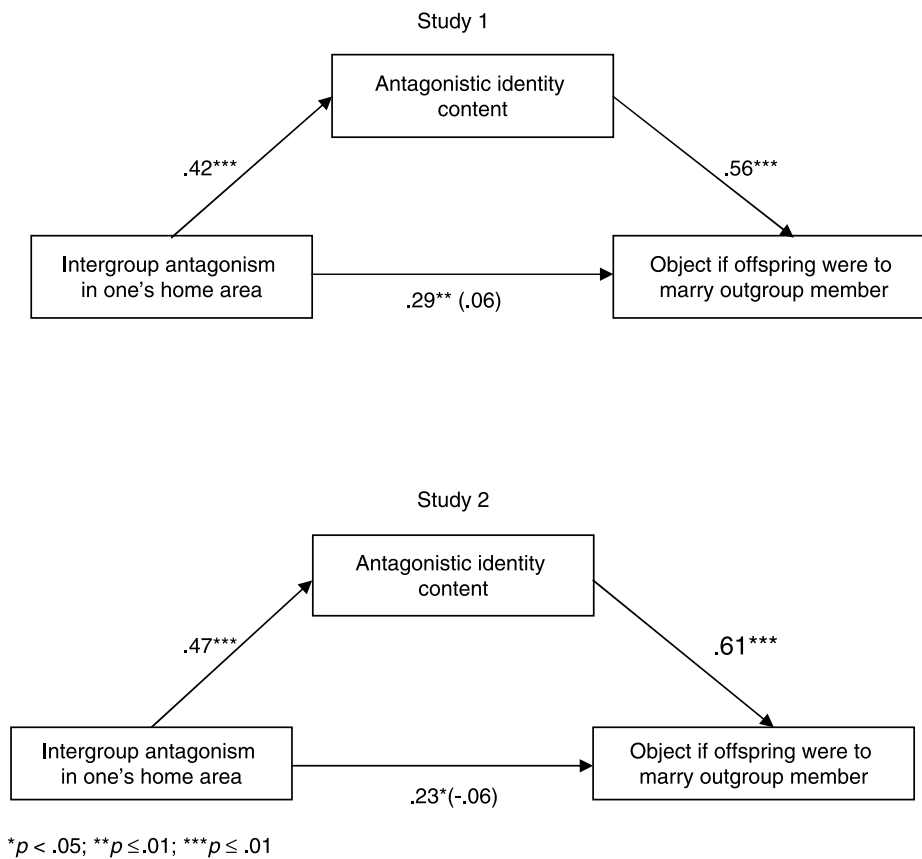
in-group over out-group shirt as the outcome measures. In each model, *intergroup antagonism* was specified as the independent variable, the outcome measure as the dependent variable and the antagonistic identity content scale as the mediator². Results of Sobel tests supported the hypothesized mediation effects for both *object if offspring married out-group member*, $Z = 3.88, p < .001$ and *preference for in-group over out-group shirt*, $Z = 3.25, p < .001$. These models are summarized in the upper portions of Figures 3 and 4, respectively³.

Discussion

Two hypotheses were tested in Study 1: that the content of participants' social identity would moderate the association between identification and negative intergroup intentions (H1), and that identity content would mediate the relationship between the experience of intergroup antagonism and negative intentions, such that experiencing

² Two alternative models were tested for both behavioural intention measures. In the first, intergroup antagonism was specified as the mediator and the antagonistic identity content scale as the IV. The second model specified intergroup antagonism as the DV, the antagonistic identity content scale as the IV and the behavioural intention measure as the mediator. Both models failed to show mediation, and the path from the mediator to the DV remained significant in each case.

³ Because the average correlation between in-group identification and the identity content scale across Studies 1 and 2 was .40, mediation analyses in both studies were repeated while controlling for in-group identification. In all cases, this did not qualitatively change the pattern of results. In other words, all reliable paths remained reliable, and non-reliable paths remained non-reliable. We can therefore be confident that the predictive role of the identity content scale was not in-turn the result of its association with in-group identification. Although the correlation between in-group identification and the identity content scale is also relevant to the interpretation of the moderation findings, the existence of two strong main effects of these scales confirms their unique association with the outcome measures. Thus, when holding one scale constant, the other scale has sufficient variance to correlate strongly with the outcome measure. Moreover, the moderation effect is unlikely to have emerged at all if these scales had been confounded.



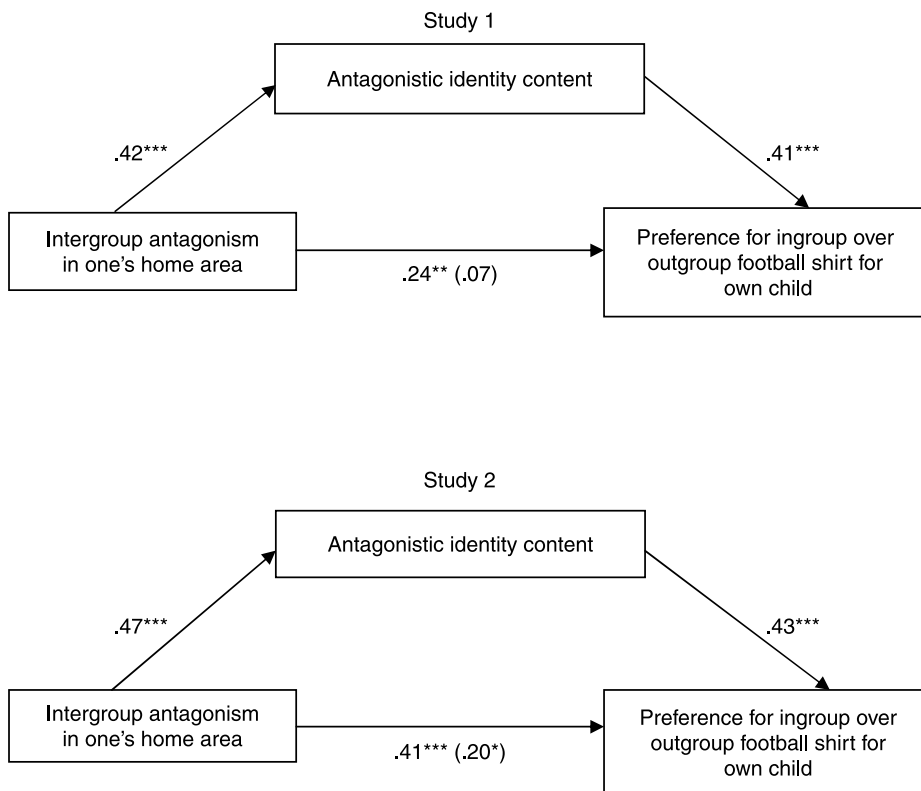
Path weights are standardised regression (β) coefficients

Figure 3. The hypothesized model in which the relationship between *intergroup antagonism* and *object if offspring married an out-group member* is mediated by antagonistic identity content.

intergroup conflict leads to negative intentions to the extent that it defines in-group identity in terms of negative relations and conflict with the out-group (H2).

Results provide support for both hypotheses. In relation to H1, the association between identification and the two outcome measures (*object if offspring married out-group member* and *preference for in-group shirt*) was moderated by antagonistic identity content. Specifically, in-group identification became more predictive of negative intentions when in-group identity emphasized a negative relationship with the out-group. The association between identification and intergroup intentions thus depended on the specific *meaning* of the in-group identity.

Regarding H2, there was evidence that while the level of intergroup antagonism in one's home area predicted negative intentions on both outcome measures, this could be accounted for by antagonistic identity content. This is consistent with the hypothesis that experiencing conflict between the in-group and the out-group predicts negative intentions and it does so by precipitating definitions of in-group identity that emphasize an antagonistic relationship with the out-group.



* $p < .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

Path weights are standardised regression (β) coefficients

Figure 4. The hypothesized model in which the relationship between *intergroup antagonism* and preference for buying an in-group rather than an out-group football shirt for participant's child is mediated by antagonistic identity content.

Of course, this is not to say that identity content has no impact on levels of intergroup antagonism or intergroup relations more generally. In fact, it is precisely because it has an impact that we have chosen to study it. However, we would suggest that its impact is more likely to be apparent in *specific instances* of collective behaviour than on a scale that measures a more general sense of intergroup relations in one's home area. In this way, the *impact* of identity content is much more likely to be manifested in collective behaviour (e.g. a riot or a protest; Reicher, 1996) than in intergroup antagonism as measured in the present research.

One possible criticism of Study 1 is that while analyses supported our hypotheses, it only offers a 'snapshot' of these processes at one particular point in time. It might be argued on this basis that the findings of Study 1 are time bound, in the sense that they may be over sensitive to the events of, say, the previous week rather than representing a chronic process. For example, the finding that the association between in-group identification and negative behavioural intentions was contingent upon identity content may be due to a transitory polarization of attitudes in response to a particular event. Although a cursory examination of news stories relating to intergroup violence suggests

that this was not the case, a second study was conducted in order to test our hypotheses at a time of reduced intergroup violence.

STUDY 2

Study 2 was conducted 1 year after Study 1, during which time there had been a dramatic reduction in intergroup violence in Northern Ireland. Table 1 reports the number of recorded incidents on five indices of intergroup violence in the year preceding Study 1 (2002–2003), and the year preceding Study 2 (2003–2004). Chi-squared analyses indicate that on all but one of these measures there was a highly significant reduction in the number of incidents from the year preceding Study 1 to the year preceding Study 2. Moreover, inspection of the observed frequencies on the only measure not to show a highly significant drop (number of deaths due to the security situation) in fact indicates that more than twice the number of people died as a result of intergroup violence in the year preceding Study 1 than in the year preceding Study 2. Thus, relative to Study 1, Study 2 was conducted at a time of markedly reduced intergroup violence.

Table 1. Number of incidents relating to intergroup violence occurring in the year preceding studies 1 and 2 (Source: Statistics relating to the security situation in Northern Ireland, 2003/2004)

Nature of offence	Number of incidents in preceding year		
	Study 1 (2002–2003)	Study 2 (2003–2004)	χ^2
Persons charged with terrorist and serious public order offences	359	279	10.03**
Persons injured as a result of the security situation	1125	765	68.57***
Deaths due to the security situation	15	7	2.91#
Shooting incidents related to the security situation	348	207	35.82***
Bombing incidents related to the security situation	178	71	45.98***

** $p < .005$; *** $p < .001$; # $p < .1$.

With this in mind, Study 2 has two aims. The first of these is to replicate the findings of Study 1 in order to demonstrate the reliability of the observed effects despite fluctuations in manifest levels of intergroup violence. Given the theoretical principles outlined in the general introduction, there is every reason to suppose that this will be the case. Sectarian intergroup conflict has a long history in the region that is presently Northern Ireland (Lyons, 1971). It is deeply engrained psychologically and highly salient for people living there, even if they vehemently oppose such conflict (Cairns & Mercer, 1984). As such, the impact of enduring sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland on identity processes is unlikely to be affected by fluctuations, albeit marked, in intergroup violence across 1 year.

The second aim of Study 2 is to provide a qualitative illustration of the processes under investigation. Specifically, an open-ended question was administered in order to

allow participants to record and explain the motivations and reasons for their (quantitative) answers to the behavioural intention measures. The purpose of this was to provide an indication of how participants' self-reported reasons for their answers on the outcome measures marry with the quantitative constructs (e.g. identity content) used to predict these outcome measures. These qualitative responses will therefore illustrate the role of identity content in determining outcomes on the behavioural intention measures, and in doing so will increase confidence in the validity of the hypothesized processes and/or highlight alternative processes and motivations behind particular quantitative responses.

Method

Participants

Participants were 112 students, aged 16–18 years, from schools in Northern Ireland. As in Study 1, they were recruited at an Open Day at Queen's University Belfast. There were 80 female and 31 male participants. One participant did not specify their sex. Sixty-four participants identified themselves as Catholic, 32 as Protestant and 16 as non-Christian.

Measures and procedure

The same scales and quantitative measures were used as in Study 1. These were *in-group identification* ($\alpha = .86$), *intergroup antagonism* ($\alpha = .85$), and the antagonistic identity content scale ($\alpha = .85$). After they had completed the quantitative items, participants were asked, 'In your own words, can you explain *why* you answered the last three questions in the way you did?'. This question had an open-ended response format that allowed participants to outline their reasons without being directed by specific prompts or predefined response categories.

The same procedure was followed as in Study 1, with participants first being presented with the filter questionnaire and then given the appropriate main questionnaire on the basis of their self-reported religious denomination.

Results

Moderation analyses

Moderated regression analyses were again performed to test H1 (Aiken & West, 1991) and once more the first outcome measure was *object if offspring married out-group member*. Both in-group identification and antagonistic identity content were significant predictors ($b = 0.24$, $SE = .112$, $p < .05$ and $b = 0.81$, $SE = .158$, $p < .001$, respectively), as was the interaction term, $b = 0.20$, $SE = .098$, $p < .05$, indicating moderation ($\Delta R^2 = .024$). The overall model ($R^2_{adj} = .354$) was also highly significant, $F(3, 108) = 21.29$, $p < .001$. Consistent with H1, simple slopes analysis revealed that when scores on the antagonistic identity content scale were low (one standard deviation below the mean), then the in-group identification was not a significant predictor, $b = 0.02$, $SE = .116$, $p > .05$. However, when scores on the antagonistic identity content scale were high (one standard deviation above the mean), then in-group identification was a significant predictor, $b = 0.46$, $SE = .188$, $p < .05$. These effects are illustrated in the right-hand panel of Figure 1 using uncentred variable scores.

The second outcome measure was again *preference for in-group over out-group shirt*. Both in-group identification and antagonistic identity content were significant predictors ($b = 0.56$, $SE = .123$, $p < .001$ and $b = 0.53$, $SE = .173$, $p < .005$, respectively), as was the interaction term, $b = 0.24$, $SE = .106$, $p < .05$, indicating moderation ($\Delta R^2 = .029$). The overall model ($R^2_{adj} = .381$) was also highly significant $F(3, 105) = 23.14$, $p < .001$. Consistent with H1, simple slopes analysis revealed that when scores on the antagonistic identity content scale were high (one standard deviation above the mean), then in-group identification was a highly significant predictor, $b = 0.83$, $SE = .206$, $p < .001$. When scores on the antagonistic identity content scale were low (one standard deviation below the mean), in-group identification was still a significant predictor ($b = 0.30$, $SE = .126$, $p < .05$), although the size of this effect was greatly reduced relative to when *expression of out-group identity is threatening* was high. These effects are illustrated in the right-hand panel of Figure 2 using uncentred variable scores.

While these results replicate those of Study 1, it remains possible that these effects might differ across religious groups. To rule out this possibility, further analyses were performed to establish whether these moderation effects were in-turn moderated by religious denomination. To maximize the power to these tests, data from Studies 1 and 2 were combined. For both *object if offspring married out-group member* and *preference for in-group over out-group shirt*, the three-way interaction terms between identification, identity content and religious denomination were non-significant when added to a model incorporating the three main effects and three two-way interaction terms, $F(2, 215) = 0.47$, $p > .05$, and $F(2, 213) = 1.63$, $p > .05$, respectively. Moreover, the interaction between identification and identity content remained significant in both cases, $b = 0.22$, $SE = .088$, $p < .05$, and $b = 0.32$, $SE = .109$, $p < .005$, respectively.

Mediation analyses

As in Study 1, H2 was tested through two mediation analyses (Baron & Kenny, 1986)–one for *object if offspring married out-group member* and one for *preference for in-group over out-group shirt* as the outcome measures. Results of a Sobel test supported the hypothesized mediation effects for *object if offspring married out-group member*, $Z = 4.33$, $p < .001$. Although the direct path from *intergroup antagonism* to *preference for in-group over out-group shirt* remained significant after inclusion of the mediator, results of a Sobel test supported the hypothesis by suggesting partial mediation, $Z = 3.55$, $p < .001$. These models are summarized in the lower portions of Figures 3 and 4, respectively.

Quantitative–qualitative analyses

The first aim of the qualitative analysis was to investigate whether open-ended responses could illustrate and verify the posited relationship between identity content and responses on the behavioural intention measures. These responses were coded according to whether the respondent explicitly expressed a belief that relations between Protestants and Catholics should be peaceful, benign and/or positive (0, no; 1, yes). The following are good examples of such a belief:

- (1) I feel that the future generation of Northern Ireland should be exposed to the other communities i.e. Catholics and Protestants mixing together in schools, living in the

same areas etc. I believe in doing so, we would have a much more likely chance of reaching peace.

- (2) I think with the political situation in Northern Ireland, it is important to teach children that your religion should not affect your politics. Children should understand that although Protestants and Catholics may have different outlooks on life, they should respect others values and beliefs.

Those coded as '0' not only included responses that failed to express such a 'positive' belief, but also expressed a belief that the relationship between Protestants and Catholics was antagonistic:

- (3) I feel that in tradition Protestant and Catholics don't mix beliefs, so why start now. If my child wants to wear a kit which was Catholic related, they would definitely not be allowed to.
- (4) I would mind if they married a Catholic because they would be ignoring their own beliefs. I wouldn't buy them a Celtic top because it expresses Catholics.
- (5) In the majority of cases, Protestants + Catholics don't get along . . . Protestants aren't allowed into their schools, so they shouldn't be allowed into our schools. I would send my child to a Protestant school to help keep it Protestant.

Of the 112 responses, 40 were coded as '1' (positive intergroup relations belief expressed) and 72 were coded as '0' (positive intergroup relations belief not expressed). Three independent samples *t* tests were then conducted using this binary variable as the independent variable, with *preference for in-group over out-group shirt*, *object if offspring married out-group member* and in-group identification as dependent variables. Results indicate that those who expressed a belief that relations between Protestants and Catholics should be peaceful, benign and/or positive were much less likely than those who did not express such a belief to object if their child were to marry a member of the out-group ($M_s = 1.28, 2.96$), $t(110) = 4.89$, $p < .001$, or to show preference for an in-group over an out-group football shirt ($M_s = 0.53, 2.15$), $t(110) = 4.11$, $p < .001$. Moreover, there was no difference between these two groups in terms of in-group identification ($M_s = 4.60, 4.90$), $t(110) = 0.88$, $p > .05$.

The second aim of the qualitative analysis was to explore why, unlike in Study 1, the identity content scale only partially mediated the hypothesized relationship between *intergroup antagonism* and *preference for in-group over out-group shirt*. In other words, *intergroup antagonism* retained a unique predictive value over and above antagonistic identity content. One possible reason for this is that preference for buying an in-group over an out-group football shirt for one's child may not just be a reflection of particular ways of expressing in-group identity. Instead, it may represent a pragmatic decision, based not on antagonistic identity content, but on a straightforward concern for one's child's safety in an area characterized by intergroup hostility. To explore this possibility, open-ended responses were coded on two further dimensions. The first of these was whether a participant's explanation for their responses on the football shirt measures were couched in terms of the safety of their child (0, no; 1, yes), the second was whether it was couched in terms of their upbringing and values (0, no; 1, yes). While Quotation 4 above illustrates the latter viewpoint, the following quotations illustrate the former:

- (6) I don't mind my son or daughter being married to a different religion . . . but buying a Rangers shirt would show them to others as being a Prod and wouldn't be liked in the area by local residents of the Catholic community.
- (7) I live in an area which is 100% Catholic and if someone was seen wearing a Rangers top they would get the shite kicked out of them and that's only if the lads were feeling lazy as they might kill him/her.

Of the 112 responses, 17 emphasized the safety of their child (coded as '1') while 95 did not (coded as '0'). Twenty-four emphasized the respondent's upbringing and values (coded as '1'), while 88 did not (coded as '0'). To gauge their respective importance, *preference for in-group over out-group shirt* was regressed simultaneously on both of these binary variables. The overall model ($R^2_{adj} = .50$) was highly significant, $F(2, 109) = 57.44, p < .001$, as were both of the predictors. Specifically, preference for buying an in-group over an out-group football shirt for one's child was greater when explanations were couched in terms of the respondent's upbringing and values than when they were not, $\beta = 0.72, p < .001$. In-turn, preference for buying an in-group over an out-group football shirt for one's child was also greater when participants' explanations were couched in terms of the safety of their child than when they were not, $\beta = 0.21, p < .005$. Thus, as suggested, a straightforward concern for one's child's safety in an area characterized by intergroup hostility does indeed appear to have unique predictive power in explaining preference for buying an in-group over an out-group football shirt for one's child.

However, given that the direct effect of *intergroup antagonism* on *preference for in-group over out-group shirt* was fully mediated by *expression of out-group identity is threatening* in Study 1, the above explanation would require that the sample in Study 2 as a whole were from more 'dangerous' areas than those in Study 1. As an indirect test of this prediction, an independent samples *t* test was performed on a single-item measure of how much participants felt that their home area had suffered during the period of conflict known as the 'Troubles'⁴ (*During the Troubles, how did your area suffer in comparison to other areas?* 1, less than other areas; 4, same as other areas; 7, more than other areas). In support of this prediction, participants in Study 1 ($M = 2.58$) reported that their home area had suffered less than other areas, to a greater extent than those in Study 2 ($M = 3.05$), $t(227) = -2.09, p < .05$. Thus, participants in Study 2 believed that they came from relatively more 'troubled' areas than did the participants in Study 1.

Discussion

The results of Study 2 substantially replicate those of Study 1 in a setting of reduced intergroup violence, and in doing so provide further support for our hypotheses. Specifically, the association between identification and the two outcome measures was again moderated by particular forms of identity content, such that in-group identification became more predictive of negative intentions when in-group identity emphasized an antagonistic relationship with the out-group (H1). In combination with the data of Study 1, there was also no evidence that these moderation effects were

⁴ The 'Troubles' is widely understood to refer to the period of conflict between the emergence of Catholic civil rights movements in the late 1960s and the present ceasefires.

in-turn moderated by religious denomination. There was also support for the hypothesis that identity content mediates the relationship between the experience of intergroup antagonism and negative intentions, such that experiencing intergroup conflict leads to negative intentions to the extent that it defines in-group identity in terms of conflict and negative relations with the out-group (H2). Thus, although levels of intergroup violence in the year preceding Study 2 were significantly lower than those in the year preceding Study 1, the patterns of results across the two studies are very similar.

The only difference of note between the patterns in Studies 1 and 2 was that in Study 2, antagonistic identity content could only have partially mediated the hypothesized relationship between *intergroup antagonism* and *preference for in-group over out-group shirt*. Further (qualitative and quantitative) analyses support an explanation of *intergroup antagonism's* remaining predictive value in terms of functional, safety concerns, over and above identity-based concerns. This suggests that while Study 2 was conducted at a time of relatively low intergroup violence across Northern Ireland, the consequences of the chronic experience of conflict across several decades in particular areas are unlikely to dissipate quickly (Muldoon, 2004). In this sense, then, local experience suggests that it is better to be safe than sorry, despite broader reductions in overt conflict. Such an effect highlights not only the powerful everyday reality of intergroup hostility for the participants in these studies, but also the meaningfulness and ability of the measures used here to speak to that reality.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across these two studies, we have presented evidence of the way in which identity content in a setting of chronic social conflict can come to emphasize an antagonistic relationship with an out-group, and the consequences of this for the association between identification and negative intentions. Study 1 tested and supported hypotheses regarding the relationship between these forms of identity content and negative behavioural intentions. First, although in-group identification *per se* did predict such intentions, antagonistic forms of identity content moderated this effect (H1). Second, there was support for the hypothesis that these forms of identity content mediate the impact of experiencing intergroup conflict and antagonism on negative behavioural intentions (H2). Study 2 then replicated these patterns 1 year later, at a time of reduced intergroup violence. This suggests that in a setting of chronic intergroup conflict, our hypotheses regarding the relationship between identification, social identity content, intergroup antagonism and negative behavioural intentions remain valid, despite fluctuations in the manifest level of intergroup violence. In relation to H2, although the correlational data precludes the conclusion that mediation definitely occurred, the analysis nevertheless represented a valid and stringent test of the hypothesized process—a process which in-turn had a clear theoretical rationale (e.g. Drury & Reicher, 2000). Specifically, H2 would have to have been rejected if the observed associations between variables deviated from that predicted. That H2 could not be rejected across four tests thus represents considerable support for that hypothesis.

Together, the present findings suggest that in a setting of chronic social conflict, such as that in Northern Ireland, the effects of group identification are far from straightforward. Instead, attention should be paid to the way in which the content of social identities in such contexts can come to reflect and in-turn predict the in-group's

antagonistic relationship with the out-group. The implications of identification for intergroup relations will in-turn depend on this meaning, and *vice versa*. In highlighting the dynamic between identity content and intergroup relations, these results are consistent with self-categorization theory (Turner *et al.*, 1987; Turner *et al.*, 1994), and with other approaches to intergroup phenomena in the social identity tradition that emphasize social identity as a content-driven, dynamic process (e.g. Haslam, 2004; Lalonde, 2002; Reicher, 1996).

A key avenue for future research would therefore be to examine the processes through which particular definitions of in-group identity come to dominate as a function of the experience of intergroup antagonism. One important factor here will undoubtedly be the impact that the wider intergroup context has on *intragroup* processes, particularly regarding the ability of different members of the group to exert influence and define category scope and content (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a, 1996b). For example, Stott *et al.* (2001) and Stott and Drury (2000) argue that the generalization of conflict among previously peaceful category members is in part due to the increasing prototypicality that the wider intergroup context bestows upon 'militant' category members. These category members are then empowered to live out their conflictual understanding of intergroup relations with the out-group, and to attempt to exert normative pressure towards conflict on other in-group members (see also Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005). In contrast, the experience of benign relations with other groups empowers group members to exert normative pressure *away* from conflict on in-group members who transgress peaceful norms (Stott, Adang, Livingstone, & Schreiber, 2007; Stott *et al.*, 2001).

Viewed in these terms, the present findings can be seen as a model of how intergroup conflict can be perpetuated through its impact on the content of protagonists' identities. This raises questions regarding how intergroup conflict might be managed or reduced, and what the role of identity content might be in this process. As argued above, intergroup conflict and the associated identities of protagonists are usually about real and meaningful differences between-groups. As such, successful conflict management requires that these differences be addressed at the level and in the form that they occur, often within the framework of an overarching superordinate category (Eggin, Haslam, & Reynolds, 2002; Haslam, 2004; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Stephenson, 1981).

In-turn, it is clear that the content of superordinate categories is also important. Specifically, the content of such categories can facilitate *positive* intergroup relations by being broadly defined, such that diversity and pluralism are an essential component of that category (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Waldzus, Mummendey, Wenzel, & Weber, 2003; cf. Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). Of course, this is easier said than done in settings such as Northern Ireland. We can nevertheless suggest that the improvement of intergroup relations rests upon creating the conditions under which group members can *reconstruct and reconstrue* the (identity) relationship between the in-group and out-group, such that it comes to be seen as benign and even positive and productive, rather than conflictual. However, an important caveat is that redefining group identities and intergroup relations in this way will be most successful (and most politically and socially progressive) if it goes hand-in-hand with the elimination of the group-based inequalities or injustices that beget conflict in the first place (Haslam, 2004).

Specific avenues for future research therefore include examining the ways in which identity content (and changes therein) may help to explain how other approaches to conflict reduction (e.g. intergroup contact: Allport, 1954; Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Pettigrew, 1998) may or may not help to reduce intergroup

antagonism. Specifically, changes in the meaning of *in-group* identity (and not just stereotypes or evaluations of the out-group) may mediate the positive impact that contact may have on intergroup relations. Indeed, identity content and the intergroup relations from which it stems may shape the extent to which particular forms of intervention are viable at all. For example, the widely acknowledged need to generate 'ideal' contact conditions (e.g. where protagonists have equal status and do not view each other as a threat, Allport, 1954) before intergroup contact will have any palliative effect speaks to the need for 'positive' contact to be seen as possible and proper by group members in the first place (see also Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005).

In summary, the present research has highlighted the importance of the way in which social identity content comes to emphasize a conflictual relationship between the in-group and the out-group in settings of chronic social conflict such as Northern Ireland. Social identity content here can be seen as a *theory* of intergroup relations—an understanding of how one's in-group relates to an out-group, and all that this entails. It develops through one's subjective experience of intergroup relations, and in-turn impacts on intergroup relations by providing the psychological basis for social action by in-group members. This specific content gives meaning to social group membership in such settings, and the implications of psychological group membership (i.e. identification) for intergroup relations therefore depend directly on this meaning. More generally, the present studies warn against theorizing intergroup relations solely in terms of the generic processes that make group life possible (e.g. categorization, identification) to the neglect of the specific content that makes group life meaningful. Instead, it may be suggested that social identities are meaningful self-definitions *precisely because* of their content, and abstracting the generic processes and constructs that make group life possible from the specific content that makes it meaningful tells only part of the story of what social identity actually is.

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