What Does It Mean to Be an American? Patriotism, Nationalism, and American Identity After 9/11

Qiong Li
Mershon Center, Ohio State University

Marilynn B. Brewer
Department of Psychology, Ohio State University

The period of heightened nationalism in the United States that followed the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 provided unusual conditions for investigating issues surrounding the distinction between patriotism and nationalism and the relationship between national identification and pluralistic values. In a survey of national identity and social attitudes conducted in late September 2001, two different definitions of national unity were inserted in the introduction to the questionnaire in an attempt to prime activation of different conceptualizations of nationality. Results demonstrated that the priming conditions did have an effect on the pattern of interrelationships among measures of patriotism, nationalism, and tolerance for cultural diversity.

The meaning and consequences of national identification have long been the subject of debate among philosophers, historians, and social scientists. Of particular concern is the question of whether identification with one's country—in the form of national attachment, pride, and loyalty—is or is not necessarily associated with derogation and contempt of nations and cultures other than one's own. On the positive side, group identification at the national level, like other social identities (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), creates bonds of solidarity among all members, aligns individual interests with national welfare, and provides the motivation for being a good group member at the individual level—that is, for enacting the voluntary, participatory behaviors that constitute the citizen role (Brewer, in press). On the downside, high levels of national iden-

tification ("hypernationalism") have been associated with authoritarianism, intolerance, and warmongering (Van Evera, 1994).

This differentiation between the positive and negative manifestations of national identification is represented in social psychology by drawing a distinction between "patriotism" and "nationalism," with the former connoting pride and love for country and the latter referring to chauvinistic arrogance and desire for dominance in international relations. As a healthy national self-concept, patriotism is positive love of one's own country (Bar-Tal, 1993; Bar-Tal & Staub, 1997; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989) related to secure ingroup identification (Druckman, 1994) and independent of outgroup derogation (Brewer, 1999). By contrast, nationalism is related to insecure ingroup identification and intergroup differentiation, including the view that one's own country is superior to others and thus should be dominant (Feshbach, 1994; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Mummendey, Klink, & Brown, 2001).

Because nationalism and patriotism share the feature of positive ingroup evaluation and pride, they are positively correlated both conceptually and empirically (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). The difference between the constructs lies in their relationship to intergroup attitudes. Patriotism is compatible with internationalist values and cooperation, but nationalism is negatively correlated with internationalism (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989) and positively related to militarism (Furia, 2002; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). Internally, patriotism may also be compatible with liberalism and tolerance for diversity, but nationalism is more likely to be associated with authoritarian values and intolerance. As two different sides of the same coin (e.g., de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003; Worchel & Coutant, 1997), it is possible that "love of nation" can be associated with benign patriotic attitudes under some circumstances *or* with more malign nationalistic attitudes in other circumstances, within the same individual. Which conceptualization of national identity is activated may vary as a function of the perceived intergroup context, the salience of different national symbols, or the behavior of national leaders.

National Identity Under Threat: The Aftermath of 9/11

As forms of social identification, patriotism and nationalism both increase in response to an outside threat. The 9/11 attacks resulted in immediate, visibly evident increases in expressions of national identification and unity throughout the United States. In light of the social science debate on the nature of nationalism, the question that arises is, What are the likely consequences of this heightened identification at the national level? More specifically, what are the likely consequences for tolerance for diversity internally and for international attitudes and relations externally?

One important factor determining the nature and consequences of enhanced national identification may be how individuals understand the meaning of national "unity" under this particular historical circumstance. How groups come to be

perceived as unified or coherent social units is the subject of considerable social-psychological research and theory (Campbell, 1958; Hamilton, Sherman, & Castelli, 2001). We have proposed (Brewer, Hong, & Li, 2004) that there are two different bases for perceiving a social group to have the properties of a coherent entity. On one hand, a group may be seen as a unit by virtue of the shared attributes and common heritage of its members. By this criterion, a group is a unit to the extent that its members share an underlying common "essence" that gives the group a fixed and immutable character (Yzerbyt, Rocher, & Schadron, 1997). On the other hand, a group may become an entity by virtue of facing a common problem, having a common purpose, and acting in a coordinated way to achieve shared goals (Hamilton, Sherman, & Lickel, 1998). This definition of unity is dynamic and temporal; it is based on similarities among group members in intents and motives rather than similarity of fixed attributes or character.

It is our hypothesis that these two bases for group unity have different implications for responses to threat to the group as a whole. If group unity is defined in terms of shared purpose in the face of threat, then national identification should be directed toward effective internal cooperation to achieve common goals. Awareness of interdependence and common fate promotes an *intragroup* focus of attention (Yuki, in press), with an emphasis on maintaining intragroup relationships and shared concern for group welfare. Thus, when national unity is construed in these dynamic, goal-based terms, identification with the nation should activate the patriotic representation of ingroup attachment and loyalty without necessarily arousing nationalistic sentiments as a consequence. Under these conditions, we would predict that heightened patriotism (national identification) would be positively associated with tolerance for diversity and inclusiveness internally, and would show little or no relationship to heightened nationalism.

By contrast, if national unity is defined in essentialistic terms, then the meaning of national identity is more likely to be exclusionary and associated with intolerance of difference, either internal or external. Essentialistic conceptions of the ingroup rest on intragroup similarity and distinctiveness from others. This definition of group unity leads to an *intergroup* focus of attention (Yuki, in press), with an emphasis on maintaining homogeneity within groups and differentiation between groups. Thus, ingroup identification and loyalty are associated with valuing distinctiveness and ingroup superiority over outgroups. Under these conditions, we would predict that heightened patriotism (national identification) would be associated with heightened nationalism and less tolerance for internal diversity.

The period of intense national identification, uncertainty, and emotionalism that followed 9/11 created an unusual set of conditions to test the implications of different meanings of American identity in a meaningful context. In part because of the high degree of uncertainty and change, shared understandings and collective representations of the nation were in a state of flux. Under such circumstances, individuals may be easily influenced by subtle activation of different conceptual-

izations of the meaning of national identity and unity. This, in turn, creates an opportunity to test experimentally the influence of alternative construals of national unity on the relationship between patriotism and nationalism.

Within the context of the aftermath of 9/11, we conducted a survey study to assess the interrelationships among patriotic American identity, nationalism, and attitudes toward cultural diversity. We also introduced an experimental manipulation intended to prime different meanings of national identity to test our hypotheses about the effect of activating different forms of national unity on the pattern of relationships among these variables. More specifically, our assumption here is that the implicit meaning of national identity is reflected in the nature of the relationship between high levels of identification and attitudes toward outgroups, both external and internal. National identity in the form of essentialist ingroup pride/superiority should produce relatively high correlations between ratings on patriotism and nationalism scale items, as well as a negative relationship between patriotism and tolerance for diversity (i.e., an exclusive definition of American identity). When national identity is primarily based on shared ingroup attachment, however, this should be reflected in relatively lower correlation between patriotism and nationalism, and less negative relationship between patriotism and acceptance of internal diversity.

Design And Methods

A questionnaire survey was conducted during a 1-week period in late September 2001 with two respondent samples—one from students at Ohio State University, and the other a small community sample from Columbus, Ohio. The questionnaire was designed to assess American identification in terms of both patriotism and nationalism, perceptions of national cohesion and unity, and various attitudes related to tolerance of cultural diversity. A short paragraph inserted in the introduction to the questionnaire constituted the priming manipulation.

Participants

The university sample consisted of 148 college students (103 females and 45 males) who participated in this study in partial fulfillment of course requirements for their introductory psychology class. All were U.S. citizens. Of the total sample, 127 identified themselves as white Americans, 8 as African Americans, 6 as Asian Americans, 1 as Hispanic American, and 6 as "other."

The community sample consisted of 74 adults (32 females, 41 males, and 1 unspecified) who participated in the study voluntarily. The community respondents were recruited at a church and a restaurant in the local area and completed the questionnaires individually within that setting under the administration of a

member of the research team. Although this was a convenience sample rather than a representative sample of the community, the two settings were selected to increase the overall diversity of our survey respondents. All participants were U.S. citizens; 56 of them identified as white Americans, 2 as African Americans, 8 as Asian Americans, 1 as Hispanic American, and 7 as "other."

Materials

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section contained items designed to assess patriotism and nationalism, and the second section assessed diversity tolerance and affect toward outgroups. All items in this section were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Patriotism. Five items from the Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) patriotism scale were used to assess this aspect of identification with America: "I am proud to be an American," "I am emotionally attached to America and emotionally affected by its actions," "Although at times I may not agree with the government, my commitment to the U.S. always remains strong," "The fact I am an American is an important part of my identity," and "In general, I have very little respect for the American people" (reverse-scored).

Nationalism. Six items assessing nationalism were also taken from the Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) scale: "In view of America's moral and material superiority, it is only right that we should have the biggest say in deciding United Nations policy," "The first duty of every young American is to honor the national American history and heritage," "Other countries should try to make their government as much like ours as possible," "Foreign nations have done some very fine things but it takes America to do things in a big way," "It is really NOT important that the U.S. be number one in whatever it does" (reverse-scored), and "People should support their country even if the country is in the wrong."

Tolerance measures. Several items from the General Social Survey were adapted to assess attitudes toward cultural diversity and lifestyle diversity tolerance within the United States. These included four items assessing favorability toward multicultural values [e.g., "Ethnic minorities should be given government assistance to preserve their customs and traditions," "It is better for the country if different racial and ethnic groups adapt and blend into the larger society" (reverse-scored)] and three items assessing acceptance of lifestyle diversity (e.g., "homosexuality should be considered an acceptable lifestyle," "we should be more tolerant of people who choose to live according to their own standards, even if they are very different from our own"). These items were selected because they tap different aspects of acceptance of internal diversity and have been used frequently in national surveys.

For a more direct assessment of attitudes toward different cultural subgroups, respondents rated on a 7-point scale how close they felt to each of several social

groups, including white Americans, black Americans, Asian Americans, and Muslim Americans.

Finally, as a measure of the inclusiveness of the representation of national identity, respondents indicated how important [on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (extremely important)] each of several factors was to being "truly American." The factors rated included "being born in the United States," "being able to speak English," and "being a Christian."

Priming Manipulation

A brief description that was inserted as part of the general instructions on the first page of the questionnaire was varied with the intent to prime alternative perceptions about the meaning of American identity. In the "core essence" priming condition, respondents read the following:

> The tragic events of September 11 have united Americans as never before in our generation. We have come to understand what we have in common as Americans. As a nation, our focus is on the core essence of what it means to be an American.

In the "common goal" priming condition, this paragraph was replaced with the following:

> The tragic events of September 11 have united Americans as never before in our generation. We now have a common purpose to fight terrorism in all of its forms and to work together to help those who were victims of this tragedy.

All other instructions were the same for both versions of the questionnaire.

Procedure

The university student participants completed the questionnaires in groups of 25 people over a 3-day period. The community sample respondents were administrated the questionnaire individually during the same period of time. For both samples, the alternative versions of the questionnaire were distributed randomly so that half of the respondents received the first priming manipulation and the other half the second.

Results

All analyses were conducted with the white American subsamples only. Although both similarities and differences between whites and minority groups in patriotism and nationalism were of interest, the sample of minority respondents in these surveys was too small (and too internally diverse) to permit meaningful

statistical comparisons.[1] Further, the measures of tolerance of cultural diversity clearly have different meanings for majority and minority group members, which complicate correlational analyses. Thus, to make all analyses comparable, we elected to test our hypotheses on the white American samples, which were sufficiently large to support statistical inferences.[2]

For all participants, a patriotism score was computed by averaging responses to the five patriotism items ($\alpha = .83$). A nationalism score was computed by averaging responses to the six nationalism items ($\alpha = .72$). In addition, two different indices of tolerance for cultural diversity were generated. A multiculturalism score was computed by averaging participants' responses to the four items on multiculturalism ($\alpha = .45$). A lifestyle tolerance score was computed by averaging responses to the three items on acceptance of diverse lifestyles ($\alpha = .83$). For all of these measures, higher scores indicated higher levels of patriotism, nationalism, and favorability toward diversity (tolerance).

The closeness ratings were used to compute indices of distance to outgroups (black, Asian, and Muslim) by subtracting the rating of closeness to each of the outgroups from the rating of closeness to the white ingroup. On these indices, higher scores indicate greater distance, less tolerance or acceptance.

Each respondent's ratings of the importance of being born American, speaking English, and being Christian as criteria for being "truly American" were also used as indicators of tolerance, with higher scores indicating less inclusiveness and less acceptance of diversity.

Effects of the Priming Manipulation

For purposes of testing our hypothesis about the effects of priming different construals of American unity, we combined data from the white American respondents from the university and community samples ($N = 183$). We did find some differences between the two samples on the tolerance measures. The college students were significantly higher in lifestyle tolerance ($M = 5.10$) than the

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[1] Consistent with previous research findings (e.g., Sidanius & Petrocik, 2001), ethnic minorities in our samples scored lower on the national identity scales (both patriotism and nationalism) and higher in favorability toward cultural diversity relative to our white respondents.

[2] Exactly a year before the attack (in September 2000), we conducted a survey study among OSU college students that included measures of American identification, loyalty, and cohesion. By embedding many of the same items in the 2001 questionnaire, we were able to compare responses to these measures by members of the same college population at two otherwise equivalent points in time. The average levels of self-reported national identification, loyalty, and cohesion were already quite high in 2000 ($M = 7.03$, SD = 2.83; $M = 6.60$, SD = 2.02; and $M = 6.79$, SD = 1.98, respectively), but did increase significantly among the sample in 2001 ($M = 7.69$, SD = 1.56; $M = 7.16$, SD = 1.73; and $M = 7.70$, SD = 1.59, respectively) ($t = 2.92$, $p < .01$; $t = 1.98$, $p < .05$; $t = 2.49$, $p < .05$). Further, the consistent decrease in standard deviation of responses on all three measures suggests that the mean increase was associated with less dispersion toward the lower ends of the distribution. Thus, relative to a baseline from the previous year, we obtained empirical verification of a general increase and greater uniformity in levels of American identification, loyalty, and cohesion after 9/11.

Table 1. Patriotism, Nationalism, and Attitudes Toward Cultural Diversity (whites only)

	Essence mean (SD)	Common-goal mean (SD)	Overall mean (SD)
Patriotism[a]	6.31 (0.79)	6.49 (0.62)	6.40 (0.72)
Nationalism[a]	4.03 (0.88)	4.00 (1.06)	4.01 (0.97)
Multiculturalism[b]	3.86 (0.97)	3.82 (1.01)	3.84 (0.99)
Lifestyle tolerance[b]	4.21 (1.78)	4.55 (1.79)	4.39 (1.79)
Born in America[c]	3.22 (1.38)	3.26 (1.26)	3.24 (1.32)
Speak English[c]	4.07 (1.06)	4.43 (0.74)	4.25 (0.93)
Be a Christian[c]	2.72 (1.62)	2.70 (1.56)	2.71 (1.59)
Distance to blacks[d]	1.24 (1.49)	1.35 (1.63)	1.30 (1.56)
Distance to Asians[d]	1.40 (1.75)	1.47 (1.73)	1.44 (1.73)
Distance to Muslims[d]	1.90 (1.99)	2.01 (1.83)	1.96 (1.91)

[a]Scale from 1 to 7, with 7 indicating highest level of agreement.
[b]Scale from 1 to 7, with 7 indicating most tolerance.
[c]Scale from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating highest importance rating.
[d]Difference from whites; possible range = −6 to +6, with higher score indicating larger distance.

community sample respondents ($M = 2.95$) ($F_{1, 159} = 70.95$, $p < .01$) and showed more acceptance of multiculturalism ($M = 3.99$ and 3.41, respectively) ($F_{1, 159} = 12.54$, $p < .01$). However, the two samples did not differ significantly on the critical patriotism and nationalism scales, and there were no significant interactions between sample and priming manipulation on any of our measures.[3]

Scale means. Table 1 reports the means and standard deviations for each of our primary measures, within each of the priming conditions and overall. Respondents in the two conditions were comparable on both patriotism and nationalism, indicating that the priming manipulation did not affect the overall level of national identification expressed by participants, nor were there any significant effects on mean levels across the different tolerance measures. These findings were not unexpected, because we had predicted that our priming manipulation would have its effects on the pattern of interrelationships among our measures rather than their overall levels.

It should be noted that mean levels on the patriotism measure were very high—nearing the ceiling on the 7-point scale. Thus, heightened patriotism was uniform among respondents in this survey conducted shortly after 9/11. Nationalism scores, however, were closer to the midpoint of the scale on average, and varied between relatively high and relatively low levels across respondents. Therefore, it was possible to assess the extent to which respondents' level of extremity of patriotism was related to relatively high levels of nationalism.

[3] Random assignment to the two versions of the questionnaire was also equivalent across samples. The proportions of college and community males and females who received each of the versions were essentially the same. Among the 183 white respondents, 90 received the essence manipulation (65 college, 25 community; 54 female, 35 male, 1 unspecified) and 93 received the common-goal manipulation (62 college, 31 community; 59 female, 34 male).

Table 2. Correlations Among Patriotism, Nationalism, and Attitudes Toward Cultural Diversity in Essence and Common-Goal Conditions

	Patriotism		Nationalism	
	Essence	Common goal	Essence	Common goal
Multiculturalism	−.28**	−.04	−.34**	−.36**
Lifestyle tolerance	−.01	.11	.00	.00
Born in America	.35**	.13	.48**	.38**
Speak English	.23*	.39**	.29**	.33**
Be a Christian	.20	−.02	.37*	.22**
Distance to blacks	.26*	.16	.26*	.03
Distance to Asians	.29**	.19	.44**	.06
Distance to Muslims	.31**	.21*	.46**	.17

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

Correlates of patriotism. More important for our specific hypotheses than overall mean levels of identification and tolerance is the pattern of correlations between levels of patriotism and nationalism and tolerance. To test the hypothesis that, relative to common goal–based patriotism, essence-based patriotism is related to less tolerant attitudes toward cultural diversity, we first computed the correlation between patriotism and nationalism in the two conditions. The correlation between patriotism and nationalism was $r = .36$ ($p < .01$) in the common-goal condition but was meaningfully higher ($r = .52$, $p < .01$) in the essence condition (difference $z = 1.31$, $p < .10$). Consistent with our hypothesis, priming an essence-based construal of national unity meant that nationalism rose in association with heightened patriotism more than it did when a goal-based construal was primed. In the latter condition, patriotism was relatively independent of nationalism.

Further, as can be seen in Table 2, in general the correlations between patriotism and attitudes toward cultural diversity were significant (in the direction of an association between high patriotism and low tolerance) in the essence condition, but these correlations in the common-goal condition were consistently closer to .00.[4] Although most of the differences between these correlations were not statistically significant, the overall pattern is the same across these diverse indices of tolerance and acceptance of cultural difference. In general, in the essence priming condition, extreme levels of patriotism were associated with greater cultural intolerance. But in the common-goal priming condition, patriotism did not correlate with intolerance.

[4] Interestingly, the one exception to this pattern is the response to the item on the importance of "speaking English" as a criterion for being truly American. Having a common language is a factor related to the effectiveness of a civic society as a cooperative community, hence consistent with a goal-based perception of national identity. Further, the ability to speak English is an acquired characteristic, in contrast to being American by birth.

In contrast to these differences in the pattern of associations with patriotism, nationalism was associated with low levels of tolerance in both conditions, as one would expect. Interestingly, however, in the common-goal priming condition there was no relationship between nationalistic attitudes and distancing from ethnic minorities internally, although these attitudes were highly correlated in the essence condition.

Discussion

Consistent with our hypothesis that activating different conceptualizations of the meaning of American unity would be associated with different forms of national identification, the correlates of patriotic ingroup identity were influenced by our priming manipulation in this study. Overall, patriotism under the essence definition of American unity appeared to be incompatible with acceptance of cultural diversity within the nation. Apparently, this conceptualization of strong national identity promoted what Sidanius and Petrocik (2001) referred to as "exclusionary patriotism." A high level of patriotism in this representation is associated with derogatory attitudes toward other nations and with intolerance for variation from a common cultural standard within the nation.

Under the common-goal definition of American unity, however, patriotism was less associated with nationalistic attitudes and was uncorrelated with attitudes toward multiculturalism and diversity. This does not mean that high national identification and ingroup love promotes tolerance for internal diversity under these circumstances, but rather that patriotism and diversity are not incompatible. For some respondents in this condition, a high level of patriotism and high favorability toward multiculturalism coexisted. Thus, this form of patriotism is less likely to be exclusionary and at least has the possibility of promoting more inclusive representations of the nation.

Our results support the idea that patriotism and nationalism are separable psychological constructs. The extent to which they are related depends, in part, on what meaning of national identity is activated at the time that assessments are made. Patriotic American identity is not necessarily related to negative attitudes toward multiculturalism and minority groups in general. However, patriotism and nationalistic American identity combined are related to less tolerance to cultural diversity, negative attitudes toward minority groups, and restricted criteria for identification as a "true" American.

These results also confirm the idea that this association between the patriotic and nationalistic aspects of national identity can vary from situation to situation, independent of individual differences in chronic levels of patriotism and nationalism. In this study we did not collect data on individual differences that might predict nationalistic attitudes themselves, apart from their degree of association with patriotism. However, under conditions of threat and uncertainty in particular, patriotic zeal may or may not activate such nationalistic values, depending on

focus of attention and the perceived meaning of national loyalty. It is under just such conditions that national leaders are most likely to issue calls for national unity. The effects of our primes (analogous, perhaps, to the rhetoric of an authority figure) suggest that even subtle differences in how such messages are framed can influence whether the arousal of ingroup feelings comes with the cost of intolerance and outgroup derogation.

Data from our essence priming condition indicate that patriotism is more highly associated with nationalism when unity is predicated on similarity of identity. The results suggest further that the "core essence" of American identity is defined (at least implicitly) in terms of cultural homogeneity and something close to a nativistic, ethnic construal of what it means to be an American. Clearly, this construal can be exploited by leaders who see political advantage in mobilizing nationalistic sentiments in the name of patriotism. Although patriotism is itself a benign sense of group feeling, essentialist patriotism can make someone more susceptible to the influence of events that elicit nationalism and intolerance of ingroup diversity.

One implication of these findings is that building patriotic American identity based on shared common goals and purposes is more desirable for a pluralistic society than focusing on similarities of culture and heritage. With the analyses reported in this article, we are taken back to the long history and unresolved set of questions about unity and diversity. Unity in one sense can be achieved through difference rather than sameness (Gurin, Peng, Lopez, & Nagda, 1999). Recognition of group differences does not necessarily entail intergroup conflict, and patriotism may reinforce a sense of unity and solidarity in the face of diversity if there is an emphasis on common interests and common fate, rather than homogeneity of culture.

It is clear from our data that common goal–based patriotic national identity is compatible with tolerance for cultural diversity. Nonetheless, it does not guarantee such tolerance unless it is also associated with a reduction in nationalistic national identity. We have shown that it is possible to activate patriotism without nationalism through a simple priming procedure. Presumably, there are other naturally occurring circumstances that raise the likelihood of activating essence-based or common goal–based conceptualizations of national identity. It would be instructive to understand what educational, social, or political interventions lead to one form of patriotic identification rather than the other. Common goal–based patriotic national identity might be the way to achieve a positive regard for one's own country combined with tolerant attitudes toward cultural diversity and intergroup differences.

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dence concerning this article should be sent to Marilynn B. Brewer, Department of Psychology, Ohio State University, 1885 Neil Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210. E-mail: brewer.64@osu.edu

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