Us Versus Them: The Roles of Organizational Identification and Disidentification in Social Marketing Initiatives

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Whereas organizational identification is defined as a cognitive connection between a person and an organization, disidentification is defined as a sense of separateness. The authors conducted a mail survey to compare the attitudes and behaviors of people who identify or disidentify with the National Rifle Association or view it in a neutral fashion. The results show that whereas identification is related to people's personal experiences, disidentification is related to their values surrounding the organization. Moreover, although both identifiers and disidentifiers talk, only identifiers take action.

In the organizational behavior literature, organizational identification is broadly defined as a cognitive connection between a person and an organization (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994; Mael and Ashforth 1992), whereas disidentification is analogously defined as a sense of separateness (Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001). To take a few real-world examples of these phenomena, through its innovative social responsibility practices, Ben and Jerry's attempts to foster a sense of identification among many consumers (Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn 1995). Conversely, stakeholders' negative reactions to Exxon after the oil spill (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994) or toward Nike after allegations of sweatshop operations (McCall 1998) suggest that people also disidentify with organizations. As the following examples suggest, social marketers also attempt to build identification and/or disidentification as part of their strategies:

- In a campaign against tobacco giant Philip Morris, the California Anti-tobacco Coalition has depicted the "Marlboro Man" in billboards with the caption, "Bob, I've got emphysema." Through their television advertising and Web site links, organizations such as getoutraged.com are similarly trying to promote separation from Philip Morris. These examples illustrate how organizations such as the California Anti-tobacco Coalition and getoutraged.com are trying to influence consumers to disidentify with Philip Morris.

- People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has several initiatives in place (e.g., membership program, newsletter, online mall) to foster a sense of identification with the organization. Simultaneously, PETA is also urging consumers to disidentify with The Gap for using questionable methods to import leather from India. This example illustrates how PETA is trying to induce consumers to identify with it on the one hand and disidentify with The Gap on the other hand.

These examples are by no means exhaustive, but they help illustrate the need for social marketers to better understand how both identification and disidentification work. Specifically, we use the term "social marketing" in this article to mean "the design, implementation, and control of programs seeking to increase the acceptability of a social idea or practice in a target group(s)" (Kotler 1975, p. 283). In line with Bloom and Novelli (1981), we contend that social marketing is an endeavor that can be engaged in by profit-making organizations (e.g., Anheuser-Busch encouraging responsible drinking), as well as by nonprofit and public organizations. In other words, regardless of the sponsor, encouraging stakeholders to engage in socially responsible behavior (e.g., quit smoking, not be cruel toward animals) and to avoid or act against socially irresponsible behavior (e.g., oppose sweatshop operations) are among the principal goals of social marketing (Andreasen 1995). Identification and disidentification can help achieve these respective goals.

Moreover, as Goldberg (1995) suggests in his plea for broadening the scope of the extant social marketing domain, such goals of individual behavior change are complementary to broader societal goals of change at the policy and social environment levels. Thus, beyond this study's interest to social marketers who work for individual behavior change, the potential to affect policy as a result of these individual behavior changes (e.g., the positive effects of reduced smoking rates on health care costs leading to a ban on the marketing of tobacco products) increases the interest of identification and disidentification to policymakers as well as legislators. A similar argument is put forth in the health communications literature by Wallack (1990, p. 371), who asserts that "the way a society thinks about cigarette smoking, in the long run, is certainly as important as, and may be even more important than, getting small numbers of people to quit smoking." We contend that identification and disidentification are two important cognitive constructs that

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have not been studied previously in the social marketing literature and that not only shape people's thinking and lead to individual-level behavior change (i.e., the social marketing objective) but also could lead to related macro changes (i.e., in policy and the social environment).

More important, in some contexts, many people have a relatively inert, "neutral" orientation toward the organization, which makes them possible targets for transition to either positive or negative polarization. Knowledge of how to convert people from an apathetic state to a stronger positive or negative relationship with the organization and thereby galvanize desired behavioral change would be helpful for social marketers. Similarly, depending on his or her vantage point, a manager may be interested in not only proactively fostering identification (or disidentification) to influence behavior but also reacting to and containing (neutralizing) such efforts when opposing organizations go on the offensive.

To use identification and disidentification to their benefit, social marketers need an understanding of these constructs, their antecedents, and their consequences. More specifically, are positive affiliations formed in the same way as negative ones? How prevalent are such valenced affiliations compared with more apathetic relationships with organizations? Are there asymmetries in the behavior of people who identify with an organization versus those who disidentify? How do identifiers and disidentifiers differ from each other and from those who view organizations neutrally? Our objective in this article is to address these issues.

The empirical context of this study is the National Rifle Association (NRA). Several factors point to the suitability of the NRA for an exploratory study of this type. As Goldberg (1995, p. 350) asserts, "the dark side of marketing, involving a much wider range of products and issues, also awaits research scrutiny. Consider, for example, how the legal and illegal marketing of guns and automatic weapons contributes to the disease of violence." Rightly or wrongly, the NRA has been viewed as a contributor to such violence (e.g., Erickson 1997), which makes it a worthwhile subject of inquiry. Conversely, the opposing gun control organizations are positioned on the social platform of increased "consumer safety," and they are actively marketing the platform of increased safety to the public (Pitts 1998). Disidentification with the NRA and subsequent behavior modification in terms of reduced gun ownership, negative word of mouth, and attendance at anti-NRA rallies may lead to stricter gun control measures, which would lower the rate of unintentional shootings and violent crimes and benefit society as a whole. In contrast, identification with the NRA may lead to increased gun ownership and increased support for the NRA through donations, attendance at rallies, and so forth, which may in turn impede the efforts of reduced violence and increased safety.

More generally, social movement theorists (e.g., McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988) suggest that organizations such as the NRA also have "customers." The subjects in our sample either already support the NRA's cause (through their donations or membership) or have the potential to support the NRA's cause (e.g., by donating money, volunteering time, becoming a member). Conversely, every subject also has the potential of similarly acting against the

NRA through a variety of forums. Organizations opposing the NRA need to learn about the construct because they want to engender such disidentification among the public. The flip side is that, because widespread disidentification is typically not to an organization's advantage, controversial organizations (such as Planned Parenthood and Human Rights Campaign) need to understand the factors that are related to disidentification.

Not surprisingly, in the natural course of some focus groups we conducted, the NRA emerged as the most discussed organization—one that participants had feelings toward and to which they could relate. It was also an organization toward which participants felt both positive and negative; that is, we had a good chance of tapping both identifiers and disidentifiers through a random survey. Finally, with a membership base of more than 4 million and an annual budget of $150 million, the NRA is an established marketing organization (www.nra.org; Davidson 1996). But the NRA's influence extends far beyond these numbers. In 1999, the U.S. market consumed approximately $2.2 billion worth of firearms and ammunition—many of which were no doubt used for recreational hunting and target practice (Kesmodel 1999). However, the U.S. Department of Justice reports that there were more than 10,000 homicides and half a million serious violent crimes committed with firearms in 1999. The NRA, therefore, seems to be a good starting point for better understanding the differences between the identification and disidentification constructs as they relate to consumers.

We also clarify at the outset that organizational membership and identification, though likely to be related, are not one and the same. Whereas identification is a cognitive state, membership is a related behavior. Therefore, people who identify with an organization may take up membership (if that possibility exists) to manifest their identification; alternatively, people who join the organization as members may over time come to identify with it. However, all members need not identify with the focal organization (for an art museum example, see Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn 1995), and conversely, all those who identify with the organization need not be members (as in this study). For example, whereas 55 of the 405 respondents in this study identify with the NRA, only 21 are members (of whom 10 are identifiers and the remaining 11 view the organization neutrally). Conversely, of the 50 who disidentify, only 6 are members of organizations that oppose the NRA.

This study contributes both to theory and to practice. We add to the literature in social marketing, corporate social responsibility, and organizational identification (e.g., Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn 1995; Drumwright 1996). Moreover, extant research on identification has mostly focused on members or former members of an organization. In contrast, in recognition of the notion that these attitudes may affect the behavior of both current and potential consumers of an organization, our study focuses on the general population. Notably, although the primary focus of this article is social cause organizations, our findings also have implications for marketers of products and services: Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) show that consumers' relationship with a company can influence their reactions to the company's products.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Organizational identification is a well-established concept in the organizational behavior literature (e.g., Mael and Ashforth 1992; O'Reilly and Chatman 1986). Formally, Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994, p. 239) define identification as the "degree to which a person defines him or herself as having the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization." Note from the definition that identification is based on self-perception rather than the person's perception of an organization. Identifying with organizations is a way to preserve (or enhance) the self-concept. With increasing interest in relationship marketing strategies (see Morgan and Hunt 1994), there has been growing interest in marketing in organizational identification and the way it relates to customer behavior (e.g., Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn 1995; Drumwright 1996; Sen and Bhattacharya 2001).

Similar to organizational identification, disidentifying with organizations is another mechanism to preserve the self-concept (Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001). However, in this case, the self-concept is preserved not by developing a connection with the organization but through a sense of separation. Formally, disidentification is a self-perception based on (1) a cognitive separation between a person's identity and his or her perception of the identity of an organization and (2) a negative relational categorization of the self and the organization (Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001). The first part of this definition mirrors Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail's (1994) definition by emphasizing separation (as opposed to overlap) of the person's self-concept from that of the organization. The second part of the definition suggests that in disidentification, people affirm their social identities by categorizing organizations into groups such as "rivals" or "enemies."

Overall, disidentification and identification are similar in that both are perceptual constructs or schemas that help define a person's self-concept. Our views are consistent with the message of schema research (Fiske and Taylor 1991)—people simplify reality by storing knowledge at a molar, inclusive level. Specifically, in line with Ashforth and Mael (1989) and Bergami and Bagozzi (2000), we adopt a "molecular" view of both identification and disidentification as summary or global perceptions of belongingness to or separation from an organization. This oneness or overlap is based not on a direct correspondence between a person's own characteristics and the organization's but, instead, on an overall subjective sense of conformance between identities. Both identification and disidentification are relevant only in contexts in which a person has an opinion about the organization—as opposed to a third, neutral state of cognitive apathy in which a person seeks neither a connection with nor separation from the organization.

The basis of identification and disidentification is grounded in the general family of cognitive consistency theories. For example, Heider's (1958) balance theory—a theoretical forebear of schema models (Fiske and Taylor 1991)—suggests that people are motivated to maintain relationships in which they agree with their friends and disagree with their enemies; that is, both connections and disconnections are important in people's self-concepts. When people find themselves in situations in which they disagree with a friend, they are out of balance. To restore balance, they may change their attitudes either about the issue or about their friend. When the link in question is between a person and an organization, we propose that both identification and disidentification enable people to change their attitudes about the organization and thereby enhance or maintain their self-concepts. Unlike in the extant consumer behavior literature, in the case of identification and disidentification, this attitude change is made not on the basis of consumer characteristics or brand features and attributes but on the basis of specific organizational ideologies, policies, and practices.

To elaborate, ideologies, policies, and practices are integral components of an organization's image (Barich and Kotler 1991). In particular, social cause organizations are often positioned on distinct platforms (e.g., Greenpeace helps preserve the environment). In contrast, policies and practices of goods and services providers typically involve the conduct of corporate employees or human resources (e.g., racial and sexual fairness/discrimination in hiring, benefit policies, employee policies with regard to volunteering), procurement (e.g., socially responsible buying), manufacturing (e.g., using child labor), marketing (e.g., advertising content and style, pricing practices), and business policy (e.g., the product lines of the company, corporate philanthropy, alliances with nonprofits, pollution, toxic waste and other environmental policies). In some organizational contexts, the practices are generally known to the public (e.g., Phillip Morris sells cigarettes), and in other cases, unanticipated events bring the practices to light (e.g., an employee tape-recorded conversations in a company meeting to reveal racial discrimination at Texaco).

In terms of organizational identity construction (Scott and Lane 2000), in general, a person's beliefs and inferences with regard to these policies and practices coupled with his or her prior knowledge and experience with an organization, as well as the organizations' reputation, lead to certain overall evaluations regarding the organization's identity. These overall evaluations, when assessed for overlap with the person's identity and self-concept, lead to feelings of connectedness (i.e., identification), separation (i.e., disidentification), or indifference. Note that identification and disidentification need not be tightly coupled; in other words, it is not necessary to identify (disidentify) with Organization A in order to disidentify (identify) with Organization B. For example, a person may disidentify with the NRA but may not identify with any particular gun control organization. Moreover, even within the context of one organization, prior identification is not a necessary condition for disidentification at some later stage.

In support of these basic notions, using a combination of literature reviews, archival data, focus groups, and survey research, Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) show that organizational identification and disidentification are qualitatively distinct constructs (versus two oppositional ends of the same construct). Overall, their study suggests that though organizational identification is primarily a mechanism for identity enhancement, disidentification is related not only to enhancement but also to people's motivations for identity maintenance. In other words, under certain condi-

tions, people's identities may be threatened by an attitude of indifference toward an organization, and disidentification may be necessary to maintain their identities and self-concepts. Other studies in psychology have found similar distinctions between constructs. For example, positive affect and negative affect are different from each other (Diener and Emmons 1984).

Whereas Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) focus on establishing that identification and disidentification are different constructs and investigating the antecedents and consequences of disidentification, we focus on distinguishing between the profiles of people who identify or disidentify with an organization or view it neutrally. In other words, we start by categorizing people into identifier, disidentifier, or neutral and subsequently establish systematic differences across these groups. Thus, our study is more in the spirit of Belch and Belch (1987), who find that boycotters and non-boycotters of a product base their attitudes on different criteria: Whereas corporate associations matter more for boycotters, nonboycotters are affected more strongly by product attributes.

We draw on the organizational behavior and marketing literature in this area to propose factors that not only seem to be systematically related to both organizational identification and disidentification but also likely discriminate among the profiles of identifiers, disidentifiers, and those who neither identify nor disidentify with a focal organization of interest (i.e., the neutral group). For example, given that these feelings of connection with and/or separation from organizations are often rooted in people's value systems, prior research suggests that values and beliefs toward issues that are central to the focal organization's identity are related to identification (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994; Scott and Lane 2000). Similarly, contact with an organization (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994; Mael and Ashforth 1992) is associated with identification; therefore, we examine the role played by personal experience with issues that are central to the focal organization's identity. Because the external image of an organization is related to identification (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994; Pratt 1998), we believe that it is important to examine the role the perceived reputation of the focal organization plays among identifiers and disidentifiers. Finally, the link between identification (and disidentification) and behaviors such as public discourse about the focal organization and action for (against) the focal organization has been documented by several researchers (e.g., Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Mael and Ashforth 1992), so we examine how identifiers, disidentifiers, and neutrals differ in this regard. In the following sections, we propose how the relative association of these variables differs across people who identify, disidentify, and feel neutral toward an organization.

Values and Beliefs Toward Issues Central to the Organization's Identity

Organizational behavior researchers (e.g., Ashforth and Mael 1989) have suggested that identification is related to the consistency between people's self-concepts and their perceptions of an organization's identity. Researchers have even defined organizational identification as a congruence between organizational and individual values (Hall and

Schneider 1972). Therefore, identification with the focal organization will be related to the values the person holds toward the issues that are central to the organization's identity. Similarly, disidentification may be necessary as a means to preserve a person's self-concept when there is a perceived incongruence or conflict between the person's values and those of the focal organization. This is particularly likely if the values on which the organization is positioned are also central to the person.

In general, identifiers want to be known as being assimilated with the organization, whereas disidentifiers want to be known as distinct. Notably, in similar situations in psychology, the motivations for distinctiveness have been shown to be stronger than the motivations for assimilation (Brown and Williams 1984; Oakes 1987). This suggests that disidentifiers who view themselves to be in an "us–them" relationship with the organization want to be differentiated from the organization more than identifiers who view themselves to be in an "us–us" relationship with the organization want to be considered similar. Thus, compared with the effect on identifiers, disidentifiers' perceptions of the focal organization will be more strongly associated with their values and beliefs toward issues that are central to the organization's identity. More formally,

H_1: On values central to the organization's identity, disidentifier > identifier > neutral.

Personal Experience in Contexts Central to the Focal Organization's Identity

People selectively expose themselves to particular information, tasks, and other people that permit the maintenance and strengthening of desired identities (Schlenker 1985). Studies of organizational identification have shown that contact with an organization, through participation in its activities and/or consumption of its products, is positively related to identification (Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn 1995; Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994). Increasing contact leads to greater salience of the shared values between the organization and the person and therefore to identification.

In contrast, familiarity often leads to greater differentiation and perceived variability and thus to more moderate judgments (Fiske and Taylor 1991). Bringing people with positive and negative feelings together is one possible way to break down their mutual misperceptions. Typically, disidentifiers are less likely to encounter additional, novel, or unusual information about the focal organization—and this biases their encoding of all subsequent information in ways that are consistent with their existing negative attitudes (Schlenker 1985). This line of reasoning suggests that people who have greater information, knowledge, familiarity, or experience with an organization and its traits will be more moderate in their feelings about the organization and less likely to disidentify.

H_2: On personal experience in contexts relevant to focal organization's identity, identifier > neutral > disidentifier.

Organizational Reputation

Organizational reputation refers to outsiders' beliefs about what distinguishes an organization (Dutton and Dukerich

1991). These reputations are constructed from a mix of sig-
nals that include factors such as social responsiveness and
media exposure (Fombrun and Shanley 1990). Organiza-
tional identification researchers have established that identi-
fication is positively related to the prestige of the organiza-
tion's identity (Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn 1995) and a
sense that the organization is respected and admired by
meaningful referents (Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Dutton,
Dukerich, and Harquail 1994). In essence, when people con-
strue the reputation as attractive, affiliating with the organi-
zation creates an opportunity for a positive social identity.
Thus, those who identify with an organization should be
more affected by their perceptions of its reputation than are
those who view it neutrally. The reverse arguments should
hold true for disidentification: A perceived unattractive or
negative organizational reputation should lead to disidenti-
fication. That is, people maintain their senses of self by dis-
tinguishing themselves from salient but (perceived) unat-
tractive organizational reputations.

Researchers have argued, however, that negative informa-
tion is perceptually more salient than positively valenced
information and given more weight than positive information
(Peeters and Czapinski 1990; Taylor 1991). Therefore, nega-
tive organizational information may have greater impact in
shaping a person's identity than does positive information. In
other words, organizational reputation is likely to affect
disidentifiers to a greater extent than identifiers.

H_3: On perceived organizational reputation, disidentifier > iden-
tifier > neutral.

Public Discourse About the Focal Organization

Talking about the focal organization is a way of increasing
the relevance of the organization as a source of self-defini-
tion. In this case, publicly talking about the organization is
akin to being a spokesperson for the organization, which
may be considered a form of citizenship behavior (Bergami
and Bagozzi 2000). People who identify with organizations
perceive the organization's successes and failures as their
own (Ashforth and Mael 1989) and expend efforts that are
directed toward preserving, supporting, and improving the
organization (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994).

Similarly, we believe that people who disidentify with an
organization will also be more prone to talking about the
organization than are those who view the organization neu-
trally. In this case, saying negative things about the organi-
zation is people's way of protecting their social identity and
self-integrity. Notably, such criticism is often a more imme-
diate and convenient form of self-affirmation than is taking
action against the focal organization (Taylor 1991).

One question is whether identifiers are more or less likely
to talk publicly about the organization than disidentifiers
are. It is possible that identifiers are more exposed to social
contexts that are more conducive to such conversation. In
contrast, negative feelings about organizations may be more
salient and more easily recalled than positive feelings; this
suggests that disidentifiers are more prone to talking pub-
licly about the organization than identifiers are. On balance,
therefore, we posit that there will not be any difference
between these two groups in the extent to which they pub-
licly talk about the focal organization.

H_4: On public discourse related to organization, identifier =
disidentifier > neutral.

Actions For or Against the Focal Organization

We posit that identification will lead to actions in support of
the focal organization, whereas disidentification will lead to
actions against the focal organization. Mael and Ashforth
(1992) have shown that identification on the part of alumni
leads to increased donations to the alma mater. Similarly,
O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) show significant linkages
between extra-role behavior (for which the person receives
no immediate reward and which benefits the larger organi-
zation) and identification. Finally, in the context of restau-
rant employees, Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) show that
identification leads to citizenship behaviors.

In the realm of disidentification, people will take actions
against the focal organization to maintain their sense of self.
These actions can range from personally boycotting a product
or service, writing to the media and other relevant constituents
(Day and Landon 1977; Singh 1988), or even supporting an
opposing organization (e.g., donating to the American Cancer
Society to maintain disidentification with cigarette compa-
nies). These actions are motivated not only by people's
desires to enhance their image but also by people's desires to
avoid dissonance associated with acting inconsistently with
their established beliefs and prior commitments.

Again, there may be arguments suggesting the relative
extent to which identifiers and disidentifiers will take
actions in favor of or against a focal organization. Some
exploratory focus group data suggest that though doing
good does not help, doing bad hurts; that is, the negative
actions of disidentifiers may be greater in intensity than the
positive actions of identifiers (Barnard et al. 1993). How-
ever, in reality, the extent to which action is taken may
depend on the relative ease of taking such action, the sizes
of the focal organization and the opposition, and so on.
Therefore, on balance, we posit no difference in the extent
to which these two groups take action for or against the focal
organization.

H_5: On action related to the organization, identifier = disidenti-
fier > neutral.

In summary, people may feel positive, negative, or neu-
tral toward an organization. We believe that these overall
attitudes toward an organization are differentially related to
a set of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. In the following
section, we describe a large-scale empirical study that tests
our assertions.

Methods

We conducted a random survey of households in a large
southeastern U.S. city that probed people's attitudes and
behaviors with specific reference to the NRA. In the survey,
in addition to the scale items pertaining to the constructs of
interest, we asked questions about the subjects' knowledge
and experience with the NRA and with organizations oppos-
ing the NRA and questions on demographics such as sex,
age, and occupation.

The execution of the survey closely followed the guidelines
provided by Dillman (1977). We used a mailing list company
that provided us with names, addresses, and limited demo-

graphic information (e.g., age, income, sex) for a random sample of 1000 households. In addition to a cover letter outlining the academic purpose of the survey, we attached postage-paid return envelopes and a $1 incentive. One week after the first mailing, we mailed a follow-up postcard to all survey recipients. Two weeks after the first mailing, we mailed a second wave of surveys along with an updated cover letter to recipients who still had not responded. Of the 1000 surveys we mailed, 962 were received by respondents (38 were returned by the Post Office). As a result of these efforts, of the 962 received by respondents, 531 were completed and returned to us, for a response rate of 55.2%. To ensure that our sample was knowledgeable regarding the issue at hand, we eliminated 126 respondents who professed that they were "not at all familiar with the NRA," which left a usable sample of 405 respondents. Of these, 21 (5%) were NRA members, and to the extent that this is an overrepresentation of the NRA membership in the U.S. population (1.6% of individuals and 4% of households), our results may have limited generalizability.

In terms of demographics, respondents were 41% female, 59% male. The age of respondents ranged from 24 to 78 years, with an average of 48 years and a standard deviation of 9.9 years. Respondents self-categorized their occupations as 49% professional, 21% managerial, 12% clerical/technical, 6% labor/blue collar, 9% other, and 3% currently unemployed. The median income range was between $60,000 and $65,000. In terms of nonresponse bias tests, we investigated how the respondents compared with the overall sample to which we mailed the questionnaires in terms of three key demographics—age, income, and sex. Our mailing population was 50% women and 50% men, so it seems that our respondent sample has a slight overrepresentation of men. There is no age difference among respondents and nonrespondents. At first blush, the median income of the respondents at $60,000–$65,000 seems at variance with the population statistics (median at $50,000–$55,000). However, when we factor in the sex representation of the respondents and the higher earnings of men than of women in the mailing population, the overall disparity between the respondents and nonrespondents ceases to be of much concern.

Measurement of Variables

The two dependent variables of interest to us are identification and disidentification. Table 1 provides the scale items and reliabilities for all the constructs used in the study. Respondents indicated their level of (dis)agreement with each statement on a five-point scale ("agree strongly" = 5). Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) used the same scale items and showed through confirmatory factor analysis that identification, disidentification, and the other five variables of interest are all qualitatively distinct constructs. Specifically, the confirmatory factor analysis results show that the measurement model with all seven latent constructs had an acceptable fit: λ^2 (131 degrees of freedom [d.f.]) = 627.08 ($p < .01$), goodness-of-fit index = .87, normed fit index = .87, incremental fit index = .90, comparative fit index = .90, root mean square error of approximation = .09.

On the basis of the confirmatory factor analysis results, we used several tests to further assess discriminant and convergent validity for the measures. We constructed a 95%

Table 1.   Scale Items and Reliabilities

Construct	Scale Reliability (α)[a]
Organizational Identification	.87
1. The NRA's successes are my successes.	
2. When someone praises the NRA, it feels like a personal compliment.	
3. When someone criticizes the NRA, it feels like a personal insult.	
Organizational Disidentification	.79
1. The NRA's failures are my successes.	
2. When someone praises the NRA, it feels like a personal insult.	
3. When someone criticizes the NRA, it feels like a personal compliment.	
Perceptions of the NRA Based on Values and Beliefs About Guns and Control	.81
1. I have values and beliefs about gun control that have affected my perceptions of the NRA.	
2. I have values and beliefs about gun laws that have affected my perceptions of the NRA.	
3. I have values and beliefs about gun ownership that have affected my perceptions of the NRA.	
Perceptions of the NRA Based on the NRA's Reputation	.70
1. The NRA's reputation in my community has affected my perceptions of the NRA.	
2. The effect of joining the NRA on a person's reputation has affected my perceptions of the NRA.	
Perceptions of the NRA Based on Personal Experiences	.72
1. I have had personal experiences that have affected my perceptions of the NRA.	
2. A friend or family member has had personal experiences that have affected my perceptions of the NRA.	
Actions	.83
1. I have done volunteer work (for or against the NRA).	
2. I have made charitable contributions (for or against the NRA).	
3. I have joined organizations (for or against the NRA).	
Public Discourse	.90
1. I have publicly expressed my feelings (positive or negative) about the NRA.	
2. I have publicly expressed my opinions (positive or negative) about the NRA's goals and objectives.	
3. I have publicly expressed my feelings (positive or negative) about supporters of the NRA.	

[a]The reliability coefficient α is Cronbach's alpha.

confidence interval around the correlations between the latent constructs. None of the confidence intervals included 1.0 or –1.0, which provided some evidence of discriminant validity. In addition, a series of nested model comparisons assessed whether differences were present when correlations between the latent constructs were constrained to 1.0. Statistically significant differences between each model pair indicate discriminant validity. It is noteworthy that compared with the models in which the traits were allowed to correlate freely, the model fit worsened significantly each time we constrained the correlation between any pair of constructs to 1 or –1, implying again that all of these are different constructs. Finally, we conducted a more stringent test, recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981), which demonstrated discriminant validity by showing that the

Table 2.   Within-Group Means

Variable	Identifiers (n = 55)	Disidentifiers (n = 57)	Neutral (n = 293)
Values and beliefs	4.08	4.50	3.88
Personal experience	3.41	2.66	2.88
Reputation	3.04	3.30	2.77
Public discourse	3.56	3.48	2.58
Action	2.84	2.10	2.01

Tests of Equality of Group Means

	Sum of Squares	Wilks' Lambda	F-Statistic	d.f. 1	d.f. 2	Significance
Values and beliefs	25.325	.906	20.898	2	402	.000
Personal experience	23.494	.937	13.411	2	402	.000
Reputation	8.334	.974	5.422	2	402	.005
Public discourse	77.221	.832	40.622	2	402	.000
Action	30.590	.893	24.043	2	402	.000

average variance extracted from each latent construct exceeds the squared correlation between all pairs of constructs. This series of tests provided evidence of discriminant validity between all pairs of constructs. Together, the results provide evidence that the measures have the sound psychometric properties necessary for hypothesis testing.

For the purposes of this study, we classified identifiers and disidentifiers as those who scored higher than 3 on the respective scales (there were no overlaps), and we classified the rest of the respondents as neutral (i.e., those who neither identify nor disidentify). Such classification into groups based on the midpoint of the scale is common in similar contexts (e.g., Roberts and Berger 1999). This classification scheme resulted in 55 identifiers, 57 disidentifiers, and 293 people who neither identify nor disidentify (i.e., are neutral). The scale items and the internal reliabilities of the independent variables (i.e., discriminators) are also noted in Table 1. Note from the scale items that all participants (i.e., identifiers and disidentifiers alike) responded to the same scales; they only needed to know themselves whether they felt positive or negative about the organization.

Results

To test the proposed hypotheses, we used multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and multiple discriminant analysis (MDA), both well-accepted procedures for understanding group differences. For the MANOVA, the scale variables (i.e., values, personal experience, reputation, public discourse, and action) were the dependent variables, and the classification variable (i.e., whether someone was an identifier, a neutral respondent, or a disidentifier) was the independent variable. Although the neutral category is much larger than the other two, these cell size differences per se do not pose any problems with the analyses.[1]

All four multivariate tests (Wilks' lambda, Pillai's trace, Hotelling's trace, and Roy's largest root) suggest that the effects in the model are highly significant ($p < .001$). In other words, the mean vectors of the dependent variables differ across the three groups. Table 2 provides the within-

Table 3.   Test of Multiple Comparisons (Tamhane)

Dependent Variable	Comparison[a]	Mean Difference (Standard Error)
Values and beliefs	D–N	.62 (.12)***
	N–I	−.20 (.10)**
	I–D	−.42 (.15)***
Personal experience	D–N	−.22 (.13)*
	N–I	−.53 (.14)***
	I–D	.75 (.18)***
Reputation	D–N	.53 (.13)***
	N–I	−.27 (.13)**
	I–D	−.26 (.17)
Public discourse	D–N	.90 (.15)***
	N–I	−.98 (.14)***
	I–D	.08 (.19)
Action	D–N	.09 (.12)
	N–I	−.83 (.12)***
	I–D	.74 (.15)***

[a]D denotes disidentification, N denotes neutral, and I denotes identification. The corresponding mean differences are shown in the next column.
*$p < .10$.
**$p < .05$.
***$p < .01$.

group means and addresses the issue of whether the group-mean differences are significant for each dependent variable considered alone. As the results show, consistent with the multivariate results and in line with our expectations, all five variables show significant differences across groups.[2]

For a sense of the specific intergroup differences for each variable, we conducted multiple comparison tests that account for alpha inflation by focusing on the experiment-wise error rate. The results are consistent across various testing procedures. In Table 3, we report the results of Tamhane's test that accounts for unequal covariance matri-

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[1]If we had a choice, we would have preferred to obtain more equal group sizes (e.g., 135 in each of the three groups) for higher overall power, but our survey results did not turn out that way.

[2]Admittedly, because these tests are based on independent pairwise comparisons, there is a risk of alpha inflation. But given the strong significance levels (the highest is .009), we expect the effects of each of these variables to differ significantly across the three groups even after we account for multicollinearity.

ces across the groups.[3] Examining the *p*-values that correspond to the multiple comparisons in conjunction with the group means, we find that H_1 is supported: Values and beliefs of both identifiers and disidentifiers more strongly relate to their respective perceptions of the NRA than do the values and beliefs of the neutral group. Moreover, disidentifiers' perceptions of the organization are more strongly associated with their values and beliefs than are those of the identifier group ($p < .05$). The results with regard to personal experience also support our expectations. We find that, compared with both the neutral group and disidentifiers, the role of personal experience is stronger for identifiers. Moreover, disidentifiers' perceptions of the focal organization are less related to their personal experience than are those of the neutral group ($p < .1$). In other words, lack of personal experience is associated with disidentification. H_2 is supported.

The results with regard to reputation (H_3) suggest that, as expected, both identifiers' and disidentifiers' perceptions of the focal organization are more strongly related to the perceived reputation of the organization than are the perceptions of the neutral group. However, contrary to our expectation, disidentifiers' perceptions are not more strongly related to the organization's reputation than are identifiers' perceptions.

As predicted in H_4, identifiers and disidentifiers engage in greater public discourse about the organization than do people who neither identify nor disidentify. Moreover, there does not seem to be any difference between the identifier and disidentifier groups on this score. With regard to action for or against the focal organization (H_5), we find that, consistent with our expectations, identifiers act in support of the focal organization to a greater extent than the neutral group does. Disidentifiers do not differ from the neutral group in the extent to which they act against the organization. Finally, although we expected no difference between identifiers and disidentifiers in terms of support for or against the focal organization, we find that identifiers "walk the talk" by supporting the NRA to a greater extent.[4]

The discriminant analysis adds a few more insights to the MANOVA results. Specifically, we estimated a three-group MDA in which the groups composed of identifiers, disidentifiers, and neutral respondents and the five dependent variables of the MANOVA now constitute the independent variable list. Table 4 summarizes the results of the discriminant analyses. Again, various multivariate statistics such as Wilks' lambda and Pillai's trace and the corresponding F-ratios show that the model is significant ($p < .0001$). Moreover, as suggested by the Wilks' lambda and the associated chi-square statistic, both canonical discriminant functions are significant ($p < .001$).

It is also instructive to examine the group centroids as well as the standardized coefficients of the canonical discriminant function to learn more about the differences among the groups (Table 4). The group centroids suggest that whereas identifiers and disidentifiers differ from each

Table 4. Discriminant Analysis Results

Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

	Function 1	Function 2
Values and beliefs	.449	-.308
Personal experience	.008	.645
Reputation	.225	-.447
Public discourse	.725	-.303
Action	.123	.725

Functions at Group Centroids

	Function 1	Function 2
Disidentifiers	1.018	-.605
Neutral	-.308	.025
Identifiers	.754	.687

other mostly in terms of Function 2, the difference between both identifiers and disidentifiers compared with the neutral group is the main source of discrimination for Function 1. Drawing on the discrimination function coefficients, we find that identifiers and disidentifiers differ from the neutral respondents mostly in terms of public discourse and values (the two strongest coefficients for Function 1). Similarly, the biggest differences between identifiers and disidentifiers are in terms of actions and personal experience (the two strongest coefficients for Function 2). Finally, although our primary objective is to understand intergroup differences rather than to classify objects into groups, we computed a hit ratio using the "leave one out" principle. The classificatory power of the model (76.3%) is better than chance, as judged by the proportional chance criteria (56.1%), the maximum chance criteria (73.3%), and the Press's Q statistic ($p < .01$).

Discussion

Do people affiliate with organizations both positively and negatively? Are such affiliations (systematically) differentially related to a set of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors? The results of our research suggest a positive response to both questions and point to theoretical and practical implications for strengthening identification and containing disidentification.

Researchers have long emphasized that identification is a way for people to preserve and enhance their self-concepts. This study suggests that, along with organizational identification, disidentification is also part of the strategy people use to sustain and enhance positive social identities. Thus, this study enlarges both the organizational identification literature and the view of the "extended self" (Belk 1988). As our results suggest, the extended self seems to stem not only from material possessions or even memberships (Bhatcharya, Rao, and Glynn 1995) but also from people's positive and negative psychological connections with organizations.

In the context of organizations (such as the NRA) that are viewed both positively and negatively by constituents, our central finding is that these affiliations are related differentially to the set of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors investigated in this study. Thus, compared with an apathetic state, whereas positive affiliations with organizations are nurtured

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[3]A Box test for the equality of covariance matrices rejects the hypothesis of equality.

[4]It could be argued that the 11 NRA members in the identifier group are driving the results for H_5. However, the results hold good even after we remove these members from the identifier sample.

through personal experience with the organization and/or the products and issues surrounding it, disidentification is related to a sense of value incongruence between the person and the organization and simplified images of the organization developed through its perceived reputation. Our findings also show that, when compared with the neutral group, both identifiers and disidentifiers exhibit distinct behavior patterns such as talking about the focal organization. However, identifiers go beyond talking and act on their beliefs, whereas disidentifiers stop at discourse. This distinction is a validation of and addition to the identification literature that has touted action—beyond words—as one of the benefits of identification (e.g., Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Mael and Ashforth 1992).

Along with Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001), we also show that formal organizational membership—either in the employee or customer arena—is not a prerequisite for forming such positive or negative connections. As emphasized previously, most of our identifiers (disidentifiers) were not NRA members (members of gun control organizations). In other words, organizations that are not so strongly membership oriented are also likely targets for identification and disidentification. In general, organizations that are narrowly defined and strongly associated with a particular value or issue (i.e., social cause organizations) are more likely to have identifiers and disidentifiers specifically because of the distinctive value and issue. Examples would be organizations that oppose smoking or domestic violence, pro-life and pro-choice organizations, gay rights organizations, animal rights organizations, and for-profit organizations that are positioned or reputed for specific socially responsible or irresponsible activities (e.g., sweatshop operations, racial discrimination). Conversely, organizations that have diffuse positions and multiple identities in the marketplace (e.g., United Way) are less likely to be identified and/or disidentified with.

Our findings are important for social marketing because they suggest a broader scope for social marketing strategy. To elaborate, our study suggests that social marketing efforts need not necessarily be confined to changing behavior within an organization's own membership, attracting more members, or even inducing the target audience only to think favorably in terms of the mission of the organization. Identifying with the focal organization or disidentifying with an opposing organization while belonging to the general public and subsequently engaging in word of mouth and individual-level action are also legitimate ways of supporting the focal organization's social change efforts. For example, in certain contexts, the social marketer may decide that it is more efficient to influence people to distance themselves from opposing organizations (e.g., PETA's efforts with The Gap) than to affiliate with the focal organization. At a minimum, such disidentification will be associated with negative word of mouth toward the opposing organization, which in turn may have more macro consequences such as shaping societal thinking on a particular issue (Wallack 1990).

These findings have several practical implications that can be used to strengthen and/or contain identification and disidentification as is deemed necessary. The main practical implication is that people do identify and disidentify with organizations, and this leads to certain systematic behavior patterns; therefore, social marketers should think strategically about managing the patterns. Moreover, given that we find a sizable segment that is apathetic toward the NRA, depending on the context, social marketers should also consider inducing disidentification among the neutral segment. Before delving into the specifics, it is worth emphasizing, however, that promoting identification and/or containing disidentification may, in certain cases, involve repositioning the organization in people's minds (e.g., the recent efforts by Phillip Morris to position itself as a socially responsible company). This is a difficult task, particularly for organizations that have an indelible, negative image to begin with. Notably, depending on the target audience's stance toward various issues surrounding the focal organization, in their communication strategies, managers may decide to reposition either the focal organization itself or the competition. However, bear in mind that particularly in the context of ideological organizations or ones that deal with controversial causes, such repositioning and the business of fostering identification (or disidentification) in general is a double-edged sword. In promoting identification among one segment, social marketers may inadvertently promote disidentification among another.

In terms of the practical implications, our findings speak to controversial organizations such as the NRA that may themselves be the targets of disidentification. In this case, we believe that because perceived value incongruence, lack of personal experience, and (perhaps because of selective perception; Schlenker 1985) the formation of simplified images based on media reputation all relate to disidentification, fact-based information dissemination about the focal organization and its actions can help quell disidentification. Thus, many of our focus group participants agreed that they would find it difficult to disidentify with the NRA if they knew that the NRA was involved in funding rape crisis centers or battered women's shelters. Similarly, Nike consumers who disidentify with the company because of its overseas sweatshop operations often do not know that those overseas employees earn much more than do employees who work in local organizations. Thus, beyond strengthening identification, ongoing information-oriented communication can also help mitigate disidentification.

Our research also has implications for anti-NRA social-cause organizations such as Handgun Control Inc. Such an organization is interested in bolstering identification with itself, influencing people to disidentify with the NRA, and converting the neutral segment to identify with it and/or disidentify with the NRA. First, given the role of personal experience in identification, Handgun Control should focus its own identification-bolstering efforts mostly on people who, either directly or indirectly, have suffered from gun-related incidents. Second, communication strategies heightening the salience of people's values are appropriate for both groups. However, the messages for garnering identification and disidentification should be different—whereas the former would emphasize the similarity between the person's and Handgun Control's values, the latter would harp on the incongruence between the person's values and those of the NRA. Third, given that personal experience strongly discriminates between identifiers and disidentifiers, it may

be easier for an organization such as Handgun Control to get a larger body of people to disidentify with the NRA than to identify with itself. However, although the disidentifiers will benefit Handgun Control through their negative word of mouth about the NRA, our results suggest that they are unlikely to undertake other proactive behaviors (e.g., writing senators, participating in anti-NRA rallies).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The generalizability of the findings in this study is limited in two respects: First, we cannot be sure that the special place the NRA has in the public's mind because of the fundamental importance of the issues it deals with did not influence the responses in some systematic fashion. Second, perhaps because the empirical investigation for this study was conducted in the southeastern United States, the NRA membership was slightly overrepresented in this study (21 of 405, or 5%) compared with the national average (1.6% of all individuals or 4% of all households). Given that the members either identified with or were neutral toward the NRA, in particular, some of the responses of the identifier and neutral groups may have been influenced by this overrepresentation.

This study raises several research issues. Theories of group identity and intergroup behavior introduced in this article can also be used to understand the formation of brand communities (e.g., Muniz and O'Guinn 2001) and other cause-based communities that are becoming increasingly popular on the Internet. With what do these people identify—is it the brand, the cause, or the opportunity to communicate with other people through this medium? Another pertinent research issue for both theory and practice is whether a distinctive, ideological corporate positioning is better than adopting a "middle ground." This issue involves the interdependency between identification and disidentification. Could strategies directed at building identification result in creating disidentification instead? A possible example worthy of empirical research is advertising that has a social dimension (Drumwright 1996): Is it cause related (that could build identification) or cause exploitative (that could lead to disidentification)? More generally, are certain identity-building dimensions more vulnerable to being misinterpreted than others? We hope that this study will inspire inquiry along these lines.

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