

## Identity Fusion with One's Country and Willingness to Fight for it: The Moderation Role of Universalism Values



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Social identification can promote benevolence toward ingroup members but can also instigate hostility toward outgroup members, especially when the former group feels mistreated. Identity fusion with one's country, a feeling of union with it, is a good predictor of willingness to fight people who have offended or threatened it. In this study, we propose that universalism values – concern about equality and justice for all people – attenuate the link between identity fusion with one's country and willingness to fight those who disrespect it. In a Chilean sample ( $N = 160$ , age between 18 and 63 years,  $M_{\text{age}} = 31.21$  years,  $SD = 8.90$  years; 73.1% women), a multiple regression analysis supported our hypothesis. We discuss the implications of this result for interventions directed to improve intergroup relationships.

*Key words:* identity fusion, universalism values, willingness to fight, intergroup relationships

In the context of a migration crisis in Iquique, a Northern Chilean city, many members of the host community attacked a group of immigrants who they blamed for the growing criminality rate and deterioration of the living conditions in that city (BBC, 2022). Terrible situations like this are just the overt expression of strong rejection against immigration in our country: 69% of Chileans desire immigration to be restricted and only 39% believe that immigrants could make a positive contribution

to our country (Criteria, 2021). Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) provides a compelling explanation for hostile attitudes toward foreigners. People are prone to dividing the social world into “us” and “them” groups. This social identity or sense of belonging to the ingroup becomes integrated into our identity, and so people are motivated to obtain a positive social identity – an identity that would boost their self-esteem – by holding an intergroup bias that favors their in-

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group over the outgroup. Many studies have supported this theory by showing that social identification is related to intergroup bias and conflict (see Al Ramiah et al., 2011).

On the other hand, theorizing on basic values suggests that self-enhancement motivations of this sort might be counteracted through universalism values (UV; e.g., Schwartz, 2010), that is, through attaching special importance to acceptance, equality, and justice for all human beings. The goal of our study is to examine the potential moderating role of UV in the link between identity fusion with one's country and willingness to attack people who have threatened or offended it. Past research has shown that identity fusion with a group predicts willingness to fight outgroups better than other group identification variables (Fredman et al., 2015; Swann et al., 2010). Hence, it is particularly important to establish if UV can attenuate the link of identity fusion with willingness to fight outgroups and to conduct that examination within the context of fusion with one's country given the problems of negativity toward immigrants referred to above.

### Identity Fusion with a Group

Identity fusion is a strong feeling of connection with a group. Fused people feel that their personal and social identities are merged and believe that they share essential qualities with their group (Gómez et al., 2020; Swann et al., 2009; Swann et al., 2012). Fused individuals also establish ties with the group as a whole and with ingroup members, who come to be perceived as if they were relatives (Buhrmester et al., 2014; Swann et al., 2014). Identity fusion has been associated with a willingness to fight for the ingroup by attacking people from outgroups who have threatened or offended the ingroup (e.g., Bortolini et al., 2018; Henríquez et al., 2020; Swann et

al., 2014). This result has been found in studies targeting different types of groups, such as favorite football team, religious group and country. Identity fusion is a better predictor of this willingness to fight than measurements of group identification from the classic social identity theory (Besta et al., 2014; Buhrmester et al., 2014; Gómez et al., 2011; Gómez et al., 2019). Most studies on identity fusion evaluate *willingness* to perform extreme behaviors (Henríquez et al., 2020; Gómez et al., 2020), instead of actual performance. However, there is evidence that identity fusion predicts actual extreme behaviors. For example, Libyan revolutionaries, who displayed extreme behaviors in the frontline to remove Gaddafi, showed higher levels of identity fusion with their battalion than revolutionary Libyans not being part of the frontline (Whitehouse et al., 2014).

In this study, we used the country as the reference group and expected to replicate the relationship between identity fusion with the country and the willingness to fight reported in the literature.

### Universalism Values

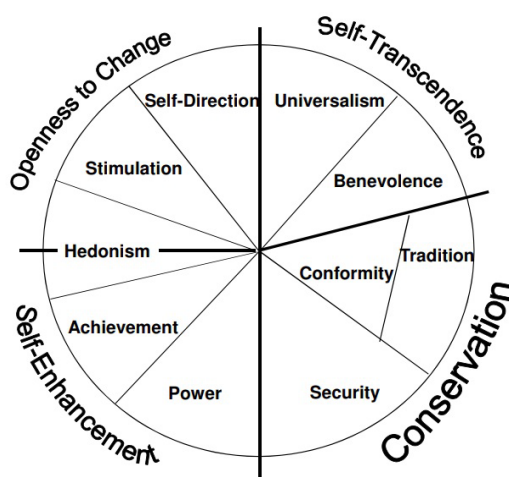
Values refer to what people hold important in life. UV, in particular, refer to attaching relevance to understanding, protection, equality, and justice for all individuals, even members of outgroups (Schwartz, 1994). UV emphasize the similarities over the differences with other people and promote being concerned for all people (Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 2012). Consistently, UV have been associated with more positive attitudes toward outgroups (Beierlein et al., 2016; Davidov & Meuleman, 2012; Davidov et al., 2014; Ponizovskiy, 2016; Schwartz, 2007a, 2010; Vala & Costa-Lopes, 2010; Vecchione et al., 2012). Thus, in our study, we expected a negative relationship between UV and willingness to

fight for one's country against individuals who have offended or threatened it.

UV were conceptualized within the theory of basic values developed by Shalom Schwartz and colleagues. Those authors propose that values are general beliefs that guide our lives and motivate attitudes and behaviors. Besides, they suggest that basic values are universal because they are based on human needs such as social interaction, survival, and welfare (for a review see Sagiv et al., 2017; Schwartz 2012; Schwartz et al., 2012). Values can influence behavior in three ways: individuals act to attain and maintain the goals associated with their values; people plan behaviors that lead to expressing their values; and persons focus their attention on elements that threaten or provide opportunities for attaining their values (Cieciuch et al., 2015).

The theory of basic values posits the existence of ten universal values organized into two polar dimensions composed of four higher-order values: *self-transcendence* ver-

sus *self-enhancement values* and *openness to change* versus *conservation values*. The values included in each component share the same motivational goal. The self-transcendence component includes UV. The four components are ordered in two polar dimensions that reflect competing or opposite values, which implies that there is a prioritization of some values over others. People do not decide by considering values separately, but they compare them and choose some over others, creating a hierarchy (Schwartz, 2012). The polar dimension formed by self-transcendence versus self-enhancement represents the conflict between other-oriented values associated with concern for other people's welfare (self-transcendence) and self-oriented values related to pursuing personal interests (self-enhancement). The other polar dimension confronts openness to change and conservation values. The former denotes the disposition to change and independence of feelings, thoughts, and behavior, while the latter points to maintaining



Note. This figure was taken from Schwartz (2012).

Figure 1 Model of relationships among ten values.

the past, conforming to social norms, keeping order, and opposing changes (Schwartz, 2012; Schwartz et al., 2012)<sup>1</sup>. The two polar dimensions are represented in Figure 1. The basic values theory has been empirically supported in different countries (e.g., Beramendi & Zubietta, 2017; Bobowik et al., 2011; Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995; Saiz, 2003; Sandy et al., 2017; Schwartz, 2007b, 2012; Schwartz & Bardj, 2001).

### The Present Study

Previous studies have examined moderators of the relationship between identity fusion with one's country and willingness to fight for it, such as beliefs regarding the moral justifiability of violence (Chinchilla et al., 2021), or shared genes or core values within the country (Swann et al., 2014). However, to our knowledge, the current study is the first one to examine whether UV might moderate the link between identity fusion with one's country and willingness to fight for it. We hypothesized that UV would attenuate the effect of identity fusion on willingness to fight because those values promote care, and concern for all individuals, including those who do not pertain to one's country. Specifically, when Chile or Chileans are threatened or offended by outgroup members, fused people who embrace UV would be less inclined to fight against those outgroups than fused individuals who do not hold UV.

Our hypothesis is also consistent with the common ingroup identity model (CIIM). According to this model, intergroup bias is reduced if ingroup members perceive both themselves and outgroup members as part of a greater, superordinate group, thereby creating a common identity instead of perceiving the ingroup and the outgroup as two separat-

ed groups (Gaertner et al., 1996; Gaertner et al., 1993). The CIIM has been supported empirically (e.g., Andrighetto et al., 2012; Robinson, 2016). Nevertheless, further evidence has shown that a common identity does not necessarily reduce intergroup bias when individuals are highly connected with the ingroup, because they might feel that the common identity threatens their ingroup distinctiveness (Crisp et al., 2006; Esses et al., 2006; Jetten et al., 2004). For people highly connected to their ingroup, a decrease in intergroup bias has been found when those individuals develop a dual identity, whereby they identify with the superordinate group while simultaneously maintaining their identification with the ingroup (Guerra et al., 2010; Landabur & Wilson, 2022; Riek et al., 2010).

In the present study, we reasoned that UV imply categorizing all individuals as part of one group, humanity. This proposal is coherent with the positive correlations found between UV and identification with all humanity (Hamer et al., 2019). Thus, according to our hypothesis, fused people with Chile that also prioritize UV (i.e., those who would have a dual identity), would express less willingness to fight against outgroups than fused individuals who attach low relative importance to UV (i.e., those who would perceive ingroup and outgroups as separated groups).

## Method

### Participants

A non-probabilistic sample of 160 Chileans participated online (age between 18 and 63 years,  $M_{\text{age}} = 31.21$  years,  $SD = 8.90$  years; 73.1% women). The participants' activities were as follows: workers (47.5%), workers and students (30.6%), students (20.6%), and unemployed (1.3%). We promoted the study among people in the general community,

<sup>1</sup> For more details of this theory, see online supplementary material (Table S1).

students and non-students, from different regions in Chile. Specifically, the study was advertised through Facebook pages, emails sent to several universities across the country and to acquaintances, who were asked to invite their relatives and friends to participate.

We conducted a sensitivity analysis using G\*Power for the moderation effect: linear multiple regression,  $N = 160$ ,  $\alpha = 0.05$ , power = .80, one tested variable (the interaction term), and a total of 5 predictors (the interaction term, moderator, independent, and two control variables: age and sex). Sensitivity analysis indicated that this study can detect a minimum effect size of  $f^2 = 0.050$  ( $R^2 = .053$ ).

### Measurements

*Verbal Fusion Scale.* We evaluated identity fusion with Chile using the adapted verbal scale from Gómez et al. (2011), which is the most used scale to measure this concept ( $\alpha$ s between .70 and .93 have been reported; e.g., Besta et al., 2015; Jong et al., 2015; Swann et al., 2014). Participants indicated their agreement with seven statements about their relationship with the country (e.g., “I feel immersed in my country”, “I am strong because of my country”) using a Likert scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

*Willingness to Fight for the Group.* We adapted the scale developed by Swann et al. (2009) to evaluate willingness to fight those who have threatened or offended Chile ( $\alpha$ s ranging from .73 to .88 have been reported; Gómez et al., 2021; Paredes et al., 2018; Swann et al., 2009). Participants rated their agreement with five items (e.g., “I would fight someone physically threatening another Chilean”, “I would help others get revenge on someone who insulted Chile”) using a scale from 0 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

*Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ).* To evaluate UV, we used the Chilean version of the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ; Schwartz et al., 2001) developed by Saiz (2003). The instrument consists of 40 items that describe 40 different people with particular aspirations and desires, associated with ten values, and every value is measured by three to six items (UV are evaluated by six items). According to their reported gender (male, female, “other”), participants were assigned to a scale version with the respective pronoun (he, she, he/she). This adjustment was made because the PVQ asks participants about how much they identify with the particular person depicted in each item. No other changes were made, so the content of the items was the same for all participants, regardless of their gender. Participants were asked to answer, “How much like you is this person?” from 0 (not like me at all) to 6 (very much like me). Item examples of universalism values are “He/She thinks it is important that every person in the world be treated equally. He/She believes everyone should have equal opportunities in life”, and “He/She believes all the worlds’ people should live in harmony. Promoting peace among all groups in the world is important to him/her”.

### Procedure

Participants were invited to participate in an online study about the perception of the country and the disposition to protect it. Before responding to the survey, potential participants read and approved an informed consent that included the study conditions and safeguarded the confidentiality of their data. Participation was voluntary and anonymity was guaranteed. They were offered to be included in a raffle (one prize of 30,000 Chilean pesos, about US\$42 at the time of recollection data) for their participation. Participants

Table 1 *Descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and Pearson correlations*

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Identity fusion				
2. Willingness to fight	.55***			
3. Universalism values	-.35***	-.45***		
4. Age	.23**	.19*	-.10	
Sex	-.18*	-.15	.17*	-.24**
<i>M</i>	2.37	1.10	1.30	31.21
<i>SD</i>	1.45	1.14	.67	8.90
$\alpha$	.90	.81	.73	

Note. Sex was coded: man = 0, woman = 1.  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

gave their consent by clicking on a webpage. Then, in the following order, they responded to the Verbal Fusion Scale, the Willingness to Fight for the Group scale, a demographic questionnaire (age, activity, nationality, sex, and gender), and the Chilean version of the PVQ. We performed all analyses in SPSS v. 21. We controlled for age and sex<sup>2</sup> in the analyses because these variables turned out to be associated with our main variables in this study and have shown an effect on intergroup attitudes in previous studies (e.g., Besta et al., 2014; González et al., 2017; Swann et al., 2014). Data are available at <https://data.mendeley.com/datasets/cscv6m3fgg/2>.

## Results

Descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations are displayed in Table 1.

As expected, identity fusion with Chile and UV showed, respectively, positive and negative correlations with the willingness to fight for the country. Identity fusion with Chile and UV correlated negatively with each other, which is to be expected considering that identity fusion with any given country implies

favoring this country over all others in the world. In contrast, UV entail a concern for all humankind, instead of favoring any country over others.

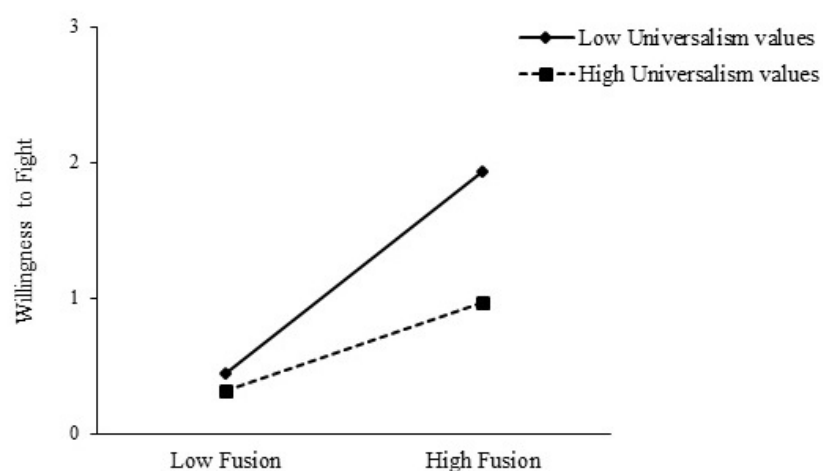
Most participants reported low and middle scores for identity fusion (45% and 82% of participants indicated a score below 2.0 and 4.0, respectively). Likewise, the majority of the participants obtained low scores on willingness to fight (80% of participants informed a score below 2.0).

According to Schwartz's (2007) recommendation, the score for each value was calculated following an ipsatization procedure. Each person's response was centered on his/her mean rating of all items in the PVQ, thus representing his/her preference for each value over the other values. Our results replicated the circular system of values (see supplementary material for details, including Table S2 in the online supplement). We then proceeded to test whether the relationship between identity fusion and willingness to fight was moderated by UV. To do so, willingness to fight scores were regressed on the mean-centered scores of identity fusion and UV (the independent and moderator variables, respectively), their interaction term, and age and sex as control variables (see Table 2).

<sup>2</sup>The same pattern of results was observed when gender, instead of sex, was controlled for.

Table 2 Regression analysis on willingness to fight for the country

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	.91	.31	2.97	.003
Identity fusion	.37	.05	7.02	.000
Universalism	-.41	.11	-3.59	.000
Identity fusion X Universalism	-.22	.07	-3.30	.001
Age	.00	.01	.40	.690
Sex	.01	.16	.05	.957



Note. Values for low and high universalism and identity fusion represent  $\pm 1$  SD from the mean.

Figure 2 Identity fusion and universalism values interactively predict willingness to fight for the country.

Results showed that the interaction between identity fusion and UV had a significant effect on willingness to fight,  $b = -.22$ ,  $t(154) = -3.30$ ,  $p = .001$ . Figure 2 depicts this interaction (independent and moderator variables were split at  $\pm 1$  SD from the mean). Tests of simple slopes show the association between identity fusion and willingness to fight for people with high UV ( $b = .22$ ,  $t(154) = 3.32$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and low UV ( $b = .51$ ,  $t(154) = 7.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In sum, this result supported our

main hypothesis, that UV attenuated the relationship between identity fusion with Chile and willingness to fight for it.

As expected, there were also main effects for UV,  $b = -.41$ ,  $t(154) = -3.59$ ,  $p < .001$ , and for identity fusion  $b = .37$ ,  $t(154) = 7.02$ ,  $p < .001$ . The whole model (UV and fusion main effects plus their interaction effect), explained around half of the variance of willingness to fight ( $R^2 = .450$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Sex and age did not explain any additional variance in



willingness to fight ( $p > .05$ , for both control variables).

### Discussion

This study examined the moderating role of UV on the relationship between identity fusion with Chile and the willingness to fight against people who have offended or threatened Chile. To our knowledge, this is the first study exploring this particular moderation. As hypothesized, results showed that UV attenuated the effect of identity fusion on willingness to fight. Fused people with the country who prioritize UV showed significantly less willingness to fight against outgroup members than fused individuals who do not prioritize UV.

A tentative explanation for this moderation could be formulated in terms of the CIIM (Dovidio et al., 2007; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000, 2012; Gaertner et al., 1993). UV would represent the connection with all humanity – the superordinate group – while identity fusion with the country would represent the connection with the subordinate group, i.e., the ingroup. Hence, fused individuals with Chile who prefer UV would have a dual identity. That is, they would perceive themselves as members of their country and simultaneously as members of a superordinate group that includes all humanity. They would display less willingness to fight outgroups than fused people who do not prioritize UV because they would not perceive Chileans and foreigners as two separated groups but as equal members of the worldwide community. This dual identity would not threaten the ingroup distinctiveness (in this case, the identity fusion with the country), which should improve attitudes toward outgroups (Guerra et al., 2010; Riek et al., 2010). Future studies should examine whether fused people with the country who prefer UV have a dual identity and, in turn, if

that dual identity decreases the willingness to fight outgroups.

The found attenuation of willingness to fight outgroups for fused people who prioritize UV could be used in interventions to improve intergroup relationships. In our results, identity fusion correlated negatively with UV. Thus, fused individuals with their country would have a lower preference for UV. Coherently, previous research has informed negative associations between national identification and UV (Roccas et al., 2010). Therefore, interventions in fused people would require increasing their preference for UV to improve their attitude toward outgroup members. Although studies have reported relative stability over time of individuals' hierarchies for basic values (Sundberg, 2016; Vecchione et al., 2016), there is evidence of value change. For instance, studies have shown that an increase in the preference for self-transcendent values (such as UV) occurs by telling the participants that these values are prioritized by people in their reference group (Maio et al., 2009; Rokeach, 1975). Future research could experimentally explore if that procedure increases the preference for UV among fused people. These proposed interventions could be applied to the country or other groups such as soccer fans (Kossakowski & Besta, 2018) or religious communities (Fredman et al., 2017), in which there are fused individuals who are willing to fight against threatening outgroups.

Some scholars have suggested that the relationship between identity fusion and willingness to fight could be reduced through *defusion*, i.e., diminishing identity fusion with the group (Fredman et al., 2015; Gómez et al., 2019). Our proposed intervention programs would be a better option for three reasons. First, our proposal does not require reducing the level of identity fusion with the ingroup. Feelings of connection with the group and its members represent an important part of



fused people's identity, so reducing fusion would negatively affect their identity, worsening their quality of life. Second, diminishing fusion levels could be unviable because fusion tends to be stable over time (Gómez et al., 2020). Third, according to the CIIM, our proposal implies maintaining the identity fusion with the ingroup while simultaneously fostering UV, which would create a dual identity (e.g., perceiving oneself as a Chilean and also as a member of the worldwide community). This dual identity would not threaten the ingroup's distinctiveness, and hence would promote positive attitudes toward outgroups (Guerra et al., 2010; Riek et al., 2010).

These results can be applied to current conflictual processes such as migration between countries. Migration implies positive consequences for the host and immigrant populations, such as cultural, social, and economic exchanges, but it can also bring conflicts associated with differences between those populations (e.g., Eger et al., 2022; Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2016; Urzúa et al., 2020; Yzerbyt & Demoulin, 2012). The country targeted in our study, Chile, is particularly important to the examination of intergroup relationships at a macro level, given that Chile has received a great amount of immigration recently and Chileans show increasing negative attitudes toward immigrants (e.g., Carmona-Halty et al., 2018; Critería, 2021; Departamento de Extranjería y Migración, 2020; González et al., 2017).

The relationships between identity fusion and willingness to fight remained significant ( $b = .54, p < .001$ ) after including UV as a moderator. This result implies that there might be other attenuators of this relationship. In a study published after our data collection, Chinchilla et al. (2021) found that considering violence as a not morally justified action attenuated the link between fusion with the country and violent pro-country behavior.

Future studies should evaluate if both variables jointly contribute to moderate the fusion-fighting link.

Secondarily, we replicated the positive association between identity fusion and willingness to fight, which is consistent with the literature (e.g., Fredman et al., 2015; Gómez et al., 2020; Henríquez et al., 2020). In addition, we found a negative relationship between UV and willingness to fight. Although previous research has not examined this association, this finding is coherent with the relationship between UV and positive intergroup attitudes reported in the literature (e.g., Davidov et al., 2019; Ponizovskiy, 2016; Schwartz, 2007a; Vecchione et al., 2012).

The limitations of this study are associated with the sample and data recollection. Sampling was non-probabilistic, and the sample ( $M = 31.21$  years old) was younger than the adult Chilean population ( $M = 46.89$  years old; Ministerio de Desarrollo Social y Familia, 2020) and the proportion of women was higher in our sample than in the population. Other than age and sex, other comparisons cannot be made, either because we did not evaluate the variables involved (e.g., social class, or SES) or population statistics were lacking (e.g., identity fusion with the country, values). Besides, most participants obtained low and middle scores on identity fusion and low scores on willingness to fight. Therefore, generalization of the present results to adult Chileans in general or to other populations should be made cautiously. Nevertheless, we replicated the circular values system and the association between identity fusion and willingness to fight found in different countries. Moreover, our results are comparable to other Chilean studies in terms of preferred values: in our sample favorite values were universalism, benevolence, and self-direction, which have been reported as prioritized in other Chilean studies (Navarro et al., 2009;

Saiz, 2003; Sánchez et al., 2012). Likewise, the mean of identity fusion in our sample (2.37) was similar to those obtained in other studies conducted in Chile, which show scores between 2 and 3 (authors; Swann et al., 2014).

On the other hand, data were recollected cross-sectionally, hence our results cannot be used to support causal interpretations. Despite these limitations, the present results provide initial evidence for a new option to reduce the effect of identity fusion on willingness to fight against outgroups and so they might be used to improve intergroup relationships more generally.

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