Why frames, not (just) essentialist theories, are central to prejudice

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Centering social identities in interaction with others is pervasive and often pernicious, reducing complex individuals to mere instances of coarse-grained social kinds. A common explanation appeals to a cognitive predilection for essentialist theories, which then generate stereotype-conforming scripts. We argue that the appropriate order of explanation is reversed. Essentialist theories are the culmination of a process of cognitive entrenchment in which identitarian frames – slogans, pictures and iconic symbols – play a central role, by regulating attention, interpretation, and response in an intuitive, open-ended way. To explain the heterogeneous domains, contents, and mechanisms of identity-centric thought and action, we need more than just beliefs. And to intervene effectively on pernicious identitarian habits, we need more than just arguments: we need memes, images, slogans, and other frames that move us beyond seeing others in reductive and tokenizing ways.

1. Introduction

Current culture is dominated by identitarian themes. We routinely center social identities in political discourse, in our social affiliations, and in everyday interactions. One unfortunate result is that members of marginalized groups often find themselves treated as if they are "just" tokens of those groups: as "nothing more" than a woman, a black person, a Muslim, a wheelchair-user, etc. Correlatively, people who are not members of those groups often find those identities "popping out" in their intuitive thinking about and interactions with individuals who are such members, sometimes despite their best efforts.

Centering social identity in this way can be deeply pernicious. It motivates the use of generic claims, essentialist beliefs, and slurs. Further, it leads even those who avoid such claims, attitudes and words to regulate their thoughts and actions in accord with entrenched stereotypes. For example, people are more likely to interpret a black man reaching into his pocket as reaching for a gun than for a wallet (Correll et al. 2002, Eberhadt et al. 2004, Payne 2001); or to sit further away from a black woman than a white one (Amodio & Devine 2006, Nosek et al. 2007). Such identity-based expectations and reactions render us complicit in enacting oppressive social norms in subtle and unreflective ways, and can lure us into enforcing them more overtly through political action, hate crimes and genocide (Tirrell 2012).[1]

Crucially, not every case of identity-centric thinking is pernicious: among other things, it can play a key role in self-construction and progressive politics (Camp and Flores 2024). Nor do all of the pernicious effects of identitarianism originate in our minds: social identities are implemented in and perpetuated by institutional and material structures that extend beyond any individual person's psychology (Haslanger 2020). But psychology is one key factor in producing these pernicious effects.

[1]For a thorough recent treatment of the various wrongs that can be at play when we center social identities, see Beeghly 2025.

Thus, unless we can understand the psychology of identitarianism, the prospects for addressing and correcting such effects are dim.

At the same time, identity-centric thinking is highly heterogeneous, in ways that make delivering a coherent theory of identitarian psychology challenging. Most obviously, it encompasses a wide range of identity categories, which have varying social, material, and cognitive significances. Agents can center any given identity in a variety of ways, ranging from merely feeling moved by inchoate, implicit and unwanted affective responses, to explicitly endorsing the identity's causal centrality on the basis of a developed theory. Agents can also center identity through a variety of modalities, including perceptual "pop out," cognitive stereotypes, and visceral emotional and aesthetic reactions. And they can center identities in these various modalities via diverse mechanisms, including imagistic imagination, inference, and unconscious association.

We will argue that despite its daunting variety, this heterogeneous range of contents, states, and processes can be subsumed under a unified explanation. To do so, we appeal to *frames*, or representations with the function of schematizing and stabilizing intuitive interpretation. More specifically, we propose:

> **The Frame View**: An agent's patterns of identity-centric thought and action are explained by their identity-centric frames (at the limit, just perspectives) about the relevant social group.

In a nutshell, a frame is a representational vehicle (e.g., a sentence, picture, or symbol) that organizes an agent's overall thinking about a topic by expressing a perspective on it (Camp 2019a). Perspectives, in turn, are open-ended, intuitive dispositions to notice, explain, and respond to some portion of the world in a certain way (Camp 2013, 2014, 2019b). The Frame View thus holds that patterns of identity-centric thought and action are explained by an agent's tendency to interpret others in a way that focalizes the relevant identity or identities, where this tendency is typically anchored in representations of that identity. Such representations can take a variety of forms, including slurs and other derogatory terms ("fag," "slut"), generics and slogans ("Boys will be boys," "Make America Great Again"), memes (Pepe the frog), and visual tropes (Barbie dolls). Because such frames are often integral devices of our cultural toolkit for social understanding and coordination, the Frame View also explains how social practices of centering identities gain a foothold in individual minds.

The Frame View is a non-intellectualist view. In particular, while believed propositional contents can encapsulate and guide interpretation in an open-ended intuitive way, not all frames are believed, or take propositional form. And even for those that do, the characteristic function of belief doesn't adequately explain their cognitive role as frames. More generally, identity-centric thought and action do not result primarily from endorsing the ascription of a property to an individual or group. Rather, they result from regulating attention and response in terms of a social identity. Thus, we claim that in order to explain identitarianism, we need to examine the resources that ordinary agents bring to intuitively interpreting the world, and not merely the theories they construct or endorse about it. To address the dark side of identitarianism, we need to go beyond theory change and put substantial resources into reframing social reality.

We proceed as follows. In §2, we canvas the cognitive phenomena involved in identity-centric thought and action. In §3, we articulate the Frame View. In §4, we argue that it can explain the emergence of full-fledged essentialist theories out of inchoate, implicit identity-centric thinking. In §5, we discuss

what sorts of non-intellectualist interventions on pernicious forms of identitarianism the Frame View might support.

1. Centering Social Identities in Thought and Action

Though it should be independently plausible that as a culture we do routinely center social identities, it is much less clear just what "centering identities" involves in terms of cognition and behavior. In this section, we outline what we take to be the central strands of identity-centric thought and action.

For expositional clarity, we focus on traditional gender categories ("woman" and "man"), which are familiar targets of such thinking. However, part of our ultimate point is that the interpretation of different social categories is cognitively implemented in very different ways, and hence that caution is called for in extrapolating from any particular case.

Gender categories are highly *salient*. We notice gender immediately and involuntarily and treat it as a basic fact about a person. This salience is reflected in gendered pronouns, which route the vast majority of our thought and talk through gender (Dembroff and Wodak 2018, 2021). It is displayed in the fact that many people find it unsettling to interact with gender non-conforming people (Lopes 2019). More prosaically, the salience of gender is manifested by the ubiquity of the question "Is it a boy or a girl?" to expecting parents, and in the tradition of 'gender reveal' parties.

One reason knowing someone's gender matters is that we employ different *patterns of behavior* toward women and men. These range from explicit, culturally conventionalized scripts, such as men paying for women's drinks on dates, to subtle, contextual patterns in seating distance, speech prosody, and amount and type of physical touch. We can proceed more smoothly in our daily interactions if we use gender to coordinate these patterns.

Less practically, we tend to cognitively *project* properties along gender lines: we expect women to share important properties with other women that they don't share with men, and vice versa. That is, gender functions as a category for induction via complex, socially shared gender *stereotypes*, which often find expression in generics like "women are cooperative" or "men are assertive." Such stereotypes carry rich descriptive imputations, including causal information about how different properties relate to each other (Neufeld 2024). They also often have a normative dimension: they don't just capture what we think women and men are in fact like, but how we feel they ought to be (Del Pinal and Reuter 2017, Knobe et al. 2013, Leslie 2015, Newman and Knobe 2019).

Descriptively, stereotypical properties play a pervasive role in how we process socially-inflected information. The behaviors we observe around us don't wear their causes on their sleeves. Stereotypes guide our interpretation of the token acts and events we encounter by influencing which categories we subsume them under, and what other past, present, and future properties we expect on their basis. Thus, the same request for a raise may be described as 'aggressive' in a woman but 'assertive' in a man. Rejecting flirtation may be perceived as an invitation to further pursuit in a woman but as disinterest in a man. And socially coerced cooperative behavior, such as shouldering service roles at work, may be interpreted as originating out of a caring nature in a woman but as the result of prudential motivation in a man.

On the normative side, we have a clear intuitive sense of what sorts of behaviors are appropriate for which types of people, ranging from what to wear to how to structure one's career, relationships, and sexual life. For many, violations of these norms are jarring. In some, they provoke moral criticism and intense emotions like anger and contempt. They often also provoke strong aesthetic responses. For example, women's voices may sound shrill and annoying; or body hair on women may seem crude and disgusting while long painted fingernails on a man may seem garish and alien. These moral, emotional, and aesthetic responses are often immediate and automatic, in a way that makes them appear obvious and natural.

To *center* gender, it isn't necessary to attend to gender above all other categorical features in every situation, or to project all of an individual's unobserved features in terms of gender. One merely needs to find gender significantly salient, to project some range of features on its basis, and to behave differently toward individuals as a result. Moreover, people differ in how much, and in what ways, they center gender. In the extreme case, womanhood becomes an attentional fixation (Whiteley 2023), treated as an all-encompassing, rigid category regulating every aspect of a woman's life; but nearly everyone centers gender to some extent, even if begrudgingly.

Gender provides a particularly clear and pervasive example of identity-centric thought and action. But we also center other broad identity categories, including race, class, sexual orientation, religion, and disability status; as well as more specific identities such as mother, professor, and athlete. Summarizing and generalizing, we can say that the following are characteristic of a subject *S* whose patterns of thought about and action regarding a group *G* are *G*-centric:

- **Salience**: *S* finds *G*-membership significantly salient.
- **Stereotypical Thinking**: *S* employs a stereotype for what *G*s are like.
- **Induction**: *S* expects individual *G*s to possess *G*-typical properties.
- **Action Interpretation**: *S* interprets the behavior of individual *G*s by appeal to *G*-stereotypical features.
- **Normative Judgment**: *S* is disposed to criticize *G*s for failing to conform to norms for stereotypical *G*s, and is disposed to offer behavioral prescriptions based on *G*-membership.
- **Emotional Reaction**: *S* experiences negative emotional reactions to *G*s who do not conform to stereotype, and positive (or less negative) emotional reactions to *G*s who do.
- **Aesthetic Reaction**: *S*'s aesthetic responses and evaluations to individual *G*s and to *G*s in general are guided by conformity to the stereotype for *G*s.
- **Patterned Interaction**: *S* interacts with *G*s and non-*G*s in different ways.

We take these eight features together to offer a theoretically perspicuous but relatively uncontroversial description of the most important elements of an independently familiar phenomenon of identity-centric thought and action, one which is rarely explicitly articulated. But more than just describing identitarianism, we are interested in understanding its roots, partly with an eye to designing interventions for addressing its more pernicious manifestations. Thus, our central questions for the next section are: what is the psychological basis for these patterns of thought and action? What kinds of mental states, processes, and dispositions underlie and explain them?

2. The Frame View

Given that identity-centric thought and action encompass such a wide class of attitudes and behaviors, one might think it could have no explanatorily unified basis. Instead, explanations will be heterogeneous and piecemeal: *this* behavior is explained by the agent's endorsed beliefs and deliberations, *that* by implicit bias, the other by a primed image, and so on.

In our view, such pessimism is unwarranted. It is true that identity-centric thought and action are produced by a wide and diverse range of mental states, processes, and dispositions. Nonetheless, we can understand identity-centric thought and action in a unified way by focusing on the cognitive resources agents deploy in interpreting the social world. In typical cases, these disparate states, processes, and dispositions are all regulated by *frames*: representational devices (linguistic or non-linguistic) with the function of guiding an agent's intuitive interpretation of some aspect of the world. Especially for materially significant identities like race and gender, the operative frames will tend to be culturally widespread.

In this section, we argue for:

> **The Frame View**: An agent's patterns of identity-centric thought and action are explained by their identity-centric frames (in marginal cases, just perspectives) about the relevant social group.

It is easiest to grasp the Frame View by considering a specific identity-centric frame and how it regulates thought and action. Take "Boys will be boys," which we think expresses a perspective on masculinity that disposes agents to interpret a range of aggressive and transgressive behaviors by boys and men as natural, exuberant, and playful.

Insofar as you are a competent member of the culture in which this slogan circulates and it functions as a frame for you, it will affect your intuitive perspective on male behavior to some degree, however subtly and fleetingly. *Inter alia*, it will render you more inclined to characterize male behaviors in positive or at least exculpatory terms; to highlight endearingly boyish features of males; to link them together as originating from a common source; and to empathize with male motivations. At the limit, you might end up characterizing Brock Turner, who raped an unconscious woman behind a dumpster at a fraternity party, as "happy go lucky...with an easy-going personality and a welcoming smile," and experiencing outrage at the severity of the justice system for condemning a young man for "20 minutes of action."[2] [3]

Treating the slogan "Boys will be boys" as a frame explains its cognitive power to regulate thought, feeling, and action in a holistically integrated, ongoing way. By contrast, merely attributing the belief that boys will be boys to the agent cannot explain this. The slogan's semantically encoded propositional content is tautologous, or nearly so. Inferences from this proposition are poor candidates for producing the rich, affect-laden characterizations and evaluative responses just discussed. Nor is there is

[2] These descriptions are from Brock Turner's father's letter, read out at his sentencing hearing. See: https://www.stanforddaily.com/2016/06/08/the-full-letter-read-by-brock-turners-father-at-his-sentencing-hearing/

[3] For more on how frames can yield socially and politically pernicious interpretations and block agents from giving uptake to more apt ones, see Flores 2025.

any obvious, stable, determinate propositional content that is pragmatically associated with the slogan which would explain these effects.

Of course, this is just one example. To establish the Frame View, we need to show that identity-centric thought and action generally are explained by frames and perspectives. In §3.1, we discuss the cognitive role of frames and perspectives in more detail, arguing that they are ubiquitous in our thinking and that they powerfully shape our behavior. In §3.2, we show how frames and perspectives can explain the wide variety of forms of identity-centric thought and action canvassed in §2.

2.1. Frames, Perspectives, and Interpretation

Frames are representational vehicles that guide interpretation. These representations include slogans such as "Boys will be boys"; mantras such as "I am a magnet for wealth"; slurs such as 'libtard'; flags such as the Pride flag; pictures such as Tank Man in Tiananmen Square; and instances of well-trodden cultural tropes such as *Pretty Woman's* hooker with a heart of gold. What makes these otherwise disparate representations into frames is how they function: they orient interpretation in an integrated, open-ended, intuitive way by regulating what you notice, how you classify it, what you project from it, and how you evaluate and respond to it. In short, frames are representations that function to express a focal interpretive principle which organizes an agent's overall intuitive thinking about a topic.

The focal interpretive principles expressed by frames schematize, stabilize, and package in a shareable format the otherwise messy, amorphous, and tacit interpretive dispositions that constitute a *perspective*. A perspective is an open-ended disposition to interpret (parts of) the world: to notice, connect and respond the world in certain ways. More specifically, we analyze perspectives as clustered dispositions to parse, select, and prioritize certain kinds of information; to explain and connect information by centering certain factors and grounds of connection; and to evaluate features and situations in certain practical, moral, aesthetic, and emotional terms (Camp 2017, 2019b, 2025).

Perspectives are dynamic, open-ended tools for handling whatever information comes one's way, within a given domain. When it encounters a particular situation or chunk of information in the world, a perspective delivers a *characterization* of it. A characterization is a rich, intuitive cognitive representation that subsumes a complex body of information, often including experientially vivid, affect-laden features, into a holistic multidimensional structure (Camp 2015, 2019b). We form characterizations of many different types of entities: groups (e.g. Americans, quarterbacks), places (e.g. the New York subway, Paris), individuals (e.g. my mother, Donald Trump, Notre Dame Cathedral), events (e.g. that hike where I got bitten by a snake), periods of our lives (e.g. high school), historical periods (e.g. the Great Depression), and so on.

Stereotypes – that is, intuitive, culturally entrenched representations of social types – are the most familiar instances of characterizations. For example, many people outside of the United States share a stereotype of Americans as (among other things) tall and beefy; always wearing sneakers and workout clothes; speaking loudly and with gratingly open vowels; gulping down oversized burgers, sodas, and frozen ready-made meals, often in front of a TV; oblivious to their surroundings but impressed by anything over 200 years old; and endorsing individualistic, libertarian or quasi-libertarian politics.

This stereotype illustrates the aspects of characterizations and perspectives mentioned above. First, it manifests a distinctive pattern of attention. Attention *parses* lower-level features into repeatable

categories relative to a presupposed taxonomy of kinds and of the features possessed by instances of those kinds. For example, a non-US-residents' perspective on Americans parses utterances' phonological patterns into various types of accents, and clothes into styles. Attention also *selects* just some parsed features as relevant: for instance, diet and clothing, but (probably) not hair color or number of siblings.

Second, a stereotype of Americans is not just a list of abstract attributed features. Many of those features, like having a grating accent, are represented in an experientially *vivid*, affect-laden way. Some features, like volume of speech, are more *prominent* than others, in the sense of being more initially noticeable and accessible to recall. And most features are also connected into networks of *centrality* (Thagard 1989, Sloman et al 1998). In particular, some features are treated as more explanatorily central than others: for instance, individualism may explain eating frozen meals alone in front of the TV instead of lingering over raucous family meals, as well as a propensity to carry guns and support lower taxes. Explanatory connections can be drawn on a range of grounds, including causation, correlation, and material implication; as well as moral, aesthetic, and other forms of normative justification.[4]

Third, the stereotype *evaluates* both particular attributed features and the overall target topic, in terms that are appropriate given the characterizing agent's background categories, values and priorities. For example, the non-US-residents' perspective on Americans might construe individualism in general as selfish and myopic, and value subtlety, restraint, and complexity over straightforward, explicit representation and communication.

We've illustrated this stereotype by mentioning specific features we expect to be widely recognizable. But stereotypes are highly, often frustratingly flexible; and other, less culturally-entrenched characterizations are even more so: they lack necessary and sufficient conditions, and can incorporate any given bit of information in myriad ways. Perspectives are open-ended dispositions to interpret the world, or some aspect of it, by forming and updating characterizations that are structured and colored in certain ways. Thus, upon being told or "clocking" someone as American, a non-US-residents' American-identity-centering perspective guides which particular features they register, and how they connect and respond to them, in ways that can vary considerably from case to case.

Crucially, while perspectives and characterizations can be specified in abstract, explicit terms, they are themselves essentially *intuitive*: they involve actual implementation in an agent's cognitive dispositions and structures, in a way that is partly but not entirely under voluntary control. Thus, it's not sufficient to employ the sterotypical-American-centric perspective that one explicitly entertain or even accept the claims "Americans have a grating accent," "Americans are loud and boorish," and/or "Americans like to go it alone." Rather, one must actually *hear* Americans' accents as grating, *notice* their sneaker- and sweats-wearing, *explain* various of their behaviors as manifestations of individualist libertarianism, *expect* them not to be sensitive to subtle nuances in manner, be *motivated* to do things like mock those features, and so on.

Putting these components together: agents have open-ended, clustered dispositions to interpret the world in certain ways (*perspectives*). Exercising those dispositions generates *characterizations*: intuitive,

[4] These dimensions of prominence and centrality are independent. For instance, individualism is not particularly noticeable but is highly explanatory, and sneaker-wearing is noticeable but not highly explanatory.

holistic, multi-dimensional, informationally rich, experience- and affect-laden representations of particular subjects. Most perspectives and characterizations are messy, tacit, interpersonally variable, and flexible. *Frames* are representational vehicles – sentences, pictures, icons – that function to regulate an agent's overall intuitive thinking about a topic by expressing a focal interpretive principle that schematizes a perspective's typically messy multidimensionality into a simpler, more accessible form.

Encountering a token of a frame in the world, or tokening it within one's own mind, activates its correlative perspective, disposing the agent to form and update characterizations in ways that conform to its guiding principle. Frames express an antecedent, inchoate perspective; but they also regulate those perspectival dispositions going forward, channeling them into more stable, schematized heuristics that can be shared across ascribing agents, target topics, and interpretive contexts.

We might encapsulate the above discussion in diagrammatic form thus:



While identity terms for social kinds, which constitute our focus here, are among the most familiar and prevalent examples of the genus, it's important to note that we also regularly employ frames to regulate our intuitive thinking about abstract theoretical domains like history and science (Camp 2019b), and about our own personal lives (Camp 2024). We take the wide instantiation of common patterns of cognitive process across such diverse domains as evidence of frames' robustness as an explanatory kind.

2.2. Frames and Perspectives Explain Degrees and Types of Identity-Centric Thought and Action

This discussion of frames and how they fit into our larger cognitive economies puts us in a position to argue for the Frame View. We argue that appealing to identity-centric frames can explain all aspects of identity-centric thought and action identified in §2. Moreover, we argue that variations among types of frame explain correlative variations in types of identity-centric behavior.

A frame is identity-centric if the characterizations it generates reliably center a socially relevant kind. Specifically:

An **identity-centric frame** is a frame that tends to generate

(a) characterizations of a relevant social group *G* which impute a high degree of stability, cohesion, and uniformity among the features attributed to individuals within the group; and

(b) characterizations of individual *G*s on which *G*-membership is highly central to many of those individuals' further features (where centrality may be material, causal/explanatory and/or normative).

Employing an identity-centric frame does not require having higher-order, propositional beliefs about the stability of *G* as a kind or about the centrality of being *G* to the further features possessed by individual

*G*s. Rather, agents who employ identity-centric frames may simply be disposed to interpret people they encounter in terms of *G*-membership, where that is taken to be highly informative. These dispositions can make a functional difference in how the agent experiences, explains, and engages with the relevant portion of the world, without being explicitly encoded as such or even affecting what they take to be actually true about it. The flexibility of the dispositions associated with frames makes them well suited for explaining the diverse range of ways of thinking and acting outlined in §2.

First, encountering an identity-centric frame activates a characterization of the corresponding social group. In typical cases, the frame is itself culturally ubiquitous and the characterization is a stereotype; so frames generate *stereotypical thinking*. Further, given that the characterization imputes high stability, cohesion, and uniformity to members of the group, we expect to find robust *induction* via *G*: a disposition to generalize from features attributed to previously encountered members of *G* to features possessed by newly encountered individuals who are *G*.

Employing an identity-centric frame will also lead to characterizing individual *G*s in a way that centers membership in *G*. It renders *G*-membership highly *salient* in thinking about those individuals. It disposes agents to parse features of those individuals in *G*-congruent terms. And it involves connecting and explaining many of the disparate features possessed by individual *G*s to the fact of their being *G*. When the features attributed to those individuals are actions, such frames will generate *action interpretation* in terms of *G*-membership.

As we saw above, the connections among features that a characterization imputes often track moral or aesthetic justification, and so impute *affectively* and *normatively-laden* features, in an intuitive way that prompts visceral response. Finally, by parsing and evaluating a host of features of multiple individuals in terms of their membership in *G*, while not interpreting other individuals in those terms, identity-centric frames induce distinctive *patterned interactions* with members and non-members.

In a maximally paradigmatic case of identity-centric thought and action, an agent centers *G*-membership in all of their thinking about *G*s and being *G*, about individual members of *G*, and about associated people and topics, at both intuitive and reflective levels, and across a wide range of contexts. Such an agent scores highly on all the dimensions of identitarianism canvassed in §2.

The most obvious instances of this paradigm are uses of a slur *S* by a committed bigot to refer to *Gs* in a context where a (more) neutral counterpart term is available (Camp 2013; cf. Jeshion 2013, Neufeld 2019). Such a bigot believes that *S* is the most appropriate way to refer to members of *G*, because *S* expresses a stereotype that they take to capture the 'essence' of *G*s. They employ *S* because it imputes a categorial ground that naturally disposes members of *G* to possess a rich range of further properties and to behave in certain ways. Because they take *S*'s associated stereotype to have this metaphysical basis, they also take it to warrant a correlative social status for members of *G*, and to justify social structures that enforce this 'place'. Further, they take this stereotype to warrant certain practical, moral, emotional, and aesthetic responses to features possessed by individual *G*s, depending on whether they conform to the stereotype, and to warrant distinct responses to the same feature when possessed by members of *G* or by non-members. In its clearest incarnation, the bigot hurls the slur as a weapon at a target member of *G*, shouting "You *S*!" or "You're nothing but an *S*!" to enforce their conformity to *S*-stereotypical properties and roles.

While bigots' use of slurs offers the clearest case of frame-anchored identity-centric thought and action, not all identity-centric frames fit this model. First, not all uses of slurs themselves fit this pattern (Camp 2013). Some slurs (e.g. 'midget') lack robust culture-wide stereotypes. Some (e.g. 'libtard', 'snowflake') aren't culturally associated with a robust, even putatively natural basis. And some slur-users don't exhibit particularly strong normative or emotional responses toward members of *G*. Second, not all frames are linguistic: pictures, flags, and other iconic symbols are among our most powerful identitarian framing devices. Third, not all frames perform their framing function as a matter of convention: the stereotype evoked by 'Boys will be boys' is not part of the word's semantic value, and metaphors are non-conventional by definition. Finally, a frame may be identity-centric without directly encoding a social identity: a photograph of a cherry pie sitting on oven mitts in a gleaming suburban kitchen may reliably evoke motherhood without any parents or children appearing in it.

More importantly for current purposes, the same frame – that is, the same representational vehicle used to express and regulate the same intuitive focal interpretive principle – can vary significantly in how it operates in the minds of its users. And this variation matters theoretically, insofar as it explains differences among those different users' patterns of thought and behavior. Thus, we claim, an analysis in terms of socially shared frames is crucial for explaining both how identity-centric thought and action is reliably elicited across different agents and also the distinct flavors of identity-centric thought and action within and across agents. We note six dimensions of variation.

First, an agent may or may not reflectively *endorse* the frame. For instance, while the committed bigot believes members of *G* 'just are' the way the stereotype purports them to be, his targets and their allies may actively reject the stereotype's aptness. Even so, once that stereotype has been activated, it lingers as a "threat in the air" (Steele 1997), affecting non-bigots' intuitive interpretation and action in ways that are difficult to combat. In other cases, we may be unsure or ambivalent about whether we genuinely endorse the frame, perhaps because we take its perspective to capture a grain of aptness within a more amorphous, possibly questionable 'vibe' (Camp 2006).

Second, a frame may vary across agents in how *thickly* its effects extend beyond generating beliefs. Thus, for one agent a framing label like "Oriental" might produce relatively abstract descriptive stereotypes, while for another it produces more visceral olfactory and sonic imagery and in another it might also or instead be coupled with patterned behavior towards Asians. Non-propositional frames like pictures, flags and movies are especially prone to affect perception and emotion in intuitive ways.

Third, an identity-centric frame may vary in its *inferential centrality* for an agent. That is, among characterizations produced by the frame, the attribution of *G*-membership may dispose an agent to explain a wider or narrower range of features. At the high end, one agent might employ the frame "Motherhood is the most important job in the world" to generate characterizations of individuals on which their being a mother explains a wide range of their observed traits, preferences and behavior and which impute many further unobserved frame-conforming features to them. By contrast, a different agent might find their attention drawn to the child-bearing status of women they encounter and feel admiration toward those who are mothers while remaining neutral about what additional features those people might share.

Fourth, an identity-centric frame may vary in its *norm centrality* for an agent. Thus, for one agent seeing a woman wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with "This mom runs on coffee, wine and Amazon Prime"

might activate a demanding set of prescriptions for motherhood, leading them to lionize mothers who successfully fulfill those demands, to sympathize with mothers who struggle but manage to achieve frame-relevant goals like hosting themed birthday parties, and to denigrate mothers who reject such prescriptions. By contrast, the same T-shirt might activate a similarly rich set of descriptive features in another agent, but merely as a set of normatively neutral observations and expectations about a certain class of mothers.

Fifth, an identity-centric frame may vary in its *cross-contextual application*. Some agents employ a given identity-centric frame pervasively, across all contexts and in application to everyone who is a member of *G*. Thus, a dedicated social conservative might employ "Motherhood is the most important job in the world" as a touchstone for thinking about individual women (as either actual mothers, potential mothers, or non-mothers), about women collectively, and about how best to organize society's social, material, and capital structures. At the other extreme, an agent could find their intuitive construals temporarily inflected by the frame when it is intoned at a family gathering without it playing a role in the rest of their life.

Finally, an identity-centric frame may vary in its *evidence-resistance*: an agent's perseverance in deploying it despite evidence of mismatch with the current context of application. For example, consider someone whose primary frame for gay men is the TV trope of the flamboyant "gay best friend". If, upon meeting their gay neighbor and finding that he is in fact a shy pharmacist parent-of-two, this agent "can't help but think" that the neighbor must secretly love fashion and binge-watching *Glee*, then that frame is evidence-resistant for them. At the other extreme, an agent might have multiple frames at their disposal for interpreting gay men, or women, and navigate flexibly among these and other frames for social identities to construct bespoke frames for individuals.

These six dimensions of variation in how agents can deploy one and the same frame – endorsement, thickness, inferential and norm centrality, cross-contextual application, and evidence-resistance – are separable. An agent's deployment of a frame can score high on some dimensions and low on others, producing a wide array of profiles of identity-centric thought and action. At one extreme lie ubiquitous, intellectualist, inferential- and norm- centralizing deployments of frames which an agent reflectively endorses. Perhaps the conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly or an intern at a right-wing think tank writing statement pieces on family leave policies, might employ frames about motherhood in this way. At the other end lie imagistic frames that an agent entertains fleetingly and resentfully, and whose effects are primarily visceral and aesthetic. For example, a barrage of Calzedonia swimsuit ads in a subway station might lead a committed body-positive feminist to feel a momentary flash of repugnance looking down at her own ankles, which fades as soon as she exits the station.

We think an appeal to frames offers a robust, explanatorily integrated account of many cases of identity-centric thought and action. However, it cannot account for all such cases. Specifically, agents can interpret people in ways that center identity, and thereby instantiate the patterns of thought and action outlined in §2, without particular frame driving this interpretation.

To see this, recall from §3.1 that frames are representational vehicles that function to schematize, stabilize, and circulate perspectives, which are themselves open-ended, clustered dispositions to attend, explain, and respond to a target domain in certain ways. Frames facilitate identity-centric thought and action by providing stable access to a perspective which renders a social identity highly salient and

explanatory, and often normatively and affectively resonant, while attributing a rich collection of associated features.

Socially shareable frames facilitate the transmission and perpetuation of culturally shared patterns of thought and action about social identities. Given the pervasiveness of such shared patterns in constructing and enforcing the identities of marginalized groups in particular, we should expect that most thought and action which centers such identities will be anchored in culturally dominant identity-centric frames. Having one's social and personal identity systematically inscribed by outsiders compounds those groups' marginalization.

However, in general, not all perspectives are expressed by correlative frames. Complex, contextually enmeshed perspectives often resist encapsulation in pithy slogans or images; this is one reason we turn to fiction and other forms of art. But even perspectives that have been aptly crystallized by a frame may not always be actually accessed through a frame: an agent may simply implement the cluster of dispositions that constitute the relevant perspective, without employing or encountering any particular scaffolding device. Nonetheless, cases where an agent is disposed to notice, explain, and respond in ways that center a certain social category without deploying any explicit vehicle to anchor or regulate those dispositions are instances of the same basic theoretical kind as the more paradigmatic frame-driven identity-centric thought and action we have evoked above.

For both frame-based and frame-free identitarian thinking, the key unifying factor, which explains the behavior we outlined in §2, is that the agent interprets the world in ways that *center* a social category: they attend to, explain, and (dis)value individuals in terms of their membership in a social group *G*. Because so much identitarian thought and behavior is in fact frame-based, and because frames amplify the basic profile shared by all identitarian perspectives, we take frame-free identitarian thinking to be a limit case of the Frame View.

3. Frames, Beliefs, and Theories

We have argued that identity-centric thought and action paradigmatically result from employing identity-centric frames for social groups. This does not require correlative identitarian beliefs. At the same time, beliefs about social groups do abound; and they clearly play a significant role in producing and maintaining social hierarchies. In this section, we address the relationship between identity-centric frames and beliefs. We argue that frames do not reduce to beliefs. More importantly, the order of explanation is reversed: we need frames to explain the emergence and persistence of identity-centric beliefs and essentialist theories.

A first point distinguishing frames from beliefs applies to interpretation in general. As we emphasized in §3.1, frames express perspectives, where having a perspective requires actual implementation in intuitive, ongoing cognitive processes in a way that is partly but not entirely under voluntary control. In general, implemented principles for interpretation need not be believed, in the narrowly orthodox sense of being explicitly represented and endorsed. Indeed, they cannot all be, on pain of regress (Carroll 1895). Thus, even when we can identify a specific set of commitments expressed by a frame, the frame itself, in its open-ended interpretation-guiding function, cannot simply be analyzed as belief in those contents.

Second, not all frames have the right sort of content to be believed. Many frames, like "Think globally, act locally," are imperatival, plausibly expressing a content that is more like a hyperplan (Gibbard 2008) or a To Do list (Portner 2004) than a propositional cut in the space of possibilities. Some, such as the iconic 1989 photograph of 'Tank Man' in Tiananmen Square, plausibly have a very different structure, and on some views an entirely different species of content, than standard propositional attitudes. Others, including memes like Pepe the Frog, Notorious RBG, or Bridezilla, appear to lack determinate content altogether.

Third, independently of whether a representation expresses a determinate propositional content, it can still implement frames' functional role of guiding interpretation in an open-ended, intuitive way without being believed or endorsed – indeed, even while being actively rejected at a reflective level. Thus, merely conjecturing that racial groups innately differ in intelligence can affect one's interactions with people from different racial groups. Likewise for *asking* yourself whether women were admitted to your graduate program just because of their gender; or for *fearing*, or just *imagining* that a black man with a gun is walking behind you on your way home (Steele 2010). Frames do not function primarily to determine which contents we represent to be true. Instead, their cognitive role is to orient attention, explanation, and evaluation by activating, selecting, connecting and coloring certain profiles of contents. While an agent's beliefs influence which frames they find intuitively compelling and the frames they activate influence which beliefs they form, neither functional role can be reduced to the other (Camp 2015).

Still, ordinary people do typically have many beliefs involving social identities. Psychologists and social theorists have often imputed *essentialist* beliefs—beliefs that "that members of categories share a fundamental nature that grounds a range of common properties" (Leslie 2014, p. 211)—to them, and have argued that these beliefs play an important role in explaining discrimination and bigotry.[5] On this view, as Gordon Allport (1954, 174) puts it, prejudice arises once "…a belief in essence develops. There is an inherent 'Jewishness' in every Jew. The 'soul of the Oriental,' 'Negro blood,'… 'the passionate Latin'—all represent a belief in essence. A mysterious mana (for good or ill) resides in a group, all of its members partaking thereof."

We think this story about the emergence of prejudice is false. Prejudicial thought and discriminatory action can and often do arise in the absence of such beliefs, merely in virtue of employing identity-centric perspectives. Indeed, as we'll now argue, we take the explanatory order to be reversed: appealing to frames and perspectives is crucial for understanding the emergence and persistence of essentialist beliefs. Echoing Hume, we will argue that frames generate beliefs by "gilding and staining all [social] objects with the colors" of their perspectival lenses (Hume [1751] 1983: 88).

Let us begin at the most inchoate, least stable end of identity-centric cognition: cases where we behave in identity-centric ways without any correlative identity-centric belief or frame. This happens either when an identity-centric frame one doesn't endorse is activated in one's environment, or when an identity-centering perspective is operative without being anchored in a frame.

[5] Often, theorists refrain from explicitly appealing to belief and talk about subjects having essentialist *representations* of social categories (see Neufeld 2022), without specifying the cognitive ontology of these representations. Our argument here can be read as against the claim that having such representations should be spelled out in terms of belief, and in favor of articulating having an essentialist representation in perspectival terms.

Such cases are common. Indeed, a large body of experimental evidence (under the header of intergroup theory; see Sidanius and Pratto 2001 for an overview) shows that it is quite easy to produce identity-centric perspectives by classifying people in terms of clearly trivial features and affiliating agents with an "in-group". For instance, when elementary school children are split into groups based on the color of their t-shirt and that classification plays some practical role, the children attend more to differences between groups, take those not in their group to be significantly different, and evaluate their own group more positively and the other group more negatively (Bigler et al. 1997; see Tajfel 1970 for the canonical studies).

For young children, it is plausible that they classify, evaluate, and respond in these ways in the absence of any accompanying metaphysical beliefs about the groups, and without explicitly representing the groups as deeply different. For older children and adults, it is plausible that they display these patterns of attention and response without believing that the classifying factor (e.g. t-shirt color) has suddenly taken on metaphysical significance. Thus, identity-centric perspectives can arise from superficial practical intergroup divisions without attributing robust, causally efficacious properties.

At the same time, even for groups that begin as arbitrary affiliations, ongoing interaction that centers group membership tends to crystallize interpretation and action into frames. As discussed in §3.1, frames serve as handy heuristics for grasping and sharing perspectives. Facilitating perspectival coordination smooths alignment in communication and action. Because perspectives centering social identities are especially ubiquitous in social coordination, and because social identities and interactions are so messy and multi-dimensional, the functional gains obtained from crystallizing identity-centric perspectives into frames are especially large (Camp and Flores 2024).

Once such frames are available, they can easily ossify along the various dimensions discussed in §3.2: endorsement, thickness, inferential and norm centrality, cross-contextual application, and evidence-resistance. In general, frames and perspectives are double-edged swords: the very effects that make them so cognitively useful also make them self-reinforcing in ways that can be dangerous (Camp 2025). Frequent use of a frame habituates an agent into cognitive dispositions that are only partly under voluntary control, and can recruit additional interpretive resources from the various contexts in which it is activated. Its practical success in helping an agent to navigate the world is likely to appear to them as evidence of its inferential and metaphysical warrant, and can encourage them to extend its applicability across an ever wider range of situations and properties, and to dismiss apparent counterexamples as local anomalies.

Further, our general desire for a world that coheres in a meaningful way can lead us to impute deeper justificatory connections between a frame's perspective and the individuals to which we apply it than our evidence warrants. Among other things, we are prone to overestimate correlations, to impute causal connections on the basis of correlation, and to impute moral principles to justify feelings of disgust (Haidt and Joseph 2004).

Our general desire for coherence can also lead us to impute explanatory centrality to features that are highly prominent in our attention. In the case of identity-centric thought, it can lead us to treat a superficial feature like skin color as diagnostic of an explanatorily powerful essence: "a fundamental nature that grounds a range of common properties" (Leslie 2014, p. 211; Haslam et al 2000, Gelman 2005). Specifically, essentialist beliefs appear to be generated at least in part through an *inherence heuristic:* "an intuitive tendency to explain patterns in terms of the inherent properties of their

constituents" (Salomon and Cimpian 2014, p. 1297). For example, we tend to explain patterns of inequality between social groups in terms of stable, enduring features of members of those groups as opposed to extrinsic factors like historical causes.

All of this suggests that essentialist beliefs typically arise as a consequence of perspectival aspects of cognition, rather than the reverse. We are powerfully motivated to move from detecting patterns to ascribing inherent properties which explain them, and thence on to essentialist beliefs about the kinds that generate and unite those properties, through something like the following schematic sequence:

1. Regulation of an agent's attention to, explanations of and responses toward individuals in terms of a **perspective** that centers membership in a social group.
2. Expression of this identity-centric perspective via a stable, tangible **frame.**
3. **Ossification** of this identity-centric frame into a simple, rigid principle that the agent applies across a wide range of otherwise diverse individuals and contexts.
4. Production via the inherence heuristic of **essentialist beliefs** that the agent takes to represent members of the social kind as they really are.
5. Construction of an explicit, reflectively endorsed **essentialist theory** that purports to explains the causal ground of that social group's identity.

Proceeding through this sequence involves more than just gradual entrenchment. Rather, each step adds additional functional structure: frames, then beliefs, and finally theories. Each step thereby makes the initial perspective more stable, more internally well-confirmed, and more robust against counterevidence.

In societies like ours, essentialist or quasi-essentialist theories about social kinds are ubiquitous and widely articulated and transmitted. Thus, most people are at least familiar with such theories, often deeply so. But being acquainted with or even endorsing such a theory does not itself suffice to generate identity-centric thought and action on a significant scale. Rather, one must internalize the theory's underlying taxonomy, assumptions and motivations, so that it guides one's interpretations and interactions in an open-ended, intuitive way. For this reason, perspectives continue to play a substantive explanatory role even in those agents who do explicitly endorse essentialist theories.

In our view, then, rather than being the causal root of identity-centric thought and action, essentialist theories primarily serve a retroactive, reinforcing *justificatory* role for such patterns of cognition and behavior. Armed with such theories, agents can justify their intuitive inclinations to center social identities in their thought and action by arguing that these patterns accurately reflect the nature of our social world: that's "just the way things are," however much some of us naively might wish it otherwise. In this way, essentialist theories contribute an additional layer of rigidity, blindness, and inaptness to the myopia we inevitably bring to many of our patterns of engagement with the world.[6]

[6] This echoes *systems justification* (Jost & Banaji 1994, Jost et al. 2004, Jost & Hunyady 2003, Yzerbit 1997) and *ideological* analyses of essentialist beliefs (Althusser 1970/2006, Eagleton 2014, Marx & Engels 1846/1970, Shelby 2003), on which such beliefs function to justify unjust social hierarchies. While adequate discussion is beyond the our scope here, one key difference is that we emphasize the causal relevance of individual psychologies and the way in which frames and perspectives are partly (though only partly) under voluntary control.

4. Theory Change and Frame Shifts: Prospects for Amelioration

Many instances of identity-centric thought and action are morally and socially troubling. Centering social identities can lead to treating others as "nothing more than" a token of some social group, often with an accompanying negative or dehumanizing stereotype.[7] Armed with a richer understanding of the cognitive basis of such behavior, we can begin to consider how to intervene on it in causally efficiacious ways. In this section, we argue that this should centrally involve promoting perspectival shifts by promulgating new frames. In slogan form: political and personal change needs memes, not (just) arguments.

The Frame View gives us reason to be suspicious of a range of dominant approaches to addressing identity-centric thought and action. Interventions that focus exclusively on modifying beliefs, without considering agents' wider interpretive resources, are blinkered. Beliefs are not the only or even primary mechanism through which we interface with the world. Eliminating essentialist beliefs will be difficult so long as identitarian perspectives retain their intuitive pull. Moreover, identity-centric thought and action are liable to persist, especially in their affective and behavioral manifestations, even if essentialist beliefs are eliminated. Thus, targeting identity-centric thought and action requires fighting fire with fire, most directly by shifting frames.[8]

This general point gains traction when we consider interventions such as theory critique and conceptual engineering. Theory critique focuses on exposing flawed arguments or false assumptions that undergird dominant theories of social groups and oppression.[9] For example, feminist theorists have argued against essentialist theories of gender, in particular against the view that gender is a biological property or that there are innate psychological differences between men and women (e.g. De Beauvoir 1952, Grillo 1995, Haslanger 2000, Spelman 1998, Witt 1995). Similar projects have also been undertaken concerning race (e.g. Appiah 1994, Mallon 2004, Shelby 2003, Zack 2014).

Such projects are indeed crucial for achieving a more accurate understanding of gender, race, and other social categories. However, if we are right about the functional importance of frames relative to beliefs, these projects should not occupy center stage in attempting to change behavior. Rejecting essentialist theories and beliefs will not itself produce a fundamental shift in an agent's operative frames

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[7] At the same time, as we noted in §1, centering social identities can also be important for building solidarity among members of marginalized social groups, embracing stigmatized aspects of one's sense of self, and engaging in meaningful political action against identity-based oppression. See Camp and Flores 2024.

[8] An additional reason why addressing beliefs does not suffice is that, independently of beliefs about essence, category labels (Neufeld, in this volume), especially in predicate nominal (Ritchie 2021a) or noun (Ritchie 2021b) forms can in and of themselves encourage centering the corresponding identities. Theory change does not in itself suffice to change labeling practices. Like we do, both Neufeld and Ritchie use these results to argue against the efficacy of standard conceptual engineering approaches.

[9] Our criticism here only applies to theorists who think of ideologies as sets of propositions or beliefs. Others construe ideology critique as involving the "reorganization of our society around different values, a restructuring of our practices so that we are positioned to recognize the value of new or different kinds of thing and coordinate on just terms" (Haslanger 2017, p. 169). On that expansive view, shifting perspectives is a component of ideology critique, rather than an alternative to it.

for gendered or racialized interactions. Indeed, in the absence of perspectival shift, theory critique is likely to produce resistant counter-theory-building, in the service of justifying one's intuitive, gut perspective (Lord, Ross, and Lepper, 1979, Taber & Lodge, 2006).

Conceptual engineering, as standardly construed, is likely to be similarly ineffective. Conceptual engineering involves proposing new extension-determining representations for politically significant terms (Burgess and Plunkett 2013a, 2013b). Perhaps the most influential example is Sally Haslanger's (2000) proposal that we should, for social and political purposes, employ the term 'woman' such that "S is a woman iff S is systematically subordinated along some dimension, and S is 'marked' as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction" (p. 39).[10]

If the Frame View is right, those concerned about the perils of identitarianism should be on the lookout in the first instance for pernicious *characterizations* of social kinds, generated by inapt frames, and only secondarily for bad *concepts*.[11] An agent's concept of woman – that is, the representation they deploy in classifying persons and forming reflective judgments and inferences about them – could be maximally politically sophisticated even as they are also pervasively disposed, at an intuitive level, to characterize and interact with women in sexist ways. Conceptual engineering, much like theory critique, is useful for theoretical inquiry on the social domain, and thus for identifying which perspectives and policies we should ultimately be implementing. And some concepts do genuinely stand in need of revision. But on its own, designing better concepts is unlikely to produce meaningful changes in identity-centric behavior in ordinary life.

Rather than focusing exclusively on intellectualist interventions and hoping they trickle down to intuitive thought and action, activists would do better to use frames to intervene directly on perspectives. The goal should be to produce perspectival shifts: to get people to actually, persistently attend to different sets of features, to spontaneously explain those features on different grounds and connect them in different patterns, and to alter their spontaneous normative evaluations and gut affective responses to members of any social group, but especially marginalized groups.

As we have argued, frames undergird much pernicious perspectival cognition. But their cognitive power also makes them our best allies for amelioration. Because frames crystallize open-ended, dynamic perspectives into stable, schematic forms that can be easily distributed and activated across contexts, they can function as tangible touchstones for reorienting and coordinating agents' overall modes of engagement with a domain.

Examples of positive frames include narratives, images, memes and slogans that center members of marginalized groups, especially those that focus on their agency. Of course, this is not a novel point: it is reflected in calls for better representation of members of marginalized groups in mainstream media, in the value placed on role models from such groups, and in the development of now-ubiquitous frames

[10] In later work (Haslanger 2020), Haslanger rejects the view that we should employ the term "woman" in these ways, which exclude some trans women, maintaining only that this concept is useful for the political purposes of capturing the social formation of our current public gender categories.

[11] See Camp (2015) for discussion of the contrast between concepts and characterizations.

combating bigotry, such as #BlackLivesMatter and the Pride flag. We especially encourage individuals to employ multiple frames with a playful stance in presenting themselves to others (Camp and Flores 2024).

What makes for a politically good frame is highly context-sensitive. A minimal constraint on good frames is that they be epistemically apt: reliably generating characterizations that are accurate at least in relevant respects (Camp 2019). However, epistemic aptness does not suffice to make a frame personally resonant or politically effective. Inculcating a new perspective can be cognitively costly, requiring shifts in deep-seated habits of interpretation within individual agents. It is also socially costly, disrupting entrenched scripts that facilitate smooth social interaction, especially by making it comfortable for privileged agents to navigate the world. Given this, it is especially crucial that ameliorative frames be emotionally and aesthetically intuitively appealing: catchy, poignant, funny, or relatable.

Moreover, simply generating new alternative frames for social identities is not enough to shift identity-centric thought and action. We need to circulate those frames, and help others work their way into full, intuitive appreciation of their perspectives. We need to loosen the intuitive grip of entrenched, pernicious frames. And we need to motivate people to move from merely achieving more insightful interpretation toward actively intervening on material and cultural reality – interventions that are at least uncomfortable and often palpably risky.

Ultimately, such changes can only be achieved with sustained, collective, systemic effort. Still, we can take substantive steps to alter our own perspectives and those in our immediate vicinity, to bring them into closer alignment with what we reflectively believe to be true. Among other things, we can prioritize a practice of questioning the relevance of appeals to group membership in explaining individual people's actions. We can avoid accentuating differences between categories (Prentice and Miller 2007). We can highlight counter-stereotypical features of members of marginalized groups. And we can point out both non-obvious similarities between people from different social groups and non-obvious differences between people in the same social group (Gelman 2005).[12]

Our central point here has been that abstract argumentation without concern for intuitive perspectival implementation is unlikely to be effective. That said, perspectival framing and argumentative theorizing should be deeply intertwined. If we focus narrowly on shifting perspectives, we risk eroding vital epistemic values. We do ultimately need to provide substantive factual and normative justifications for concrete policies, structural changes, and perspectival changes. Theories and arguments, not frames, are the most appropriate tools for performing such justificatory work. Still, even once such theories are on the table, we still need to habituate to the ways of seeing and acting that they support. And we need to probe and refine those theories, in ways that frames and perspectives are well suited to accomplish (Camp 2019a).

We should, in other words, make space for rational argument, albeit in a more capacious and warm-blooded sense of rationality and argumentation than philosophers have traditionally employed. Effective rational argument does not target isolated beliefs in specific propositions. Instead, it advocates

[12] There are complicated empirical questions about what conditions need to be in place for such interventions to succeed. For instance, highlighting counter-stereotypical kind members is only likely to be effective where the group is already perceived as encompassing trait variability, or where many different exemplars with a range of counter-stereotypical traits are presented specific circumstances (Richards & Hewstone 2001).

for accurate and fruitful taxonomies for parsing the world and allocating attention, for empirically well-grounded explanations, and for normatively justified emotional and practical responses. Frames are an important tool for both inquiry and advocacy.

5. Conclusion

We live in an identitarian culture. In particular, we often center social identities in ways that are inapt and reductive and that contribute to discriminatory behavior. In this paper, we have investigated the psychological basis for forms of thought and action that center social identities. We argued that identity-centric thought and action are primarily driven by the intuitive regulation of attention and interpretation. Rather than looking to essentialist beliefs and theories about social groups to explain how and why agents treat others through the lens of social identity, we should look first to the frames we employ and the perspectives we occupy. An appeal to frames enables us to explain highly heterogeneous and otherwise theoretically baffling cases of identity-centric thought and action, ranging from the inchoate, fleeting, and emotional to the overt, committed, and theoretical. It also enables us to see why, in order to dislodge pernicious identitarian habits, we need more than just arguments: we need memes, images, slogans, and other frames that move us beyond seeing others in reductive and tokenizing ways.[13]

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