SAMPLE ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY:


• **Purpose:** Explored whether internet based discussions were less likely to converge when participants were not personally identifiable. If supported, the research would contradict current assumptions that CMC can and will break down boundaries of race, language, ideology and that people using the internet will experience greater freedom from group-based constraints.

• **Method/Sample/Key Results:** Study 1 was a 2 (Dutch vs. English) x 2 (individuated vs. depersonalized) x 3 (time – three one hour discussions took place over three weeks) factorial design. Individuated participants were associated with their name, their nationality and a photo, depersonalized participants were associated with their nationality and initials. Political opinions converged and polarized (about research on homosexuality, for example) for individuated discussion groups only. Study 2 was a 2 (outgroups were sociology or business students) x 2 (individualized or depersonalized) factorial design. Psychology students thought they were discussing political issues with either business or sociology students. Participants completed attitude scales and a recognition task in which they had to determine “who said what” during the discussion. 47% individuated participants correctly identified statements but only 26% depersonalized participants correctly identified statements. (Most of errors were due to “intragroup” mistakes – participants more clearly remembered the group associated with different statements.)

• **Advantages/Disadvantages:** The authors used real groups but in the context of an experimental design, and the two studies complement each other (e.g., outgroup comments were rigged in the second experiment.) The who said what measure provides behavioral evidence to support the attitude scales. However, there was limited process evidence in the first study, and limited “divergence” evidence in the second study. The effect also requires group membership cues (sometimes missing when people are completely anonymous). Finally, these are students in limited discussion without clear material consequences.

• **Relevance to question:** This research suggests that internet based discussions of problems or decisions can aggravate intergroup differences that already exist – particularly if participants view each other as group members first and individuals second. Perhaps this pattern is more relevant to internet based discussions across departments, and certain forms of internet communication (bulletin boards, lists, etc.).