CHAPTER SEVEN

The Social Identity Perspective in Intergroup Relations: Theories, Themes, and Controversies

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Introduction

There has been a steady growth of research on intergroup relations in the last 30 years and the social identity perspective, comprising social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), has played a leading role in this development. In fact, research in this tradition is being pursued more vigorously now than ever before (e.g., Abrams & Hogg, 1999; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Haslam, in press; Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994; Spears, Oakes, Ellemers, & Haslam, 1997; Tyler, Kramer, & John, 1999; Worchel, Morales, Paez, & Deschamps, 1998). Its basic ideas about the role of social categorization and social identities in group processes are now widely accepted throughout the field (e.g., Brewer & Brown, 1998; Fiske, 1998). These ideas are moreover finding their way into new areas (Abrams & Hogg, 1999; Haslam, in press; Turner & Haslam, in press; Turner & Onorato, 1999).

This chapter will provide an overview of the social identity perspective by discussing key ideas and addressing important misunderstandings. The latter are worth discussing to identify themes in current research and directions for the future. It will be argued that there has been a failure to take seriously the metatheory behind the perspective. The tendency has been to divorce psychological processes from the social forces that structure their functioning. SIT and SCT emphasize that intergroup relations cannot be reduced

to individual psychology but emerge from an interaction between psychology and society (Tajfel, 1972a, 1979; Turner, 1996).

The first section summarizes the basic ideas of SIT and SCT while highlighting the similarities and differences between them. In the second section a series of questions, which raise key themes and controversies within social identity research, are addressed. The final section attempts to identify and examine the necessary features of a comprehensive social psychological analysis of social conflict between groups. It is concluded that the social identity perspective, although not intended as a "sovereign" approach to intergroup conflict, has made a significant contribution toward understanding intergroup relations, and that future progress depends on the metatheoretical ideas within which SIT and SCT developed being fully understood and embraced.

The Theories: Similarities and Differences

Many researchers tend to confuse SIT and SCT. Some use the term "social identity theory" to refer to ideas from both theories indiscriminately. Others, in distinguishing the theories, misattribute ideas from one to the other. For these reasons it is useful to highlight the main points of similarity and difference between SIT and SCT. Space is not available for detailed summaries of the theories but these are widely available (e.g., Turner, 1999).

SIT attempts to make sense of intergroup relations in real societal contexts (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It provides a comprehensive theory of intergroup relations and social change in socially stratified societies (the term social identity theory was first employed by Turner & Brown, 1978, to describe this complex analysis of intergroup relations) and addressed ingroup bias, social conflict, intergroup relations: "Why do people in groups discriminate against each other?", "Why are they ethnocentric?". Its response to these questions was the idea that people have a need for positive social identity which requires them to establish a positively valued distinctiveness for their own group compared to other groups.

The theory has *three* indispensable elements (or "legs of a conceptual tripod," as Tajfel, 1979, put it). As well as (1) an analysis of aspects of collective psychology (i.e., the need for a positive social identity), the theory delineated how this motivation interacted with (2) specific intergroup status differences in society and (3) the tendency to deal with one's identity problems as either an "individual" or as a "group" (defined as movement along a continuum from interpersonal to intergroup behavior).

SIT was used to explore the psychological consequences for members of the relative status position of their group (high or low status) and the perceived nature of intergroup status differences (secure vs. insecure, i.e., legitimate or stable vs. illegitimate or unstable), and to elaborate the different ways in which group members could and would react to the challenges posed to their social identities by their different locations in the social structure and their shared beliefs about the nature of the social structure (the main strategies identified being "individual mobility," "social creativity," and "social competition").

Tajfel developed the idea of the "interpersonal–intergroup continuum" (the extent to which one acted as an individual in terms of interpersonal relationships or as a group member in terms of intergroup relationships) to explain when social identity processes were likely to come into operation and how social interaction differed qualitatively between these extremes (Tajfel, 1974, 1978). He argued that as behavior became more intergroup, attitudes to the outgroup within the ingroup tended to become more consensual and that outgroup members tended to be seen as homogeneous and undifferentiated members of their social category.

Shift along the continuum was a function of an interaction between psychological and social factors. He emphasized the degree to which group members shared an ideology of "individual mobility" or "social change" and saw the social system as characterized by rigid and intense social stratification. He suggested that the perceived impermeability of group boundaries tended to be associated with an ideology of "social change," characterized by a belief that people cannot resolve their identity problems through individual action and mobility but are only able to change their social situation by acting collectively in terms of their shared group membership.

Contrary to many reviews the basic psychological idea of SIT was not the distinction between personal and social identity. As Tajfel stated on numerous occasions, it was the notion that social comparisons between groups were focused on the establishment of positive ingroup distinctiveness. Social identity was distinguished from the rest of the self-concept but not from personal identity. The interpersonal–intergroup continuum in SIT was not related to personal versus social identity but to "acting in terms of self" versus "acting in terms of group" (Tajfel, 1974).

The distinction between personal and social identity was the beginning of SCT and was not made until the end of the 1970s. SCT began with the insight that Tajfel's distinction between interpersonal and intergroup behavior could be explained by a parallel and underlying distinction between *personal* and *social identity* (Turner, 1978, 1982). SCT was not concerned with ethnocentrism or discrimination but with psychological group membership: "What is a psychological group?", "How are people able to act psychologically in a collective way as group members?". It tried to explain how people became a group and the psychological basis of group processes.

The basic idea was that self-perception or self-conception varies between personal and social identity and that as one moves from defining self as an individual person to defining self in terms of a social identity, group behavior becomes possible and emerges. In other words, when a shared social identity is psychologically operative or salient there is a depersonalization of self-perception such that people's perceptions of their mutual and collective similarities are enhanced. Subsequently the distinction between personal and social identity was related to the more general hypothesis that there are different levels of self-categorization, but this was a reconceptualization of the founding notion, that personal and social identity can be distinguished and that group behavior is simply people acting more in terms of social than personal identity.

A fundamental point of SCT which has been central to the analysis of stereotyping and other group phenomena is that when we perceive ourselves as "we" and "us" as opposed to "I" and "me," this is ordinary and normal self-experience in which the self is defined in terms of others who exist outside of the individual perceiver and is therefore

not purely personal. It is a shared cognitive representation of a collective entity which exists reflexively in the minds of individual group members and is structured by the realities of group life in a particular social system. Social identity is a collective self, not a "looking-glass" self – it is not an "I" as perceived by the group, but a "we" who are the group and who define ourselves for ourselves (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994; Turner & Onorato, 1999).

Just as SIT provides a new way of approaching intergroup relations, so SCT provides a new way of thinking about social groups. It has provided new analyses of group formation and cohesion, social cooperation, social influence (conformity, polarization, minority influence, and leadership), crowd behavior, "de-individuation," the contact hypothesis, social stereotyping, the self-concept, and personality. Current work on the theory has in fact gone far beyond traditional group issues (Turner, 1999).

Attributing the distinction between personal and social identity (and the hypothesis that the shift from personal to social identity transforms individual into group behavior) to SIT acts therefore to strip SCT of its core idea. The result is that the theory loses its force as an explanation of group psychology. It tends to be reduced to a purely cognitive analysis of categorization processes, an application of Tajfel's (1969) accentuation theory to self-perception but with a more developed analysis of the contextual factors determining the "salience" of social categorizations. SCT is then described as "social-cognitive" (Abrams & Hogg, 1999), as a turn away from the more "social" and "motivational" SIT to less social and more individual-cognitive ideas. It is assumed to ignore or reject the role of self-esteem in social identity processes, and to have been developed to replace SIT (Operario & Fiske, 1999). SIT in turn is reduced to a "self-esteem" theory, one which explains intergroup relations in terms of the need for positive self-esteem and has little interest in cognitive analysis. The failure of its supposed self-esteem predictions then leads it to be dismissed as a "macro-social" metatheory (Operario & Fiske, 1999), a polite way of saying that it has been empirically falsified.

In fact, both SIT and SCT are "cognitive" in the classic social psychological sense that they assume that to explain and predict behavior we need to understand how people perceive, define, and make sense of the world and themselves. Both are in the Gestalt (as opposed to behaviorist) tradition which derives from Sherif, Asch, Lewin, Heider, Festinger, and others. Both are also part of the cognitive tradition which goes back to Bruner's "New Look" in perception through Tajfel's (1957) analysis of categorization and values (other "cognitive" influences on SCT include Rosch, Medin, and Barsalou and colleagues). Neither is an individual-level cognitive theory of the form that dominated social cognition research in the 1980s. Further, despite assertions to the contrary, SCT assumes explicitly that "self-categories tend to be evaluated positively and that there are motivational pressures to maintain this state of affairs" (Turner et al., 1987, p. 57). SCT provides a specific analysis of self-esteem, seeing it as an expression of the degree to which self at any level is perceived as relatively prototypical of a higher-order, valued self-category. SCT does not discuss self-esteem in the same terms as SIT for the simple reason that SIT had already done the job and SCT was not seen as a replacement for SIT but as complementary to it (see Turner & Oakes, 1989, for a summary of how SCT emerged from social identity work).

Themes and Controversies

Are social groups the same as categories?

Rabbie, Schot, and Visser (1989) contrast social groups, which they define as "dynamic wholes," social systems characterized by perceived interdependence among members, with social categories, which they define as collections of individuals who share at least one attribute in common. They suggest that the social identity perspective assumes that groups are the same as categories.

Social groups are, of course, not the same as cognitive categories and the social identity perspective does not suggest that they are. In answering this charge, Tajfel (1982) criticized Rabbie and Horwitz for confusing two types of categories. The term "category" can mean an objective collection of people as defined by an outsider in terms of some common characteristic – a sociological category, for example, such as single-parent families. Such a group exists objectively, but it is a "membership" group (Turner, 1991). It need have no psychological or subjective significance for its members. It is not a "reference" group in classic terms.

The social identity perspective is explicitly and specifically addressed to reference groups. It uses the term "category," not in the sense of sociological categories, but in the sense of self-categories. Such "categories" are psychological representations in the mind; they are cognitive structures which people use *to define themselves* and to change their behavior. The point of SCT is to explain how a sociological group becomes a psychological group, how a membership group becomes a reference group. The idea is that people create cognitive categories to represent themselves as a higher-order entity and that, insofar as they represent themselves in terms of such categories, in terms of psychological concepts which become part of their mental functioning, they are able to transform their relationships to each other. As one moves from the "I" to the "we," we transform our behavioral and psychological relationships to each other so that we can now act in terms of a higher-order, emergent entity called a psychological group.

Rabbie and others confuse sociological categories (objective collections) with self-categories (psychological concepts). A social group, on the other hand, is a body of real people that acts in the world; it is a social system. The members interact, behave, and have relationships with each other. They share an identity, have goals, are interdependent, and they have social structures. A group has a social as well as a psychological reality. Such groups cannot be confused with either type of category above, but nevertheless their existence requires explanation. As psychologists, we assume that part of the explanation has to do with the psychology of their members. And part of their psychology is the way in which they create higher-order social categorical representations of themselves to transform their relations to each other and themselves. This does not mean that a group is only psychological, or that it is explained solely by social psychology. But self-categorization theorists are entitled to point to the psychological processes involved in group formation as a contribution to their explanation.

Rabbie et al. also suggest that the social identity perspective rejects the role of goal interdependence in group formation and that the "minimal group" studies which inspired

the development of SIT and SCT were misinterpreted by Tajfel and Turner. They claim that minimal intergroup behavior is motivated by personal self-interest and hence does not provide evidence that self-categorization is alone sufficient for psychological group formation. Their points have been answered in detail by Turner and Bourhis (1996) but it is important to note that relevant studies demonstrate that ingroup bias is influenced by participants' degree of identification with minimal ingroups rather than by the degree to which they stand to gain financially from ingroup favoritism (e.g., Bourhis, Turner, & Gagnon, 1997).

Does SIT predict a positive correlation between ingroup identification and ingroup bias?

Hinkle and Brown (1990) propose that one of the basic propositions of SIT is that there should be a direct causal link between ingroup identification and ingroup bias. This translates into the hypothesis that positive correlations should be obtained between individual differences in identification with some ingroup and individual differences in the degree to which that group is favored over the outgroups in the setting. In fact, such correlations are not uniformly positive but often tend to be weak and quite variable (Brown, Hinkle, Ely, Fox-Cardamone, Maras, & Taylor, 1992; Hinkle & Brown, 1990). These findings are then cited as evidence against the theory and are used to justify attempts at major revision (Brown et al., 1992). The lack of simple positive relationships between ingroup identification and bias is probably the single most frequently cited empirical "disconfirmation" of SIT. We suggest that such an inference is unjustified (see also Turner, 1999).

The proposition is a version of SIT's basic idea that positive social identity requires positive ingroup distinctiveness, but SIT did not equate this idea with a direct causal connection between ingroup identification and ingroup bias. On the contrary, the causal relationship was always assumed to be mediated by a number of complicating factors and "ingroup bias" ("social competition") is only one of several individual and group strategies which can be pursued to achieve positive distinctiveness (others being "individual mobility" and "social creativity").

SIT assumed that whether or not ingroup bias was observed was a function, inter alia, of the specific intergroup comparison being made and the interaction between the relative status position of the ingroup, the perceived impermeability of group boundaries, and the nature of the perceived status differences on the relevant dimension. Turner and Brown (1978), for example, showed early on just how complex the relationship between ingroup bias and different intergroup status differences could be. Low status groups tended to be discriminatory when their position was unstable and illegitimate but not when it was secure; high status groups tended to be particularly discriminatory when their position was legitimate but unstable but not when it was both illegitimate and unstable. In this light the variable relationship between measures of ingroup identification and ingroup bias is in line with the theory and only to be expected. Nothing in the summary of the theory above implies simple positive correlations.

Another issue is that identification in the relevant studies is often not experimentally manipulated but is an individual difference variable. The use of individual difference methodology is inconsistent with the SCT hypothesis that there is a psychological discontinuity between people acting as individuals and people acting as group members (e.g., Turner & Onorato, 1999). The role of social identity salience is fundamental to this point. If one obtains intergroup attitudes from subjects responding in terms of their personal differences from others, in terms of their personal identities, then the attitudes obtained are not likely to remain unchanged when the subjects' social identities become salient. SCT predicts directly that depersonalizing participants enhances intragroup homogeneity and thus will modify correlations between the intergroup responses and a prior individual difference score (Haslam & Wilson, 2000; Reynolds, Turner, Haslam, & Ryan, 1999; Verkuyten & Hagendoorn, 1998).

These and related issues are elaborated elsewhere (Turner, 1999). An important point to be made here is that differences in ingroup identification, conceptualized appropriately, are of central interest to the social identity perspective (see Ellemers et al., 1999). What we need to avoid is the idea that identification expresses some kind of fixed and stable self-structure or personality trait which is chronically salient across situations and directly expressed in just one collective strategy independently of the social meaning of the intergroup relationship. From a self-categorization viewpoint, measures of identification may be a way of getting at the individual's readiness to self-categorize in terms of some identity, reflecting the psychological resources a person will tend to bring to the task of understanding self and constructing self-categories in some setting. They will reflect the centrality of some group membership in a person's understanding of their place in the social order and their relationships to others and also their commitment to that identity as a consequence of that understanding and their social values.

Does SIT actually contain the so-called "self-esteem hypothesis"?

The "self-esteem hypothesis" in this context refers to two supposed corollaries of SIT advanced by Hogg and Abrams (1990): that (1) successful intergroup discrimination elevates self-esteem and (2) depressed or threatened self-esteem promotes intergroup discrimination. The predictions which tend to be made and which receive mixed support are that ingroup bias should enhance or be correlated with (individual) self-esteem and that low (individual) self-esteem or ingroup status should enhance or be correlated with ingroup bias. The lack of support for these predictions is another widely cited "disconfirmation" of SIT.

Some of the problems with these corollaries have been discussed by Farsides (1995), Long and Spears (1997), Rubin and Hewstone (1998), and Turner (1999). The first point to note is that they are not actually contained in SIT. In fact, the theory can be seen as inconsistent with them. The theory assumes that there is a need for positive self-evaluation, but it does not equate this need with an individual-level motive. On the contrary, it is concerned with positively valued social identity, not individual-level self-esteem,

and it does not even predict main effects of low group status or depressed social identity on ingroup bias, let alone such effects as a function of low personal self-esteem. Under conditions where social identity is salient, it is *insecure* (unstable and/or illegitimate) *social identity* in *interaction with low or high* status that prompts the need for positive distinctiveness and the search for positive distinctiveness *can take a variety of forms*. Social identity processes are only expected to come into play where social identity is salient and under such conditions people act in terms of their shared social identity, not in terms of their individual-level self-esteem.

For example, a low status group whose inferiority is stable and legitimate on the status dimension and which sees group boundaries as impermeable may seek positive distinctiveness on alternative dimensions (social creativity) but it is not likely to discriminate on the status dimension. A high status group with positive social identity which perceives its superiority as legitimate but unstable and under threat may be highly discriminatory. The personal self-esteem of group members is of no relevance to these predictions, and not even does positive or negative social identity in isolation lead to any consistent outcome. What matters is status position in interaction with the perceived nature of status differences and group boundaries.

Where discrimination takes place and successfully achieves positive distinctiveness, this might be reflected in a relevant status-related measure of collective self-esteem (but perhaps not for a high status group protecting what it has), but there is no reason why it should necessarily be reflected in a measure of personal self-esteem. If positive distinctiveness is achieved through some strategy other than social competition on the status dimension, then collective self-esteem could increase or be maintained without any basis in intergroup discrimination. To determine whether ingroup bias or some other intergroup strategy enhances positive social identity, one has to measure the self-evaluative aspects of the specific social not personal identity in relation to the specific situational dimension of comparison, what Rubin and Hewstone (1998) refer to as "social," "specific," and "state" self-esteem, not "personal," "global," and "trait" self-esteem. Why would a more positive social identity affect personal, global, and trait self-esteem? Perhaps where there is no other outlet, the participants may sometimes employ whatever measure is available to express the situationally relevant intergroup comparison, but this cannot be taken for granted.

The social identity perspective provides a different way of thinking about self-esteem from the traditional view that it is an individual psychological property which drives and motivates behavior independently of the social context. It makes a core assumption of a psychological discontinuity between individual and group behavior, personal and social identity and therefore personal and social categorical self-esteem (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Brewer & Weber, 1994; Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Turner, 1982; Turner et al., 1987, pp. 57–65). The need for a positive social identity is not driven by some fixed "inner" motive but arises from the interaction of social identities, social comparison, and social values in specific intergroup relationships (Tajfel, 1972b; Turner, 1975). There are different levels of self-esteem just as there are different levels of self-categorization (e.g., Brewer & Weber, 1994) and self-esteem at any level is a function of judgments of self in relation to higher-level identity-based norms and values through relevant self-other comparisons on specific dimensions.

Are ingroup bias and therefore prejudice universal and inevitable features of relations between human social groups?

Two widespread misconceptions are that the social identity perspective sees ethnocentrism as a universal feature of relations between human social groups and that ingroup bias can be directly equated with social conflict and prejudice between groups. For example, using minimal groups, Mummendey and colleagues (e.g., Mummendey & Otten, 1998) have systematically demonstrated positive–negative asymmetry in social discrimination. Although the ingroup is favored on positively evaluated dimensions, there is a tendency toward fairness or outgroup favoritism on negative dimensions. It is only when the positive distinctiveness of the ingroup is threatened (e.g., through minority or insecure low status) that ingroup favoritism in the negative domain arises. Because ingroup bias in the minimal group paradigm is assumed by many to be the same as prejudice and because it is not found on negative dimensions (which is equated with overt hostility or aggression), the claim is then made that SIT has proved itself unable to deal with aggression and hostility in the full-blown sense, because it can only deal with bias on positive dimensions. The same kind of idea is found in more general assertions that SIT is an argument for the universality of prejudice.

In fact, SIT never equated ingroup bias with social hostility. It conceptualized it as a strategy for comparative, positively valued ingroup distinctiveness. Ingroup bias expressed evaluative (social) competition, evaluative differentiations between groups. It was never identified directly with aggression or hostility. It was of interest because of the processes to which it pointed in intergroup relations, processes which had hitherto been largely ignored. The value of SIT was that it identified these processes explicitly and used them to create an analysis of socially structured intergroup relations. On the basis of this novel theoretical analysis one could then derive hypotheses about the generation of social conflict and aggression.

There are several ways that one can get from SIT to a prediction of aggression, but they are all theoretical rather than merely an empirical assertion that ethnocentrism and social conflict are the same thing. Social conflict cannot be equated with the outcome of just one psychological process but must be understood in terms of the interplay of many as they are shaped by the historical, social, economic, and political structure of society. In Tajfel and Turner (1979), for example, it is hypothesized that one of the ways in which intergroup conflict develops is where insecure identities and a socially competitive need for positively valued distinctiveness are correlated with a salient division into groups and a realistic conflict of interests. SIT linked realistic conflict and insecure identity processes to explain the specific conditions under which aggression might develop.

In relation to ethnocentrism, there are suggestions that the theory is refuted by evidence that groups sometimes show outgroup favoritism. But the theory never claimed that ingroup favoritism was a universal feature of intergroup relations. For example, if members of low status groups define their inferiority as legitimate and stable, then they will see their group as consensually inferior on that dimension. There are many consensual status systems in which groups agree with each other about their respective inferiorities and superiorities. SIT did not assert that groups never see themselves as inferior, it

argued that such self-perceived inferiority will have psychological consequences and motivate a range of responses.

Part of the issue is that the term "ingroup bias" has come to be used as a synonym for ingroup favoritism, implying that the latter always reflects an irrational, indiscriminate, reality-distorting psychological bias. It is assumed that ingroup favoritism (being a "bias") always accompanies ingroup–outgroup categorization, regardless of the specific nature of the intergroup relationship. But for a researcher to define ingroup favoritism as a bias is to make a value judgment from the perspective of an outside observer. Such a judgment often reflects no more than the fact that the relevant groups disagree with each other (both asserting that they are superior to each other). Groups may disagree with each other without irrationality being involved (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Reynolds, Turner, & Haslam, 2000; Turner & Oakes, 1997). Diversity in opinion between individuals does not necessarily indicate bias or irrationality and the same is true for group-based disagreement. Group differences of opinion arise from the natural relativity of perception in which meaningful and veridical representations of reality are constructed from each group's singular perspective and from attempts to (in)validate certain views over others (Turner & Oakes, 1997).

Where there is consensual inferiority and superiority between groups in a particular social system then there is agreement about the nature of social reality. Groups share a similar interpretation of their respective strengths and weaknesses and if members are asked to evaluate their own and other groups on dimensions characteristic of each group, their responses will reflect both ingroup and outgroup favoritism. Conversely, with some (insecure) group relations there is less agreement regarding the extent to which attributes characterize one group compared to another. Expressions of ingroup favoritism are most likely when the same valued dimension is claimed as characteristic of both groups and are part of the process of social competition and potential group conflict. In these terms ingroup favoritism is not indiscriminate ethnocentrism or a psychological bias but rather depends on self-categorization as an ingroup member and the extent to which the relationship to the outgroup is secure or insecure and the comparative dimension important and relevant to the group comparing itself. In SIT so-called ingroup biases are expressions of the fact that the social reality of intergroup relations is being contested rather than that it is being perceptually distorted.

These considerations have implications for the explanation of positive–negative asymmetry in minimal groups (Reynolds et al., 2000). SIT and SCT maintain that in order to behave in terms of a particular group membership, self-definition in terms of the social category *must be psychologically salient.* SCT argues that the extent to which perceivers can meaningfully categorize themselves in terms of more (or less) inclusive categories depends on the interaction between context-specific judgments of similarity and difference (comparative and normative fit) and the perceivers' expectations, motives, and goals (perceiver readiness). Perceivers seek meaningful self-definition in terms of the comparative and normative features of the stimulus information available. It is possible that, where groups are minimal, it is less meaningful for perceivers to categorize and define themselves on the basis of negative than positive dimensions. It may be difficult for ingroup members to discriminate on negative dimensions because they provide a less appropriate, less fitting basis for self-definition.

To display ingroup favoritism in the negative domain ingroup members have to indicate that they are "less bad than the outgroup" on particular dimensions. This means that in order to discriminate, ingroup members have to accept, or at least countenance, a negative self-definition. Because participants may not believe that they are defined by particular negative dimensions they may be unwilling to define themselves and act in these terms. Negative dimensions may not fit participants' normative beliefs about themselves as well as positive dimensions and consequently, identification and intergroup discrimination will be minimized.

An implication is that it should be possible to find ingroup favoritism on both positive and negative dimensions when both provide a meaningful and relevant basis for self-definition in ingroup–outgroup terms. Recent empirical work supports this analysis (Reynolds et al., 2000). In one study, ingroup members evaluated the ingroup and the outgroup on positive and negative dimensions that were typical of the ingroup, typical of the outgroup, typical of both groups, and typical of neither group. There was no evidence of positive–negative asymmetry and ingroup favoritism was found on certain negative traits. Responses were ingroup-favouring on (a) positive traits that were typical of the ingroup and (b) negative traits that were typical of the outgroup, and outgroup-favouring on (a) positive traits that were typical of the outgroup and (b) negative traits that were typical of the ingroup.

A different pattern of results characterized responses on traits typical of both groups. In line with such evaluations being less consensual (the traits are fitting for both groups) ingroup favoritism was evident on both positive and negative traits. With traits typical of neither group, the pattern of discrimination was either fairness or outgroup favoritism. Such non-fitting dimensions (as with evaluations of minimal groups on negative dimensions) are not relevant to self and are therefore of little consequence for group-based status concerns.

This analysis and evidence indicate that ingroup favoritism is not the result of a generic drive or bias for ethnocentrism triggered automatically by being in a group. Nor is it the equivalent of outgroup hostility and aggression. These judgments (and the degree to which social hostility is involved) are constrained by social realities, varying with the degree to which the relevant social identity provides a meaningful fit between the perceiver and the situation and the degree to which the social structure of intergroup status differences is secure and consensual or insecure, contestable, and open to dispute (e.g., Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers, van Rijswijk, Roef, & Simons, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1996).

Social Identity: Implications and Future Directions

SIT and SCT are grounded in the metatheory of social psychological interactionism (Tajfel, 1972a, 1979; Turner & Oakes, 1997), which holds that social psychological processes emerge from a functional interaction between mind and society. The theories deal with psychological processes which are socially structured and which are qualitatively transformed by their interaction with social life and social processes. The interactionist

perspective leads to a very different analysis of prejudice and intergroup relations from that currently dominant.

An alternative to the "prejudice" model of intergroup relations and human social conflict

As implied above, researchers sometimes appear to believe that SIT holds that ethnocentrism and prejudice are inevitable and irrational. The analysis goes as follows: People form groups; inherent in group formation is the need for superiority, which in turn is motivated by the drive for positive self-esteem; hence once one is in a group, one displays ethnocentrism, and ethnocentrism is the same as prejudice. The need for positive social identity is thus used to argue for the hypothesis that ethnocentrism is inevitable, an automatic and therefore irrational product of group formation. Intergroup attitudes are seen as products of irrational psychological biases, implying that unjustifiable prejudice is inherent in group life.

The social identity perspective is actually an argument against this view. It not only provides a specific theory of intergroup relations, it also resurrects the intergroup approach to social conflict pioneered in social psychology by Sherif (e.g., 1967) and his colleagues. Although Sherif was a realistic group conflict theorist, pointing to the role of conflicts of interests between groups in social antagonism, he stressed as fundamental the idea that intergroup relations rather than individual and interpersonal processes determined intergroup attitudes. SIT and SCT are intergroup theories in exactly the same sense. They argue that intergroup attitudes are always the product of an interaction between people's collective psychology as group members and the perceived social structure of intergroup relationships. The interaction between collective psychology and social reality is assumed to be mediated by group members' socially shared and socially mediated understanding of their intergroup relations (i.e., their collective beliefs, theories, and ideologies about the nature of the social system and the nature of the status differences between groups).

In this respect, as has been argued elsewhere (Turner, 1996), the social identity perspective provides a way of going beyond the "prejudice" model of social conflict which has dominated the field since the 1920s. The implicit orthodoxy in intergroup relations research is that social antagonism in its various forms is a product of prejudice, that is, of defect, irrationality, and pathology at the level of individual psychology. Negative outgroup attitudes are assumed to be inherently pathological, irrational, invalid, and unjustifiable.

This notion is summarized by three main ideas that pervade much research: That specific dysfunctional individual-difference or personality factors more or less directly predispose people to more or less hostility against outgroups; that there are individual-level cognitive and/or motivational processes which directly produce negative outgroup attitudes and which are socially irrational since they are purely psychologically caused; and that intergroup attitudes are inherently mindless, meaningless, and devoid of rational content. Personality, cognitive limitations, and ignorance become possible explanations of intergroup relations precisely because they ignore issues of social structure, but, in our view, this oversight also renders these explanations limited and incoherent.

The social identity perspective rejects each of these ideas. It emphasizes that we need to understand social conflict as psychologically meaningful, as an expression of how people define themselves socially, and of their understanding of the reality of their intergroup relationships. Social conflict can be a rational reaction to people's historically evolved understanding of themselves in interaction with their theories of the social world and the reality of social structure. We do not need to posit defective personality types, individual-level psychological processes which directly cause outgroup hostility as a result of some single variable, factor, or state (social categorization, ingroup identification, frustration, low self-esteem, low social status, positive or negative mood, etc.), or inherent defects in human cognition, motivation, or emotions (e.g., the supposed over-simplification and over-generalization of stereotyping) to explain social antagonism. It is a result of ordinary, adaptive, and functional psychological processes in interplay with the realities of social life. This is an important and radically different approach to social conflict from the traditional emphasis on "prejudice."

One example of the difference in approach is provided by research on stereotyping. Much SCT work has been done over the last decade to argue for its rationality and validity (Oakes et al., 1994). An aspect of the "prejudice" model is the social cognition view that stereotyping is due to limited attentional resources and shortcuts in information processing. Such impressions are interpreted as less valid and accurate than individuated judgments which reflect a person's true personal characteristics (Fiske, 1998). This view is not surprising if the influence of group realities and social structure is denied in theory and research. If groups do not exist and there are only individuals, then any judgment of people as a group must be invalid, must be erroneous. If there is not an analysis of collective psychology and social structure that can be used to explain stereotypes and stereotyping then the explanation must be sought in individual psychology. The end point is a view that stereotypes and intergroup perceptions are a function of individual psychology (and pathology).

The alternative view is that stereotypes and intergroup attitudes are expressions of collective cognition, of people's attempt to make sense of the world, to create a meaningful but collectively shaped representation of group realities. Stereotypes are not just held by individuals perceiving individuals, they describe people's group attributes and are shared within groups; they are products of group interaction and anchored in group memberships. They serve group purposes and are products of social influence and communication as much as they are products of an individual cognitive process. They also have an ideological content related to people's theories, beliefs, ideologies about the nature of the intergroup relationship.

This view does not see stereotyping as psychologically defective, invalid, or unjustifiable, but rather as an outcome of an adaptive, rational, and reality-oriented psychological process. This does not mean that every specific stereotype is valid but that the same reasonable psychological process is behind everybody's stereotypes (both those with which we agree and those with which we disagree). Validity is not purely a psychological question. It is also a social and a political question and we are entitled to argue about stereotypes, to accept some and reject some, to try, as a society, to put right those we think are wrong. The fact that we engage in social and political debate over differing stereotypes is not proof that they are psychologically defective. Rather it speaks to the functional aspects

of human collective psychology, to the fact that we seek to produce higher-order collective truths from the relativities of lower-level group judgments (see Oakes et al., 1994, chapter 8; Turner & Oakes, 1997).

It is paradoxical in light of these points that the social identity perspective is sometimes reduced to a "prejudice" theory. Arguments that SIT predicts that social categorization automatically and inevitably leads to ingroup bias, that intergroup relations should be characterized by universal ethnocentrism, that ingroup bias is inherent in group formation, that low status groups should always be more biased than high status groups, that intergroup discrimination is driven by an individual need for self-esteem and should directly enhance individual self-esteem, and so on, interpret it in this way. They imply that the theory is simply the assertion of a universal, irrational drive for ethnocentrism, unconstrained by social realities or the social meaning of intergroup attitudes and that some simple, single factor which triggers or relates to this drive should be positively correlated with intergroup discrimination virtually independent of social context or the perceived nature of intergroup relations. As we have seen, this is a misconception.

What do we need to explain human social conflict?

Is the social identity perspective a "sovereign" theory of intergroup conflict? Were social identity processes ever meant to provide exclusive or comprehensive explanations of human social conflict? The point is sometimes made that the social identity perspective does not provide a complete account of intergroup relations, as if it had ever been claimed that it did. Suffice it to say, Tajfel and Turner both stated that social identity processes were not the only factor in intergroup relations, that realistic group interests, for example, were important. The social identity perspective never rejected the insights of Sherif's realistic conflict analysis. It did reconceptualize the relationship between realistic group interests, psychological group formation, and intergroup relations (Turner & Bourhis, 1996), but it never denied the empirical importance of conflicting group interests in intergroup conflict. Indeed Tajfel and Turner were also clear that one cannot explain human social conflict through social psychology alone. Social psychology *in toto* is only a part of the story, let alone any particular theory of intergroup processes.

What does one need to explain human intergroup conflict and how does the social identity analysis fit into the picture? There are, of course, different views on this matter, but the elements of an "intergroup" view consistent with the spirit of the social identity perspective can be found in Sherif's work, in Tajfel's writings, in the self-categorization analysis of stereotyping, and in the preceding discussion of the relative role of "prejudice" or "intergroup relations" in intergroup attitudes.

SIT and SCT assume that intergroup attitudes are always an outcome of an interaction between people's collective psychology as group members and the social structure of intergroup relationships. They further assume that this interaction is mediated by people's collective beliefs, theories, and ideologies about intergroup relationships and the wider social system, by socially structured cognition. Thus human social conflict is not a matter of psychological irrationality, pathology, or error. It must be seen as an outcome of the social, psychological, and historical processes which have shaped people's collective under-

standings of themselves, their ingroups and outgroups, and their relationships with other groups. It is an outcome of the collective theories and ideologies which they have developed to make sense of, explain, and justify intergroup relationships, of the ways in which people are influenced by these ideas, and of the particular kinds of social psychological processes that are relevant to predicting how their shared understandings of intergroup relationships will translate into attitudes and actions.

From this perspective, restricting ourselves to social psychology, there are four general requirements for an account of intergroup conflict:

1. An analysis of the *psychological group*; one must know when and why people form groups and what groups are psychologically and be able to answer the question of when people will behave individually or collectively.
2. An idea of the *processes* that come into play in *intergroup relations*; one must know what processes shape how people behave toward ingroups and outgroups as a function of intergroup relationships.
3. A *theory of social influence*; one must know how group identities, goals, and beliefs become consensual, shared, and normative, how they are validated, spread, changed, and anchored in group interaction and how collective beliefs about intergroup relationships, how stereotypes about one's own and other groups, are disseminated and/or changed. It is also necessary to confront the facts of political and other forms of leadership and the role of moderates and extremists in shaping group ideology.
4. An ability to analyze the *content of group beliefs* relevant to intergroup relations and the wider society; one must know how groups understand themselves, their relationships with other groups and who they see as outgroups. What are the collective theories and ideologies which they have developed to make sense of, explain, justify, and rationalize their intergroup relationships and how are we to describe and explain the development of these collective social theories?

In terms of these components social psychology has made good progress in understanding social conflict. We have much work relevant to the main elements of the picture and the social identity perspective is central to it. SCT is a theory of the psychological group. In terms of intergroup processes, we have realistic conflict theory, which looks at the role of group goals and collective group interests, SIT, which looks at the interaction between identity, social values, and intergroup comparisons, and we have (fraternal) relative deprivation theory, which is relevant to social comparisons between groups and the collective emotions of anger, resentment, and frustration. SCT also provides a detailed and systematic analysis of social influence that has been applied to conformity, crowd behavior, group polarization, leadership, minority influence, and even political rhetoric (Haslam, in press; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996; Turner, 1991, 1999; Turner & Haslam, in press). We also know to some degree (or can speculate) on the basis of existing theory how these processes interact with each other. For example, SCT shows how identity processes and self-categorization are relevant to perceived interdependence, cooperation, and competition between groups. We know how conflicts of interests are relevant to the salience of social categorizations. We know that shared ideologies are relevant to the

identities and stereotypes one forms (Brown, P. & Turner, in press) and play a role in mutual influence (Reicher, 1987). We know that social identities are social comparative and provide a basis for the experience of collective emotions (E. Smith, 1993).

What is it that we do not have? There are two definite weaknesses. Despite the theoretical insights into how psychological group membership, intergroup processes, social influence, and collective beliefs are likely to affect each other, relatively little systematic research into these interrelationships has been conducted (although there are honorable exceptions). We have, for example, not much tried to integrate what we know from SCT and social identity processes with what we know about realistic conflict and relative deprivation, although it is evident that relative deprivation is intimately linked to realistic conflict and social identity processes. In addition, we still know very little about how groups create the content of their collective beliefs. How and why do groups develop specific ideologies? How do certain ideologies win out over others? How are they spread? Researchers have noted this neglect for years but little real progress seems to have been made in terms of testable social psychological theory.

The social identity perspective contributes to our general understanding in several ways, in relation to the group, intergroup processes, and social influence, and is relevant to the role of ideology. It helps also to clarify where future research needs to be directed for integrative progress, at the synthesis of all the main elements of the picture, at the links between the intergroup processes, and at the development of a social psychological approach to the content of group beliefs.

Conclusion

The social identity perspective emphasizes that we need to understand intergroup relations as psychologically meaningful, as an expression of how people define their social identities, and an interaction between their collective psychology as group members and the perceived social structure of intergroup relations. Social antagonism can be a (psychologically) rational reaction to people's collective understanding of themselves in interaction with their theories of the social world and social structural realities. We do not need to posit sick or defective personality types, individual-level psychological processes operating in a social vacuum, or intergroup perceptions as inherently distorting of social reality to explain stereotypes, "prejudice," and social conflict.

Part of the reason for the prevalence of traditional views has to do with metatheory. Social psychology is still dominated by "the individualistic thesis" (Asch, 1952). The social identity perspective also tends willy-nilly to be assimilated to this thesis (and reduced to a prejudice analysis). It tends to be divorced from the interactionist metatheory within which it developed. In reality, SIT and SCT take for granted that it is not possible to develop adequate social psychological theories, which do not distort the phenomena under consideration, unless one accepts that the relevant psychology is socially structured, emergent, and always functions in a social context. Social psychology is not biology, nor sociology, nor general (i.e., individual) psychology; its focus is on the socially systematic regularities of psychological functioning and human conduct. Its processes must take such

an interaction between the psychological and the collective for granted and be explanatory of and consistent with its effects.

To fail to appreciate that SIT and SCT were intended to unravel aspects of the mind–society interaction and to divorce the psychological processes they posit from the social processes with which they were assumed to interact, is to individualize them and misconstrue their psychological ideas. Misinterpretations of SIT and SCT are not an accident and neither are they wilful; they represent the intellectual influence of individualism, an influence which is felt whenever social identity ideas are divorced from their proper metatheoretical home. Understanding the metatheory of social identity is not a luxury; it is a crucial part of its legacy and a prerequisite for the full development of social psychology's analysis of intergroup relations and human social conflict.

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