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RUNNING HEAD: Social psychology of 'Making Poverty History'

The social psychology of 'Making Poverty History': Motivating anti-poverty action in
Australia

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Abstract

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent the first global, tractable effort to combat world poverty and preventable disease. However, the success of the MDGs depends critically upon the support of the people who do not themselves experience the disadvantage: That is, the people and governments of developed countries. In this paper we argue that the solution to combating poverty and preventable disease in developing nations lies in creating sufficient "political will" amongst people in developed countries like Australia. We draw on social psychological insights to explore ways to inspire social and political action in support of the anti-poverty cause. Taking a social identity perspective, we review the role of three key variables in promoting anti-poverty action: the presence of meaningful social identities which prescribe action; motivating group emotions; and group efficacy beliefs. We describe a method which crystallises these three elements to boost commitment to the anti-poverty cause. We conclude by arguing for the importance of meaningful group memberships in motivating social and political action to *make poverty history* for people in developing countries.

The social psychology of 'Making Poverty History': Motivating anti-poverty action in
Australia

British Chancellor of the Exchequer: And I'll be fighting [to keep the Millennium Development Goals on the agenda], believe me. Fighting world poverty is very important to me. But it's also important that we represent the interests of people in our own country.

Gina: Yes, of course. Though I don't believe for a moment that people in our country would want you to represent their interests if you were doing it instead of talking about saving the lives of millions and millions of children who will definitely die next year if you don't sort things out.

The Girl in the Café (2005, BBC)

In the 2005 film 'The Girl in the Café' Lawrence, a lonely civil servant, takes Gina, a mysterious young woman whom he met in a café in London, to a G8 summit in Iceland. Once there, she embarks on a series of public confrontations with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister, around the issue of poverty in developing countries and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Written by Richard Curtis, a prominent Make Poverty History campaigner, the film eloquently and deliberately raises many of the issues confronting the global fight to overcome poverty and preventable disease (Nash, 2008). In particular, as can be seen from the excerpt above, the film touches on what commentators see as one of the most important dimensions in the progress of the MDGs: the issue of political will (Costello, 2008; Obaid, cited in Lawless, 2005). Indeed, Thoraya Ahmed Obaid (cited in Lawless, 2005), Executive Director of the UN Population Fund, is quoted as saying: "If world leaders decide to meet the Millennium Development Goals, I think it can be done by 2015... The question is, is there a political will to make this investment?"

As anticipated by Gina's observation above, one way to increase political will is to have an actively engaged constituency (Hassett, Gopalakrishnan, & Cant, 2007). In parallel to the inter-governmental process around the MDGs, there arose a grassroots social movement: the Make Poverty History movement. Launched in 2005, the Make Poverty History movement was designed to galvanise the support of the governments of wealthy, industrialised nations for the achievement of the MDGs (Hassett et al., 2007). Indeed, research from the 2005 World Values Survey (www.worldvaluessurvey.org) suggests that there was certainly room for improvement in public engagement with anti-poverty issues in the Australian community. Of the nearly 4000 people surveyed, only 12.8% had heard of the Millennium Development Goals (compared to, for example, 30% of people in Sweden). This finding speaks to a significant lack of education and awareness in the Australian community about poverty issues.

However, a lack of awareness per se is not the only barrier to mobilisation in the Australian context, and these barriers reflect the political and social complexities of Australian society. Australia is a wealthy industrialised nation and as with other industrialised nations there is both rural and urban poverty. However Australia is also a country in which many members of a colonially dispossessed Indigenous population are disproportionately overrepresented in the poorest groups within that society. Many of these people live in northern Australia and they experience the same forms of inequity that is experienced by people throughout the developing world (Marmot, 2004). Increasingly the work of nongovernmental organisations such as Oxfam, Save the Children and other members of the Close the Gap coalition (<http://www.closesthegap.com.au>; which is aimed at addressing Indigenous disadvantage) rely on the methods and lessons of international development work. To

use just one illustration: Oxfam Australia's submission to the Senate Select Committee for Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities (2008) explicitly made the point that the principles that underpinned the organisation's global experience in promoting effective development were directly applicable to the issues affecting Indigenous communities. One contradiction here is that a disproportionately large proportion of the mineral wealth that has sustained the growth of the Australian economy is drawn from the impoverished remote northern regions of Australia.

The contradictions however run deeper still. Leach, Iyer and Pedersen (2007), for example, have documented the ways that structurally advantaged non-Indigenous Australians can perceive themselves as *disadvantaged* compared to Indigenous Australians; a perception that is at odds with an abundance of objective health, social and economic data which shows that Indigenous Australians live in conditions that are vastly inferior to many even in developing countries. This implies that often perceiving, or noticing, disadvantage is not a straightforward, uncontested process – even when it occurs in one's own country, let alone in places that are both physically and psychologically distant. While there are inevitably strong economic, sociological and political dimensions to these questions of the will of national leaders and engagement of constituents, we argue that social psychology can fruitfully contribute to understanding ways to promote greater levels of community awareness with issues of international development.

In this paper we explore ways to promote greater collective efforts to overcome poverty in the developing world and preventable disease, amongst people in developed countries but specifically in an Australian context. Rather than seeing this as a problem involving the personal choices of isolated individuals, we follow in Lewin's (1947) footsteps, who observed that it was easier and more effective to

change people as group members, than it was to change them as individuals.

Accordingly, we draw on recent developments in the social psychology of collective action to explore ways to inspire social and political action in support of the anti-poverty cause. Taking a social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), we outline three social psychological factors which have been shown to mobilise support for anti-poverty action. These are: the role of meaningful social identities that mobilise collective action; the motivating role of group-based emotions; and group efficacy beliefs (Thomas, McGarty & Mavor, 2009a; after van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer & Leach, 2004; van Zomeren, Postmes & Spears, 2008). Figure 1 depicts these three approaches. Having outlined each of these approaches, we then describe an intervention that crystallises these three elements to boost commitment to the anti-poverty cause. Note that the theoretical rationale and development of this work has been extensively outlined elsewhere (McGarty, Bliuc, Thomas & Bongiorno, in press; Thomas, McGarty & Mavor, 2009a); however in those papers we did not fully explicate the practical implications of this research. This review seeks to clarify the practical implications of this research for those seeking to mobilise anti-poverty action.

Social Identity and Anti-poverty Action

A first approach, stemming from the social identity tradition (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987), has emphasised the role of social identity processes in motivating commitment to collective action and social movement participation. In order to appreciate the utility of the social identity concept, it is worth briefly revising what a social identity *is*, from the perspective of the social identity approach.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests that people's self-concepts are comprised of personal identities (things that make 'me' different from

'you') and social identities (things that make 'us' different from 'them'). While there has traditionally been a tendency to view the personal, individual, self as more important, the social identity approach emphasises the profound psychological reality of social groups and collective behaviour (Turner, Oakes, Haslam & McGarty, 1994). Indeed, social identity theorists have argued that social and personal identities both constitute equally important aspects of the self-concept (Onorato & Turner, 2004). However, social identities have a particularly important role to play in understanding group, or collective, behaviour. On this point, social identity theory is clear: collective action is, first and foremost, an outcome or expression of a relevant collective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Klandermans, 2002; Reicher, 1984, 1996).

For our purposes, there are two main reasons why social identities are important in explaining collective efforts to take anti-poverty action. The first is that social identities are "more than a metaphor" (Haslam, Postmes & Ellemers, 2003); rather, social identities make group behaviour possible (Turner et al., 1987). A social identity acts as a psychological *link* between the individual and group, and thus enables co-action of individuals in line with shared understanding of who "we" are. A second reason is that when a social identity is salient (becomes meaningful in a given context), group members will behave in line with the group norms that describe how group members ought to think, feel and behave. The more people think the group in question is important and self-defining for them, the more likely they will be to act in line with the norms, values and beliefs that define the group (Terry & Hogg, 1996). Overall, social identities shape individual behaviour not because of conformity to external pressures; they shape behaviour because they are internalised aspects of "self".

Consistent with these points, a wealth of research supports the utility of the social identity concept in understanding collective action (Haslam, 2001; Klandermans, 2002) and social movement participation (e.g. Simon et al., 1998). However, this same research has shown that *not all social identities are equally predictive of action*. That is, it is not sufficient to promote collective efforts to act amongst just any group. Work by Simon, Stürmer and colleagues demonstrates that identification with a movement, as opposed to a sociological category (such as male, female, black or white), is particularly associated with action (Klandermans, 2002; Simon et al., 1998; Simon, Stürmer, & Steffens, 2000; Stürmer & Simon, 2004; see van Zomeren, Postmes et al., 2008, for a review). That is, social identification as a supporter of a particular movement (e.g. the gay movement) is a much better predictor of action than is membership of that broader social, or sociological category (e.g. a gay person; Simon et al., 1998). It is argued that some identities are more easily equipped for action than others because they have become *politicised* (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Simon and Klandermans (2001) view a politicised collective identity as a key antecedent to collective action, and suggest that it is because these politicised identities have become embedded in an awareness of the political context of the struggle. To take an example from the anti-poverty context, the Make Poverty History movement was likely to have been politicised because its focus on targeting political decision makers inherently embedded it in the broader social and political context of the inequality (particularly as it related to aid, trade and debt reduction).

Similarly, work on opinion-based groups (Bliuc, McGarty, Reynolds & Muntele, 2007; Musgrove & McGarty, 2008; O'Brien & McGarty, 2009) has shown that social identification with groups based on shared opinions is also a useful way to extend our understanding of participation in collective action. Bliuc et al. (2007)

showed that social identification with opinion-based groups is strongly associated with intentions to take relevant social and political action. Our own research has shown that identifying with groups based on a shared, anti-poverty opinion ("I belong to a group of people who are against poverty in developing nations") is a much better predictor of action intentions ($r = .70, p < .001$) than is identification as an Australian (which was not a significant predictor of action, $r = -.10, p > .10$, Thomas, Mavor & McGarty, 2008) ¹. Other research has shown that it is possible to sharpen, or crystallise, these anti-poverty opinion-based groups through a process of group interaction (Gee et al., 2007; McGarty, Bliuc, Thomas, & Bongiorno, in press; Thomas & McGarty, 2009). This is a point we will return to later, when we come to discussing practical interventions. It is sufficient to note for now that: a) social identities are important drivers of group behaviour; and b) not all social identities are "equal" as enablers of collective action.

Practical Implications

Research by Reicher, Haslam and colleagues have emphasised the ways that leaders can draw on social identities as *resources*; to strategically use social identity as a tool to prescribe to people who "we" are, and what "we" do. Reicher, Haslam and colleagues call these people 'entrepreneurs of identity' (Reicher, Haslam & Hopkins, 2005; Reicher, Hopkins, Levine & Rath, 2005). The important point here is that a social identity is not simply "downloaded" into the heads of group members. They are dynamic, flexible and changeable and as such hold much potential for shaping social change strategies (see Hornsey, Blackwood & O'Brien, 2005, for a further discussion of using collective language in mobilising social and political action).

When it comes to understanding collective, or group, behaviour (such as a group of people mobilising to take anti-poverty action) it is critical importance to

attend closely to the nature, and *meaning* of that collective (Turner, 1991). Our finding that Australian national identity does not predict anti-poverty action suggests that drawing on people's social identity as an Australian (without any other strategy) may not be effective. In part, this is because *what it means* to be an Australian is diffuse (not least because it is contested). Invoking action as an Australian could just as likely lead to a view that 'I would rather be charitable to people in need at home, than abroad' (see Livingstone & Haslam, 2008).

On the other hand, it is perhaps not particularly surprising that identifying with an anti-poverty social group is predictive of anti-poverty collective action. However, it is important to remember that social identification exists in *degrees*. That is, it is possible to be more or less committed to the anti-poverty social group, with many, if not most, people only nominally identified while other strongly identified people may be represented as the community activists or campaign organisers. However, if it is possible to sharpen, or increase identification with this anti-poverty group, then this should transform nominally committed group members to have greater involvement. The opinion-based group interaction intervention described later in this paper explicitly draws on this possibility.

Group-based Emotion and Anti-poverty Action

A second factor that has been shown to be important in understanding participation in collective action, is group-based emotion. Intergroup emotion theory (Mackie, Devos & Smith, 2001; Smith, 1993) suggests that group-based emotions (emotions based on a social identity) are a useful way to explore and understand collective action. When people identify with a group, they can experience emotions from the standpoint of this group membership. Think of football fans who experience the emotional highs and lows of wins and defeats: this is an example of group-based

emotion (Crisp, Heuston, Farr & Turner, 2007; Smith, Seger & Mackie, 2007).

Research has shown that people can similarly experience group emotion on the basis of social and political issues (Iyer, Leach & Crosby, 2003; Iyer, Leach & Pedersen, 2004; Iyer, Schmader, & Lickel, 2007; Leach, Iyer, & Pedersen, 2006; van Zomeren et al., 2004). These emotional reactions play a valuable role in capturing the phenomenology of the situation (Leach, Snider & Iyer, 2002; Smith, 1993); and in motivating social and political forms of action to reduce injustice (e.g. Iyer et al., 2007; Leach et al., 2006).

For example, it has been shown that people are more likely to take action if they perceive injustice and feel a sense of group-based anger in relation to this injustice (Iyer et al., 2007; Leach et al., 2006; van Zomeren et al., 2004; Yzerbyt, Dumont, Wigboldus & Gordijn, 2003). Moreover, focusing on group-based emotions has also been shown to be a useful way of differentiating and predicting different collective action strategies. For example, in the context of British and US support for the war in Iraq, Iyer et al. (2007) found that *shame* predicted action intentions to advocate withdrawal from Iraq, while *anger* predicted different action strategies depending on who the anger was directed at. Specifically, anger at the British people (a self-focused anger in this British sample) predicted intention to advocate for *compensation* for Iraq; anger at the American government (an outgroup) predicted intention to *confront* those responsible for the situation in Iraq; and anger at the British government (a systemic anger similar to moral outrage) predicted both compensation for Iraqis, confrontation of American government and intention to advocate *withdrawal* from Iraq. Thus, exploring the feelings and emotions are one useful way of capturing reactions to injustice.

What emotions might fruitfully motivate engagement with anti-poverty issues?

The work of Leach et al. (2002) and Montada and Schneider (1989) suggests three “prosocial” emotions that might motivate anti-poverty action amongst people in developed countries. These emotions are: guilt, sympathy, and moral outrage. While these emotions are often treated in research as conceptually separate, in everyday social interaction it seems likely that a social actor can experience a variety of emotional reactions in the face of disadvantage (indeed, most research finds high correlations between emotional reactions). Nevertheless, there is some value to considering the etiology and likely consequences of particular emotions guilt, sympathy and outrage, as they relate to mobilising activism in the anti-poverty context.

Group-based guilt (feeling bad about a harmful action you blame your own group for) has been shown to be of some limited use if apology or compensation is the goal (Iyer et al., 2003; Iyer et al., 2004) but other work has shown it to be of no use at all (Iyer et al., 2007; Harth, Kessler & Leach, 2008). Guilt also rests on appraisals of self-blame or accountability that may limit its applicability and utility in the international development context. Further, other research has shown that group-based guilt amongst non-Indigenous Australians about the treatment of Indigenous Australians may not be especially high (McGarty, Pedersen, Leach, Mansell, Waller & Bliuc, 2007; Hartley & Pedersen, 2007, had similar findings regarding the mandatory detention of asylum seekers).

Research by Iyer and colleagues (Iyer et al., 2003; Iyer et al., 2004; Leach et al., 2002) also suggests that sympathy (or feeling compassion for the plight of others), could plausibly motivate broad and concerted attempts to create greater social equality. Consistent with these points, Harth et al. (2008) found that sympathy was

associated with greater support for affirmative actions for immigrant groups. Feelings of sympathy have also been found to consistently positively correlate with wider social issues like prejudice against Indigenous Australians (Pedersen, Beven, Walker, & Griffiths, 2004) and views on policy orientation regarding mandatory detention (Hartley & Pedersen, 2007). In the context of international development and cooperation, sympathy is the most commonly experienced emotional reaction (Thomas, 2005). However, Thomas (2005) found that sympathy is only weakly associated with action, compared to guilt or outrage. While sympathy may be a useful emotion for motivating interpersonal helping (Batson, 1991) or even for motivating *spontaneous* helping towards the disadvantaged in developing nations (such as donating money to a charity), we suggest that a strong affective and moral reaction to the situation might motivate more *sustained* and committed cooperation (Thomas et al., 2009b).

Moral outrage is an action-orientated emotion, directed at a third party or system of inequality (Leach et al., 2002; Montada & Schneider, 1989). Indeed, moral outrage can be theoretically differentiated from anger based on where the emotion is directed, with moral outrage characterised specifically by its focus on unfair systems of inequality (Thomas, McGarty & Mavor, 2009b). Montada and Schneider (1989) found moral outrage to be a powerful motivator of prosocial behaviour, particularly in the political realm (see also Schmitt et al., 2000). Similarly, Walslak, Jost, Tyler and Chen (2007) found that moral outrage is associated with redistributive social policies. Thomas (2005) also showed moral outrage to be a good predictor of intentions to engage in anti-poverty action. One caveat to this is that the effect of moral outrage can be attenuated by exposure to system justifying ideologies. Indeed, Walslak et al. (2007) found that system justifying ideologies (e.g. "rags to riches" themes, which

reinforce the belief that a disadvantaged person could achieve if they really wanted to) were *negatively* associated with moral outrage, existential guilt, and support for helping the disadvantaged. Nonetheless, there is good evidence that moral outrage will direct collective, political forms of action under many circumstances.

Moral outrage is central to the campaign to support international development: the key argument of the 'Make Poverty History' campaign is that crippling debt repayments, unfair aid and trade agreements systematically maintain and perpetuate the disadvantage in developing nations. Indeed, Nash (2008) has detailed the ways that the Make Poverty History campaign explicitly sought to invoke indignation at the systemic injustice that perpetrates the disadvantage of people in developing countries. Research by Hine and Montiel (1999) suggests that they were certainly on the right track. Hine and Montiel (1999) explored the five main attributions for poverty in developing countries and found that only 'blame exploitation' (which attributes blame to high foreign debt and other forms of exploitation) was positively predictive of anti-poverty activism in developed countries. Such attributions are key antecedents of moral outrage, where the emotion arises from perceptions of an unjust system. For these reasons we argue that moral outrage is a plausible emotional response to these circumstances and merits further exploration.

Practical Implications

Asking about people's emotional reactions to the injustice can yield a large amount of information about how they perceive the disadvantage: who they attribute blame to, what sorts of action strategies are likely to result and how the emotion might re-structure relations between the advantaged and disadvantaged (Thomas et al., 2009b). In seeking to understand community reactions to such issues, emotions would seem to be good "value for money" in terms of diagnostic information.

Further, actively seeking to invoke productive or motivating emotions might also be one fruitful strategy for boosting engagement with anti-poverty issues. The nature of the emotion that will be most “productive” is likely to depend on the nature, and type, of campaign. For example, for people seeking to boost levels of charitable giving (donations of time and money) it may be that sympathy could be strategically invoked to achieve this end; while those seeking to invoke a moral imperative to act may be better placed to invoke feelings of outrage or anger in relation to the disadvantage (Montada & Schneider, 1989; see Thomas et al., 2009b, for a further discussion of these points). Similarly, different emotions might become more or less important as efforts to create greater social equality face different challenges over the course of a movement; this speaks to the idea of an *emotion trajectory* characterised by consecutive productive emotional reactions (Thomas et al., 2009b). In this regard, the “set” of emotions identified by Nash (2008) as characterising the Make Poverty History campaign (indignation, self-righteous anger, pride and joy) might provide an interesting case study in a successful anti-poverty emotion trajectory. The intervention described below explores the utility of invoking moral outrage in boosting community support for international development and cooperation.

Group Efficacy and Anti-Poverty Action

A third and final element which has been shown to be important in understanding the pragmatics of engagement in collective action is group efficacy. Group, or collective, efficacy (a more specific instantiation of the concept of collective efficacy championed by Bandura and others) captures the instrumental, practical issues confronting potential supporters (van Zomeren, Spears, Leach, & Fischer, 2004). While self-efficacy refers to an individual’s belief in their capacity to exert control over the events that effect their lives, group efficacy is the belief that the

group's actions will be effective at achieving desired goals (Bandura, 1997, 2000).

Bandura (1997) argues that (group) efficacy beliefs are central to human agency and determine the chosen course of action, the amount of effort exerted, perseverance in the face of obstacles, resilience to obstacles, whether thought patterns are hindering or motivating and, ultimately, the level of accomplishment realised.

More recent work on the role of group efficacy in motivating action has shown that group efficacy stems from social identification with a group (Cocking & Drury, 2004; Drury & Reicher, 2000, 2005). Others have described the ways that the process of identifying with similar 'others', who share your world view, gives rise to the collective sense that 'our actions can be successful' (van Zomeren et al., 2004). Consistent with these points, group efficacy has been shown to be a useful construct in predicting collective action in a variety of contexts including: women's activist and support groups (Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995), the environmentalism movement (Cocking & Drury, 2004), and the unification of East and West Germany (Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999). In the specific context of international aid and development, Thomas (2005) showed that group efficacy predicted commitment to anti-poverty action but also that these efficacy beliefs were predicated on the perception that other group members were prepared to act (social action support; following van Zomeren et al., 2004). Finally, it has also been found that participating in (successful) action augments efficacy; that is, the relationship between efficacy is cyclic such that efficacy leads to action but action bolsters efficacy (Cocking & Drury, 2004).

Intriguing research by Hornsey, Blackwood, Louis and colleagues (2006) suggests that there may also be different *goals* of group efficacy, which are more or less relevant to people at different levels of commitment to the cause. That is, efficacy

beliefs can be predicated on different group goals. Hornsey and colleagues surveyed people at an anti-globalisation protest and asked about the extent to which they perceived action would be effective in: influencing government leaders and policy makers; influencing broader public opinion in support of their cause; building an oppositional movement; and expressing values and attitudes that they personally hold. It was found that group efficacy, as traditionally conceptualised as influencing policy makers, did not predict future action in this area while the other forms of efficacy (motivated by different goals) did (as described below). Hornsey and colleagues argued for broader conceptualisations of effectiveness in collective action.

Furthermore, Hornsey et al. also asked participants if they were participating as individuals or as members of an organisation. It was found that the goals for action differed depending on whether the participants were members or non-members. In particular, for members of an organisation, efficacy based in building an oppositional movement was a powerful predictor of future action intentions. For non-members, their future action was predicted by effectiveness in influencing the general public. Thus, it seems that these different dimensions of efficacy may play different roles at different levels of commitment to the cause.

Practical Implications

People seeking to motivate community efforts to engage with anti-poverty issues need to be aware of the importance of efficacy beliefs in motivating commitment to act. We would argue that efficacy beliefs are important for all social movements but they may be particularly important in the fight to combat poverty and preventable disease in developing countries where in the anti-poverty context the problems can so easily seem intractable and de-motivate action. In this regard statistics like 'one child dies every 3 seconds' may need to be carefully deployed to

create a balance between reminding the community of the urgency of action on the one hand, and making them feel as if the problem is unsolvable, on the other. On the other hand, research Schmitt, Miller, Branscombe and Brehm's (2008) model, (see also Berndsen & McGarty, in press) suggests that, where reparations are too *easy* (and, presumably, efficacy beliefs are high), this can demobilise action-relevant emotions and potentially reduce action overall. Thus, we suggest that a careful balance must be struck between making supporters believe that action is no longer required because all the problems are solved; and the belief that action will be pointless because the problems are intractable. Of course, most experienced campaigners already know this and boost efficacy beliefs implicitly (e.g. by providing evidence of other anti-poverty group members prepared to act) and / or explicitly (e.g. by providing feedback on successful initiatives).

Similarly, it may be fruitful to attend to the specific efficacy goals outlined by Hornsey and colleagues (2006). Bolstering perceptions that action will not just affect policy, but also build the momentum of the movement, influence broader societal opinions and provide an avenue for the expression of personal values, may all assist in motivating commitment to anti-poverty action.

Summary

Thus far we have outlined three approaches to collective action, and how they might relate to motivating anti-poverty action. While there are some overlaps in the three approaches (all recognise the importance of social identity), they each contribute uniquely to understanding the 'dilemma of collective action' (Klandermans, 1997, 2002). Indeed, van Zomeren and colleagues (2004) have argued that the different elements capture different psychological needs, where the emotion pathway is associated with emotion-focused coping, while group efficacy is related to problem-

focused coping. Van Zomeren et al. argue that group efficacy and emotion *additively* increase commitment to act because they address complementary psychological needs *vis a vis* coping mechanisms; while Thomas et al. (2009a) argue that these are all vital ingredients in motivating *sustainable* commitment to act over time. In the next section we describe an intervention which crystallises these three elements – anti-poverty social identities, moral outrage and group efficacy – to boost commitment to anti-poverty action in a non-activist Australian sample.

Exploring Ways to Boost Anti-Poverty Action

The Opinion-Based Group Interaction Method

McGarty and colleagues (Gee, Khalaf & McGarty, 2007; McGarty et al., in press; Thomas & McGarty, 2009) have been investigating a new program for effecting long-term attitude change. While we refer the reader to the publications cited below for more specific details of experimental methodology and results, here we describe the rationale and key findings of this attitude change program in the anti-poverty context. The opinion-based group interaction method (OBGIM) draws on two phenomena in the annals of social psychology. The first is Lewin's (1947) famous group decision experiments and the second is the group polarization phenomenon. In the context of the World War II era, Lewin was commissioned by the United States government to look for ways to encourage citizens to serve more offal. Lewin trialled two "interventions": a lecture outlining the reasons why they should serve this food; or a group discussion method, where participants engaged in a discussion about reasons to eat offal and reach a group decision surrounding this idea. Lewin's (1947) research showed that enduring behavioural change was more likely to occur as a consequence of participating in *group discussion* than attendance at a lecture, with 32% serving offal compared to only 3% who heard the lecture. Subsequent research

on the group polarization phenomenon (Moscovici, 1991; Myers & Lamm, 1976) also illuminated the powerful role of group discussion as a polariser of (positive and negative) social attitudes and behaviours.²

Drawing on these ideas regarding the powerful transformative role of group discussion, McGarty and colleagues developed the opinion-based group interaction method. The basic method underpinning the opinion-based group intervention is comprised of a three steps (see Figure 2). The first involves getting people who are not activists in the area of interest, to self-categorise as supporters of a particular cause. That is, having outlined the aims of a particular cause, we then ask the participants whether or not they support these aims. In the anti-poverty context we expect, and have found, that most participants are supportive of international development and aid efforts (Thomas & McGarty, 2009).

In a second phase, participants were asked to use a small group discussion to come up with practical strategies for reducing the inequality. We have used the World Health Organisations' 'Water for life' (www.un.org/waterforlifedecade) campaign as the focus in our research. The 'Water for Life' program forms part of the MDG strategy and aims to halve, by 2015, the number of people without access to clean and safe drinking water. It is also an initiative that is unknown to participants in Australia and forms a useful platform for experimentation (where it is important to control for participants' prior knowledge and expectations of the movement). In this second step we thus ask participants to come up with strategies for getting both the local and national community involved in the 'Water for life' campaign.

In the third and final phase, participants are then asked what *they* are going to do, and attitudinal and behavioural measures are taken. Overall, having identified themselves as supporters of a particular cause (step one), and then spent half an hour

in small groups discussing how to further that cause (step two), participants are then asked what they are going to do in the future (step three). The idea is that if we can get people to act like “real” activists in planning interventions and actions, their attitudes will change in line with their recent behaviour.

Consistent with this idea, Thomas and McGarty (2009) found the OBGIM intervention boosted commitment to action, identification with the pro-‘Water for Life’ (anti-poverty) group and efficacy. Other research applying OBGIM to changing attitudes on other social issues has shown it to be effective in reducing negative stereotypes of people with mental disorders (Gee et al., 2007) and promoting reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Blink, 2005).

However, Thomas and McGarty (2009) also trial some improvements to the OBGIM intervention which relate directly to the group emotion pathway mentioned above. In particular, we altered the second phase, such that when participants were coming up with strategies to promote the ‘Water for Life’ movement, we additionally asked them to “concentrate on strategies that will make the community outraged that the situation exists”. That is, we asked participants to discuss ways to make other members of the community outraged. Thomas and McGarty (2009) found that this addition to step two in OBGIM, labelled “outrage norm-OBGIM”, significantly boosted commitment to act *over and above* standard OBGIM. The outrage norm-OBGIM also significantly increased identification with the pro-‘Water for Life’ group, group efficacy and moral outrage. Thus, this simple manipulation increased all of the variables that the current literature suggests are most important in motivating action (van Zomeren et al., 2008), as well as commitment to take anti-poverty action. Following up on these results, Thomas, McGarty and Mavor (2009c) replicated these findings and found that the positive effects of outrage norm-OBGIM also translates to

concrete actions. Thomas et al. gave participants the opportunity to take flyers to distribute on behalf of the 'Water for Life' cause and found that participants who had participated in outrage norm-OBGIM were significantly more likely to take flyers than those who had not. Thus, OBGIM and outrage norm-OBGIM in particular have been shown to lead to increases in identification with relevant anti-poverty groups, motivating emotion (moral outrage) and group efficacy, commitment to take anti-poverty action and, importantly, concrete changes in behaviour.

Anti-poverty Identity Formation in OBGIM

What is happening in this small group interaction to produce shifts in identification with an anti-poverty group, outrage, group efficacy and commitment to action? Recent developments in the social identity formation literature provide some clues. In particular, Postmes, Haslam and Swaab's (2005) interactive model of identity formation suggests that social identities can come to be generated, and self defining, through two separate but interconnected pathways. The first is a *deductive* pathway, where the identity and associated norms are deduced from social information; and the second is the *inductive* pathway, where group members actively develop group norms through a process of communication, negotiation and consensualisation about what it means to be a group member.

We argue that OBGIM has elements of both pathways, where group members already share a common nominal support for the anti-poverty movement (a deductive anti-poverty opinion-based group identity); but then the content of the identity is debated and – finally – consensualised upon through the group interaction in step two (an inductive process). That is, in the second stage, where people interact, and discuss ways to promote the movement, they are actively debating, negotiating, and consensualising upon group norms for action. Thus, group members specify the

norms for action for their pro-change (anti-poverty) group and participants then shift to attitudinal and behavioural positions which are congruent with the group norms which they have helped to create.

Thus, OBGIM is explicitly about *identity formation and transformation* (Thomas et al., 2009a). At the same time as increasing identification with the anti-poverty group, the provision of the outrage norm also changes, or transforms, the sense of 'what it means' to be an anti-poverty supporter. Above we asserted that social identities can be seen as resources, which people develop dynamically and reflexively to make sense of their social environment. In the context of these small groups, the discussion group became a place where appropriate behaviour was negotiated and agreed upon. Thus, through processes of discussion and the emergence of social consensus a new set of valid "group" beliefs, and norms for behaviour emerged. It was these new group norms that drove attitude and behaviour change.

Practical Implications

Overall then, a final lesson from this research for people who seek to effect change, is the importance of creating consensual understandings amongst group members around motivating norms for emotion, efficacy and action. Allowing group members to come together and to engage in discussion and debate about what it means to be a supporter of the cause, provides one mechanism for creating that consensual understanding. As intimated by Lewin's (1947) seminal studies campaigners would do well to engage would-be supporters in discussion (either face-to-face or computer mediated; see Brunsting & Postmes, 2002) with other like-minded people, rather than simply provide them with information. Indeed, it seems that many agents of change are already aware of the powerful effects of dialogue; one

website goes so far as to claim that it is through internet blogging that social change can become a reality (<http://thelpproject.blogspot.com/>).

Campaigners may also consider other methods of establishing consensual understandings amongst group members in the absence of group interaction. Given that campaigns are inevitably subject to the economies of scale and need to reach large number of people with minimal output, engaging people in small group interactions may not be the most viable option. However, it may be possible to imply group consensus by having supporters watch video taped discussions on social issues (as implied by the research of Mackie, 1986; see also Bennett-Pelz, 1958). That is, if campaigners can successfully imply a sense of 'who we are' and 'what we do' through other media, then this could also create an analogue of the consensualisation processes observed in OBGIM (note though that unless participants legitimately feel aligned with that discussion then it will be unlikely to be successful).

Concluding Comments

It is easy to claim that Australians accept or condone gross inequality in the international development context because they are heartless, racist or ignorant. Such an analysis does not, however, sit comfortably with the massive spontaneous generosity shown by Australians in the aftermath of the 2004 Asian Tsunami. Indeed, private donations totalled \$276 million ranking Australia third in the world by per capita donations (Jayawardena & McLendon, 2009). On the other hand, Australian knowledge of and engagement with the long-term agenda of the Millennium Development Goals leaves much to be desired relative to other developed nations.

Our analysis points to some ways in which the debate can be energised by drawing on social identity meanings. We have described the ways in which social identities fundamentally shape people's attitudes to, and behaviour towards, anti-

poverty action. Moreover, we argued that the relevance of anti-poverty identities in everyday social interaction depends critically on a sense of *consensus* in relation to the expediency of anti-poverty action, and the particular behaviours that will advance that cause. We also discussed the ways that attending to emotional reactions and (efficacy) beliefs that can facilitate or undermine involvement is an important concern for people seeking to mobilise anti-poverty movements. More specifically, on the basis of our review we argue that it seems particularly important to invoke feelings of moral outrage and indignation about the situation confronting people in developing countries; and make people believe that the problems are not intractable. But perhaps most importantly, these dimensions must be experienced and practiced *collectively*. Embedding emotions and efficacy in the sense of what it means to be a supporter of the anti-poverty movement is likely to be much more effective than drawing on these attributes at an individual level. While the psychological processes discussed here might sound abstract to people charged with finding anti-poverty solutions, a wealth of research supports the contention that such processes operate in everyday social interaction to mobilise people for causes (see van Zomeren et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2009a, for reviews).

Furthermore, while we have developed our arguments above in relation to efforts to combat poverty and preventable disease in international contexts, this general approach might usefully be applied to efforts to combat poverty amongst other local disadvantaged rural and urban groups, with some caveats. Indeed, earlier in this paper we highlighted the relevance of the issues of mobilising support for development in Australia to the issue of reducing poverty in Australia by arguing that Australia, or at least a large swathe of it, is a developing nation. As Oxfam and other NGOs increasingly apply lessons learnt in the international development context to

overcoming poverty in regions of remote Indigenous Australia, we nevertheless note some caveats and complexities that attend to different contexts of international and local poverty.

In particular, it seems to us that efforts to promote the productive pattern of identities, emotions and beliefs identified in this review might be complicated in cases of local poverty reduction by collective ideologies that reinforce the disadvantage, or otherwise justify it as laziness. We are, of course, aware that blaming the poor for their disadvantage happens in international contexts but we argue that this is a particularly problematic and prevalent response in contexts of local poverty (Hine & Montiel, 1999; c.f. Leach et al., 2007, who found that many structurally advantaged non-Indigenous Australians perceived themselves as disadvantaged because of a perception that they do not receive the same level of government assistance as their Indigenous counterparts). Recall that in our discussion of moral outrage we described research by Walslak et al. (2007) who found that *system justifying ideologies* were negatively associated with moral outrage and support for helping the disadvantaged. These system justifying seem more likely to us to be an undermining issue in contexts of local poverty than international poverty: a case of "if I can do it why can't they"? Put simply then, efforts to translate the lessons of this research to efforts to contexts of local poverty reduction (whether to Indigenous or other disadvantaged groups) will need to attend to different types of undermining or reinforcing collective ideologies and prejudices that shape the relevant identities, emotions and beliefs in anti-poverty action.

Overall, in both the local and international contexts it is clear to us that progress towards overcoming poverty depends on leaders having sufficient 'political will'. While there is no doubt that economic, political, environmental and legal

solutions will play an important role in the achievement (or otherwise) of the MDGs, the question of motivating public support for a social movement is intensely social psychological. Social psychology can play an important positive role in overcoming what Nelson Mandela (2005) described as the 'obscene inequality' of people in developing countries through the establishment of an engaged constituency.

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Footnotes

¹ Anti-poverty action intentions were measured in all our research by asking participants about their intention to, variously: sign a petition; write a letter to minister or government official; attend a rally; donate money to a charity; organise an anti-poverty event; attend an anti-poverty event; tell friends about anti-poverty issues.

² Sometimes group interaction can polarise negative social attitudes. For example, Myers and Bishop (1970) found group discussion around attitudes towards African Americans made racial attitudes more prejudicial. Smith and Postmes (2009) have found similar effects regarding attitudes towards immigrants in the United Kingdom; these authors found that these effects were contingent upon the establishment of social consensus around hostile group norms.

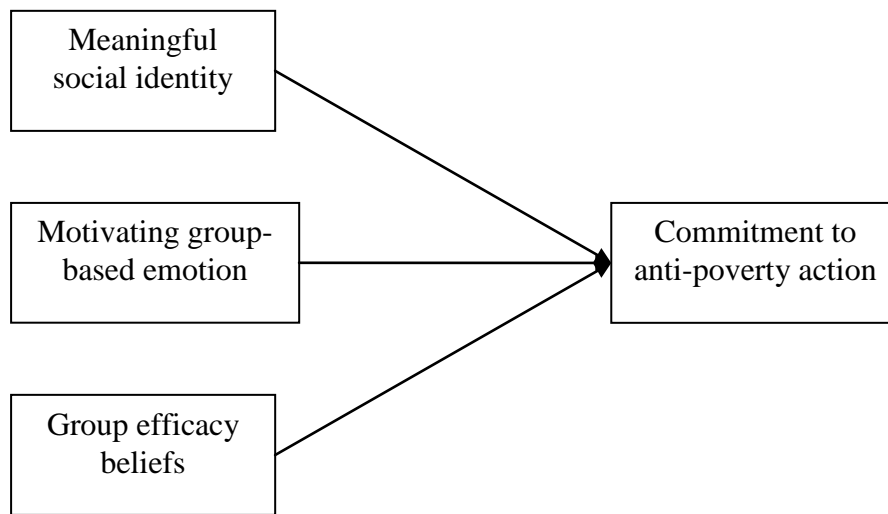


Figure 1. Three key social psychological motivators of anti-poverty action: meaningful social identities, group-based emotions and group efficacy beliefs.

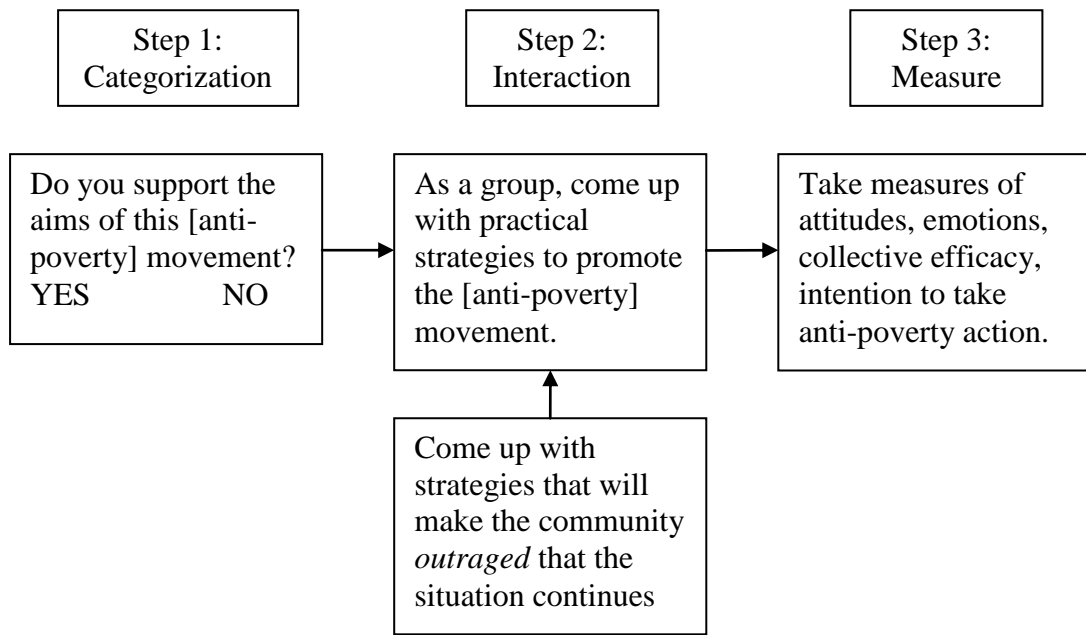


Figure 2. The opinion-based group interaction method with outrage norm.