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# THE SOCIAL IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE Intergroup Relations, Self-Conception, and Small Groups

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*The historical development, metatheoretical background, and current state of the social identity perspective in social psychology are described. Although originally an analysis mainly of intergroup relations between large-scale social categories, and more recently an analysis with a strong social cognitive emphasis, this article shows that the social identity perspective is intended to be a general analysis of group membership and group processes. It focuses on the generative relationship between collective self-conception and group phenomena. To demonstrate the relevance of the social identity perspective to small groups, the article describes social identity research in a number of areas: differentiation within groups; leadership; deviance; group decision making; organizations; computer mediated communication; mobilization, collective action, and social loafing; and group culture. These are the areas in which most work has been done and which are therefore best placed for further developments in the near future.*

**Keywords:** *social identity; intergroup behavior; group processes; social categorization*

**The social identity perspective** in social psychology is commonly viewed as an analysis of intergroup relations between large-scale social categories, which rests on a cognitive and self-conceptual

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definition of the social group and group membership. What can such an approach tell us about small face-to-face, task-oriented, interactive groups? Some would say very little. In this article, we hope to rectify this (mis)perception.

We describe the social identity perspective—its historical and metatheoretical context, its conceptual components and subtheories, and its contemporary form. In particular, we show how it is a general perspective on group membership and group phenomena that encompasses small and large groups, interactive and noninteractive groups, task-oriented and self-definitional groups, and intra- and intergroup phenomena. It is very much a perspective that can and does deal with small groups. Because this is a conceptual/review article, we do not detail specific empirical studies; however, we do provide extensive references to social identity literature.

A very large number of people do social identity research. Quite naturally, there are some differences in emphasis and interpretation among social identity researchers, but in general, there are very few deeper disagreements. As such, most, but not all, people should generally agree with the perspective we present here. Our perspective originates in and has developed from Hogg and Abrams's (1988) social identity text. For most recent overviews, see Abrams & Hogg (2001), Hogg (2001a, 2003, in press), Hogg & Abrams (2003), and Turner (1999).

### **HISTORICAL AND METATHEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

For an account of the history and metatheoretical background of the social identity perspective, see Hogg (2000a), Hogg and Williams (2000), and Abrams and Hogg (in press).

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*AUTHORS' NOTE: We are sad to report that Steve Hinkle died on October 19, 2001. He was a central and valued member of our four-person team assessing what we know about small groups from a social identity perspective, and so he appears as one of our coauthors. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Michael A. Hogg, School of Psychology, University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD 4072, Australia; e-mail: m.hogg@psy.uq.edu.au.*

## HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

The social identity perspective has its conceptual origins in research by Henri Tajfel on perceptual accentuation effects of categorization (Tajfel, 1959), cognitive aspects of prejudice (Tajfel, 1969), effects of minimal categorization (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971), and social comparison processes and intergroup relations (Tajfel, 1974). In doing this research, Tajfel's overarching passion, and his explicit goal (Turner, 1996), was to explain prejudice, discrimination, and intergroup conflict without recourse to personality or individual differences and without reducing large-scale collective phenomena to an aggregation of individual or interpersonal processes (see Billig, 1976).

From the late 1960s to his death in 1982, Tajfel, in collaboration with John Turner, who joined him as a graduate student in the early 1970s, integrated his social categorization, ethnocentrism, social comparison, and intergroup relations research around the concept of social identity. Drawing on work by Berger (1966; Berger & Luckmann, 1971), Tajfel first defined social identity as "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership" (Tajfel, 1972, p. 292). Groups, as collections of people sharing the same social identity, compete with one another for evaluatively positive distinctiveness. The nature of the competition, the strategies used, depends on people's beliefs about the nature of intergroup relations. This general idea, which became known as social identity theory, and later the "social identity theory of *intergroup* behavior" (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987, p. 42), was laid out by Tajfel (1974) and published by Tajfel and Turner in their classic 1979 article.

From the end of the 1970s through the mid-1980s, Turner and his students refocused attention on and elaborated the categorization process. These ideas were formalized as self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985; Turner et al., 1987), also called "the social identity theory of the group" (Turner et al., 1987, p. 42). This cognitive component of the wider social identity perspective (see Farr, 1996) sets out precisely how social categorization of self and others

underpins social identification and the associated array of characteristically group and intergroup phenomena. During this period, the social influence process associated with group membership and social identity was also developed (Turner, 1982)—people construct group norms from appropriate in-group members and in-group behaviors and internalize and enact these norms as part of their social identity. In 1988, Hogg and Abrams published their integrative social identity text.

The period since the late 1980s has witnessed an explosion of research and publication on social identity processes. The social identity perspective plays a key role in the burgeoning revival of social psychological research on group processes (Abrams & Hogg, 1998; Hogg & Abrams, 1999; Moreland, Hogg, & Hains, 1994). Much of this work can be characterized as theoretical or empirical consolidation. However, there have also been more substantial and concerted developments. For example, work on stereotyping (e.g., Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994; Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Schadron, 1994), self-conception (e.g., Abrams, 1996; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Hogg, 2001b; Reid & Deaux, 1996), motivation (e.g., Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Hogg, 2000b; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998), collective processes (e.g., Reicher, 2001; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995), norms and social influence (e.g., Terry & Hogg, 1996; Turner, 1991), multiple categorization and diversity (e.g., Crisp, Ensari, Hewstone, & Miller, 2003; Wright, Aron, & Tropp, 2002), and our current focus, intragroup phenomena mainly in small groups.

#### **METATHEORETICAL CONTEXT**

The social identity perspective was developed within the metatheoretical framework of European social psychology, and although it is no longer tied to Europe, it still retains this heritage. World War II decimated social psychology in Europe, and for many years after 1945 European social psychology was a remote outpost of American social psychology. However, European social psychologists gradually realized, in the 1960s, that they had a common

and distinctive European perspective, emphasis, or agenda in social psychology, which focused on the “wider social context” of social behavior (e.g., Jaspars, 1980, 1986).

This European emphasis on a more *social* social psychology (e.g., Taylor & Brown, 1979) is exemplified by Tajfel’s (1984) two-volume, 700-page, edited book. Titled *The Social Dimension: European Developments in Social Psychology*, this book was intended to capture the essence of a distinctive European social psychology over the 20 years since the early 1960s (i.e., since the birth of postwar European social psychology). In their introduction to Volume 1, Tajfel, Jaspars, and Fraser noted that amid the diversity of European social psychology,

there seems to exist a very general common denominator: in a phrase, it can be referred to as *the social dimension* of European social psychology. This is simply described: in much of the work—whatever its background, interests, theoretical approach or research direction—there has been a constant stress on the social and interactive aspects of our subject. Social psychology in Europe is today much more social than it was 20 years ago. (1984, p. 1)

Later, they defined the social dimension as a

view that social psychology can and must include in its theoretical and research preoccupations a direct concern with the relationship between human psychological functioning and the large-scale social processes and events which shape this functioning and are shaped by it. (1984, p. 3)

European social psychology adopted an interactionist metatheory that attended closely to levels of explanation and sought to avoid reductionism (e.g., Doise, 1986), seeking instead theories that developed level-appropriate concepts and then articulated these within a wider conceptual framework. Together, the social dimension and the interactionist metatheory have sponsored a keen interest among European social psychologists in groups, in particular, relations between large-scale social categories. Intergroup relations is closely linked to a general European perspective that focuses on people’s interaction with one another not as unique indi-

viduals but as members of social groups (Manstead, 1990). The focus is on the collective, not individual, self.

The social identity perspective was self-consciously developed in this intellectual milieu, and as such its genealogy is distinctly European. Its main focus certainly *was* on intergroup relations rather than intragroup processes, or small face-to-face groups.

### CONCEPTUAL COMPONENTS

In this section, we describe the social identity perspective in terms of its specific conceptual components (see Hogg, 2003). The components serve different explanatory functions and focus on different aspects of group membership and group life. They fit together and articulate smoothly with one another to provide an integrative middle-range social psychological theory of the relationship between self-conception and group processes. This way of characterizing the social identity perspective and its conceptual building blocks is consistent with Tajfel's original vision of an interactionist theory linking individual cognition, social interaction, and societal processes in a nonreductionist manner.

#### SOCIAL IDENTITY, COLLECTIVE SELF, AND GROUP MEMBERSHIP

A social group is a collection of more than two people who have the same social identity – they identify themselves in the same way and have the same definition of who they are, what attributes they have, and how they relate to and differ from specific outgroups. Group membership is a matter of collective self-construal—“we,” “us,” and “them.” Social identity is quite different from personal identity. Personal identity is a self-construal in terms of idiosyncratic personality attributes that are not shared with other people (“I”) or close personal relationships that are tied entirely to the specific other person in the dyadic relationship (“me” and “you”). Personal identity has little to do with group processes, although group life may well provide a context in which personal identities are formed (e.g., friendships and enmities).

People have as many social identities and personal identities as there are groups that they feel they belong to or personal relationships they have. Identities vary in subjective importance and value, and chronic and situational accessibility. However, in any given situation, only one identity is psychologically real—the salient basis of self-construal, social perception, and social conduct. Identities can change quickly in response to contextual changes; hence, social identity is context dependent not only in terms of which social identity is salient but also in terms of what form the identity may take.

Most social identity researchers believe that a dyad is not a group. They believe that the definitional boundary of a group must embrace at least three people because (a) a dyad is overwhelmed by interpersonal processes, and (b) you need at least three people in order to infer and construct common group characteristics from the behavior of others. In addition, many group processes simply cannot occur in a dyad—for example, coalition formation, majority social pressure, and deviance processes. Of course, two people in the same place at the same time can be a group in the sense that a shared social identity is salient, but the identity itself must rest on a larger collective. For example, two Canadians meeting in the desert may, for some reason, feel Canadian and act like Canadians. In this sense they are a group, but the group they belong to is Canadians, not the two of them in the desert. In fact, to pursue this logic, from a social identity perspective a person can act as a group member when he or she is entirely alone.

Traditionally, social identity research has simply distinguished between social and personal identity. However, there are some qualifications and alternative views. For example, Reid and Deaux (1996) acknowledge a basic difference between collective and individual selves: They use the terms (social) *identities* and (personal) *attributes*, rather than *social identity* and *personal identity*. They suggest that the cognitive organization of self-structure involves a significant amount of linkage between certain identities and certain attributes. Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi, and Ethier (1995) have also suggested that although social and personal identities differ qualitatively from one another, there are also important qualitative differ-



ences between types of social identity (e.g., ethnicity/religion, stigma, political).

Brewer and Gardner (1996) distinguish between three aspects of the self: individual self (defined by personal traits that differentiate self from all others), relational self (defined by dyadic relationships that assimilate self to significant other persons), and collective self (defined by group membership that differentiates “us” from “them”). Brewer (2001) distinguishes between four general types of social identity: (a) Person-based social identities emphasize how properties of groups are internalized by individual group members as part of the self-concept. (b) Relational social identities define self in relation to specific other people with whom one interacts in a group context; this corresponds closely to Brewer and Gardner’s (1996) “relational self” and to Markus & Kitayama’s (1991) “interdependent self.” (c) Group-based social identities are equivalent to the collective self or social identity as traditionally defined. (d) Collective identities refer to a process whereby group members do not just share self-defining attributes but also engage in social action to forge an image of what the group stands for and how it is represented and viewed by others. The social identity jury is still out over whether relational selves or relational social identities should count as social or personal identities.

#### **SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION, PROTOTYPES, AND DEPERSONALIZATION**

Social categorization is the cognitive heart of social identity processes (Turner et al., 1987). People cognitively represent groups in terms of prototypes—fuzzy sets of interrelated attributes that simultaneously capture similarities and structural relationships within groups and differences between the groups, and prescribe group membership-related behavior. Prototypes are social-cognitively constructed according to the principle of metacontrast (maximizing the ratio of perceived intergroup differences to intragroup differences) to accentuate entitativity (the extent to which a category appears to be a distinctive and clearly structured entity) (e.g., Campbell, 1958; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996), bal-

anced by a concern to represent the in-group favorably. As such, prototypes rarely describe average or typical in-group members; rather, they are polarized away from out-group features and describe ideal, often hypothetical, in-group members. Prototypes cannot form or be sustained purely by intragroup comparisons—they are dependent on intergroup comparisons. Thus, intragroup processes are inextricable from the wider intergroup context.

Prototypes vary from situation to situation as a function of the social comparative frame, that is, the specific ingroup members and the specific outgroup that are the basis for comparison. This variability may be dramatic (e.g., in relatively small and new groups), but it may also be more modest due to the inertial anchoring effect of enduring group representations (e.g., in large ethnic groups). In this way, prototypes are context specific rather than transcontextually invariant.

When you categorize someone, rather than see that person as an idiosyncratic individual, you see them through the lens of the prototype—they become depersonalized. Prototype-based perception of out-group members is more commonly called stereotyping: You view “them” as being similar to one another and all having out-group attributes. When you categorize yourself, exactly the same depersonalization process applies to self: You view yourself in terms of the attributes of the in-group (self-stereotyping), and because prototypes also describe and prescribe group-appropriate ways to feel and behave, you feel and behave normatively. In this way, self-categorization also produces, within a group, conformity and patterns of in-group liking, trust, and solidarity.

For a social categorization to have these effects, it must be psychologically real; that is, it must be psychologically salient as the basis for perception and self-conception. The principle governing social identity salience, developed and elaborated by Oakes (1987) from work by Bruner (1957), rests on the twin notions of accessibility and fit.

People draw on readily accessible social categorizations—ones that are valued, important, and frequently employed aspects of the self-concept (they are chronically accessible in memory), and/or because they are self-evident and perceptually salient in the imme-

diate situation (they are situationally accessible). For example, gender and race are often chronically and situationally accessible social categorizations. People use accessible categories to make sense of the social context, in terms of people's attitudes, behaviors, and so forth. They investigate the extent to which the categorization accounts for similarities and differences among people (called *structural* or *comparative* fit) and the extent to which the stereotypical properties of the categorization account for why people behave as they do (called *normative* fit). If the fit of the categorization to the social field is poor (e.g., similarities and differences do not correspond to people's gender or race, and people do not behave in gender- or race-stereotypical ways), people cycle through other accessible categorizations (e.g., political orientation, religion, profession, etc.) until an optimal level of fit is achieved.

Optimal fit identifies and locks in the psychologically salient categorization that now acts as the basis of depersonalization and self-categorization in that context. The salient categorization accentuates perceived similarities within groups and differences between groups to construct ingroup and outgroup prototypes that maximize entitativity and intergroup separateness and clarity in that particular context.

A slightly different but generally compatible emphasis on depersonalization has been proposed by Wright and his associates (e.g., Wright et al., 2002). Drawing on the ideas that people can internalize the properties of other people as part of themselves (e.g., Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991) and that people can include the ingroup as part of the self (e.g., Smith & Henry, 1996), Wright and his colleagues propose that strength of identification is a function of the degree to which the group is included in the self.

#### **MOTIVATION: SELF-ENHANCEMENT AND UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION**

Social identity processes are guided by two basic motivations: self-enhancement and uncertainty reduction. These motivations are cued by the intergroup social comparison idea, that groups strive to be both better and distinct.

Positive distinctiveness is driven by a concern for evaluatively positive social identity. People strive to promote or protect the prestige and status of their own group relative to other groups because group evaluation is self-evaluation. People do this because one of the most basic human motives is for self-enhancement and self-esteem (Sedikides & Strube, 1997), and in salient group contexts, the *self* in self-enhancement and self-esteem is the collective self, social identity (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). Although possession of a devalued or stigmatized social identity can depress self-esteem, people have an enormous capacity to buffer themselves from this consequence (e.g., Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998). People can also, as we saw above, respond in many different ways to a devalued or negative social identity. However, having a valued social identity and belonging to a prestigious high-status group has, in salient intergroup comparison situations, a more generally positive effect on self-esteem.

The other social identity motive is uncertainty reduction (Hogg, 2000b). People strive to reduce subjective uncertainty about their social world and about their place within it—they like to know who they are and how to behave, and who others are and how they might behave. Social categorization ties self-definition, behavior, and perception to prototypes that describe and prescribe behavior, and thus reduces uncertainty. Certainty, particularly self-conceptual certainty, renders others' behavior predictable and therefore allows one to avoid harm and plan effective action. It also allows one to know how one should feel and behave. The more self-conceptually uncertain one is, the more one strives to belong to high entitativity groups that have clearly defined consensual prototypes. Under extreme circumstances, these groups might be orthodox and extremist, and rigidly structured in terms of leadership and authority (Hogg, 2004). Another implication of the uncertainty reduction hypothesis is that subordinate groups may sometimes acquiesce in their subordinate status simply because challenging the status quo raises self-conceptual uncertainty to unacceptable levels (cf. Jost & Kramer, 2003).

### **SOCIAL ATTRACTION AND GROUP COHESION**

In salient groups, the prototype is the basis of perception, inference, and behavior. Within groups, people are highly attuned to prototypicality. Reactions to and feelings about fellow members are underpinned by perceptions of how prototypical those others are—how closely they match the group prototype. Hence, if the prototype changes, then feelings for and perceptions of specific members will change as their prototypicality changes.

One implication of this is that as group membership becomes salient, the basis of one's evaluations of and feelings for other people (i.e., liking) is transformed from personal identity-based personal attraction (traditional interpersonal attraction) to prototype-based depersonalized social attraction (Hogg, 1992, 1993). Social attraction is a function of how much one identifies with the group and how prototypical the other person is—it is positive regard or liking for the prototype as it is embodied by real group members. Social attraction tends to be relatively consensual and unidirectional: If membership is salient and there is agreement among group members on the prototype, then more prototypical members tend to be consensually popular and less prototypical members tend to be consensually socially unpopular. The network of depersonalized prototype-based positive regard and liking within a salient group represents the affective aspect of group cohesiveness—the warm feeling of oneness with fellow members.

### **SOCIAL COMPARISON**

Social comparison processes between salient groups follow a logic that is quite different from those that occur in interpersonal or intragroup contexts. Intergroup social comparisons do not strive toward uniformity and assimilation; instead, they strive to maximize differences between self, as ingroup member, and other, as outgroup member (Turner, 1975; also see Hogg, 2000a). According to Tajfel (1972, p. 296), social comparisons between groups are focused on the establishment of distinctiveness between one's own and other groups. Furthermore, because one's social identity not

only describes but also evaluates who one is, intergroup comparisons strive toward evaluatively positive ingroup distinctiveness.

#### **INTERGROUP RELATIONS**

Collective self-conception (social identity) is thus anchored in valence-sensitive social comparisons that strive for similarity within groups and differentiation between groups (Hogg, 2000a). At the level of intergroup relations, this idea explains why groups compete with each other to be both different and better—why they struggle over status, prestige, and distinctiveness.

Tajfel's (1974) analysis of intergroup behavior and social change articulates the logic of intergroup social comparisons with people's beliefs about the reality of intergroup relations and with their assessment of the availability and feasibility of different strategies to achieve or maintain positive intergroup distinctiveness (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; also see Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Ellemers, 1993). Specifically, people pay attention to status, the stability and legitimacy of status relations, the permeability of intergroup boundaries, and the possibility of achieving and sustaining an alternative status structure.

The combination of these belief variables (status, stability, legitimacy, permeability, and alternatives) generates a wide range of different intergroup behaviors (e.g., Ellemers, van Rijswijk, Roefs, & Simons, 1997; Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993). One example is lower status groups or their members who believe that the status quo is stable and legitimate, and that intergroup boundaries are permeable. These people tend to disidentify from their group and pursue an individual mobility strategy of "passing" (gaining acceptance) as members of the higher status group. They try to gain psychological entry into the higher status group.

Mobility rarely works. It is not in the dominant group's interest to permit wholesale passing. Successful wholesale passing would "contaminate" the dominant group and would dissolve the subordinate group, effectively abolishing the comparison group that makes the dominant group appear relatively superior. Passing leaves peo-

ple with a marginal identity; they are not accepted by the dominant group, and they are rejected by their own group because they have betrayed their identity. The ideology of mobility is very common because it is convenient for the dominant group: It prevents subordinate groups from recognizing the illegitimacy of the status quo and pursuing more competitive (and sometimes politicized) group-based intergroup strategies that might eventually topple the dominant group and change the status quo.

#### **SOCIAL INFLUENCE, CONFORMITY, AND GROUP NORMS**

The social identity notion of prototype is the cognitive analogue of the social interactive notion of norm. Prototypes can be considered cognitive representations of group norms, where such norms are social regularities that are bounded by group memberships and describe behavior that defines group membership (Turner, 1991). From a social identity perspective, norms are the source of social influence in groups because they are prescriptive, not merely descriptive. The self-categorization and depersonalization process explains how people conform to or enact group norms (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Turner, 1985; Turner & Oakes, 1989). Conformity is not merely surface behavioral compliance, it is a process whereby people's behavior is transformed to correspond to the appropriate self-defining group prototype.

The social identity perspective describes the social influence process associated with conformity as referent informational influence (Turner, 1982; also see Hogg & Turner, 1987). In group contexts, people pay attention to information about the context-specific group norm. Typically, the most immediate and best source of this information is identity-consistent behavior of core group members; however, outgroups can also provide relevant information ("whatever they are, we are not"). Once the norm has been recognized or established, it is internalized as the context-specific ingroup prototype and conformed to via the self-categorization process. Contextual norms serve at least two functions: to express ingroup similarities and ingroup identity, and to distance the

ingroup from all that the outgroup stands for. Because of this, they tend to be polarized away from outgroup norms and thus be more extreme than any central normative tendency of the ingroup.

### SMALL GROUPS

Although the social identity perspective has tended to focus mainly on intergroup relations and rests on a metatheory that prioritizes intergroup relations, it is, in fact, a general approach to the analysis of group membership and group phenomena. It has as much to say about what happens within small face-to-face groups as what happens between large-scale social categories. One of the key insights of the social identity perspective is, however, that any analysis of intragroup processes is incomplete without consideration of the intergroup context of intragroup processes. Starting in the mid-1990s (e.g., Hogg, 1996a, 1996b; Hogg & Abrams, 1993), the “small group” dimension of the social identity perspective has gathered substantial momentum over the past 10 years. In this section, we briefly outline how the social identity perspective contributes to an explanation of small-group phenomena.

### DIFFERENTIATION WITHIN GROUPS

With its focus on differentiation between groups, social identity researchers have paid little attention to the fact that groups are not homogeneous. In reality, in almost all cases, groups are internally structured in terms of roles, subgroups, nested categories, cross-cutting categories, and so forth. In recent years, intragroup differentiation has become a significant focus for social identity research. For example, Levine and Moreland and colleagues have articulated their group socialization model (e.g., Levine & Moreland, 1994) with the social identity perspective (e.g., Moreland & Levine, 2003; Moreland, Levine, & Cini, 1993; Moreland, Levine, & McMinn, 2001). Over time, group members occupy different generic roles (e.g., newcomer, old-timer, etc.) that hinge on the extent to which members are committed to the group and the group



is committed to its members. Moreland and Levine argue that bilateral commitment may depend on how group-prototypical the member is, and therefore social identity dynamics may underpin diachronic role transitions within small groups. Another analysis of roles, which fits well with the social identity perspective, is provided by Ridgeway (e.g., 2001). She uses status characteristics theory to explain how high-status sociodemographic category membership outside the small group furnishes members with a high status and influential role within the group.

Aside from roles, groups can also be internally structured into nested subgroups (e.g., sales and marketing in an organization) or wider cross-cutting categories (e.g., psychologists and physicists in a university). There is substantial research on the development and effects of cross-cutting and nested categories within groups (e.g., Brewer, 1996; Crisp et al., 2003; see Hogg & Hornsey, in press). For example, Sani and Reicher (e.g., 2000) provide a social identity analysis of schisms in groups. They argue that a schism is most likely to arise under conditions of identity threat and intolerance of diverse views within the overarching group. Mummendey and Wenzel and their associates (e.g., Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Wenzel, Mummendey, Weber, & Waldzus, 2003) argue that in almost all nested group situations, one group's attributes are more fully represented in the overarching group, and thus one nested group appears to occupy a dominant position. Subordinate subgroups can often feel that their distinct identity within the larger collective is threatened, which can cause them to fight strongly for their independence within the wider collective (e.g., Hewstone, 1996; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000).

Although groups that embrace diverse roles, subgroups, or nested categories often contain the seeds of subgroup conflict, this is certainly not always the case. This kind of diversity may help avoid many pitfalls of overly consensual groups for group decision making and may actually improve group decision making (Tindale, Kameda, & Hinsz, 2003). For example, identity-related attitudinal diversity combats groupthink (Stasser, Stewart, & Wittenbaum, 1995), demographic diversity benefits organizations (Brewer, 1996), and group decision making is improved by unshared infor-

mation (Wittenbaum & Stasser, 1996), the presence of minority views (Nemeth & Staw, 1989), and tolerance for internal criticism (Hornsey & Imami, in press). Overall, diversity that is internalized by members as part of their social identity may have a range of advantages for group functioning and group life as a whole (e.g., Niedenthal & Bieke, 1997; Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Wright et al., 2002).

#### **LEADERSHIP**

One of the key structural differentiations within groups is into leaders and followers. The social identity analysis of leadership (e.g., Hogg, 2001c; Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003; van Knippenberg & Hogg, in press) rests on the premise that as group membership is psychologically more salient, and members identify more strongly with the group, leadership endorsement and leadership effectiveness are increasingly based on how prototypical the leader is considered to be. In salient groups, prototypical members are the focus of depersonalization and conformity, and thus appear to exert greater influence than less prototypical members. They are also the focus of consensual depersonalized social attraction, which provides them with status and the ability to gain compliance from others—they appear to have easy influence over members and can be innovative. Because they are figural against the background of the rest of the group, their behavior is internally attributed. This constructs in the eyes of the group a leadership persona for them that further facilitates effective leadership.

Prototypical members usually identify more strongly with the group, and they therefore quite naturally behave in a group-serving manner. This validates their membership credentials and builds trust for them among other members; they are trusted to be acting in the best interest of the group, and are, paradoxically, given greater latitude to be innovative and nonconformist. Leaders who are not highly prototypical still need to prove their membership and therefore are less trusted and need to behave in a conformist manner that stands in the way of innovation and effective leadership.

## DEVIANCE

The flip side of leadership is deviance. The social identity analysis of deviance (e.g., Hogg, Fielding, & Darley, in press; Marques, Abrams, Páez, & Hogg, 2001) rests on the premise that deviant members are people who are not very prototypical and therefore are not liked (social attraction) or trusted as much as more prototypical members. Marques's analysis of the "black sheep effect" shows that people who occupy the prototypical boundary between in- and outgroup are disliked more and are more strongly rejected if they are ingroup than outgroup members (Marques & Páez, 1994). Abrams and Marques's subjective group dynamics model (e.g., Abrams, Marques, Bown, & Henson, 2000; Marques, Abrams, & Serodio, 2001) goes further to attribute the group reaction to deviants as being due to the fact that deviants threaten the integrity of group norms. Hogg and Fielding (e.g., Hogg et al., in press) build in a motivational component. They argue that the reaction of members to a deviant depends on (a) whether the deviant occupies a position on the boundary with the outgroup or remote from the outgroup, (b) whether there is a threat to the group's valence or its entitativity, and (c) whether the deviant publicly attributes his or her deviance to self or to the group.

Other perspectives on deviance focus on deviants as ingroup critics (e.g., Hornsey & Imami, in press) or as minority groups that challenge the accepted wisdom of the majority (e.g., Nemeth & Staw, 1989). In both of these cases, as discussed above, deviance is viewed as a constructive contribution to group life—minorities and critics are effectively trying to change the group's identity from inside. A final social identity perspective on deviance is that adopted by Emler and Reicher (1995), who suggest that delinquency, particularly among adolescent boys, is strategic behavior designed to establish and manage a favorable reputation among groups of peers. Consistent with this view is the fact that delinquent behavior is most common among children who feel that they cannot meet exacting adult standards of academic achievement, and it is a group activity that occurs in public, thus satisfying its identity-confirming function.

### GROUP DECISION MAKING

Group decision making is influenced in a variety of ways by social identity processes. In general, as groups become more salient and perhaps more cohesive, there should be a greater tendency for members to conform to the normative leanings of the group. This is a familiar small-group process that goes back to early research by Sherif and Asch. However, from a social identity perspective, the emphasis is on normative behavior rather than social pressure from other members; people conform to local group norms rather than comply with individuals (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Turner, 1991). One implication of this is that where group norms are polarized away from a salient outgroup, group discussion or decision making will produce group polarization—a postdiscussion group position that is more extreme than the prediscussion position in a direction away from a salient outgroup (e.g., Abrams, Wetherell, Cochrane, Hogg, & Turner, 1990; Mackie, 1986). Another implication is that groupthink, which is generally attributed to excessive cohesiveness in small groups, may be more closely tied to excessive depersonalized social attraction rather than excessive interpersonal attraction (e.g., Hogg & Hains, 1998; M. E. Turner, Pratkanis, Probasco, & Leve, 1992).

Another way in which social identity concerns may impact group decision making has been discussed above, under the heading “Differentiation Within Groups.” Groups that are not homogeneous but that embrace diversity of subgroups, roles, and cross-cutting categories may make better decisions than homogeneous groups because of the presence of identity-related unshared information (Tindale et al., 2003). More broadly, under the right conditions, dissent and diversity may enhance group decision making.

### ORGANIZATIONS

Because organizations are groups, the social identity perspective is perfectly suited to an analysis of organizations. Beginning with Ashforth and Mael (1989), social identity research on organizational processes has increased dramatically in recent years (e.g.,

Haslam, 2004; Hogg & Terry, 2000, 2001; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2001). Some of this work has focused on the role of organizational identification and commitment in worker turnover (e.g., Abrams, Ando, & Hinkle, 1998; Moreland et al., 2001). Other work has shown that organizational mergers often do not work very well because members of the new merged organization struggle to retain their former organizational identity (e.g., Terry, Carey, & Callan, 2001). There is also research focusing on how organizations manage sociocultural diversity in the workplace (e.g., Brewer, 1996). Leadership (see above) and trust within organizations (e.g., Tyler & Huo, 2002) are two other foci of social identity research in organizational contexts.

#### **COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION**

Nowadays, much decision making in organizations occurs via computer mediated communication (CMC) within virtual groups (Hollingshead, 2001). The social identity model of deindividuation phenomena (Reicher et al., 1995) helps explain what may go on in such groups. CMC has a “participation equalization effect” that evens out many of the status effects that occur in face-to-face groups, and so people may feel less inhibited because they are less personally identifiable. However, disinhibition depends on how effectively identity and status markers are concealed by the electronic medium (Spears & Lea, 1994). If people feel anonymous in the presence of a highly salient social identity, they will conform strongly to identity-congruent norms and be easily influenced by group leaders and normative group members (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998; Postmes, Spears, Sakhel, & de Groot, 2001).

#### **MOBILIZATION, COLLECTIVE ACTION, AND SOCIAL LOAFING**

Another area in which social identity ideas have informed an understanding of small group processes is the study of participation in social protest or social action groups (e.g., Reicher, 2001; Stürmer & Simon, in press). The study of social protest is the study

of how individual discontents or grievances are transformed into collective action—how and why sympathizers become mobilized as activists or participants. Klandermans (1997) argues that mobilization reflects the attitude-behavior relationship: Sympathizers hold sympathetic attitudes toward an issue, yet these attitudes do not readily translate into behavior. Participation also resembles a social dilemma. Protest is generally *for* a social good (e.g., equality) or *against* a social ill (e.g., oppression), and as success benefits everyone irrespective of participation but failure harms participants more, it is tempting to “free ride”—to remain a sympathizer rather than become a participant. The role of leadership is critical in mobilizing a group to take action, and in particular, the leader needs to be viewed as a just person who can be trusted to act in the best interest of the group and its members (e.g., Tyler & Smith, 1998). Ultimately, however, it is social identification that increases the probability of social action and collective protest.

An aspect of group life that is related to social mobilization is social loafing. The typical finding is that people in small groups exert less effort on a task than if they performed the task alone (e.g., Karau & Williams, 1993). However, this effect can be muted under a number of circumstances, for example, when people believe strongly in the group and feel they need to compensate for others' poor performance (e.g., Williams, Karau, & Bourgeois, 1993). Indeed, it seems that if one identifies strongly with the group and the task is identity-defining, then people can work harder in a group than they do alone (e.g., Fielding & Hogg, 2000).

#### **GROUP CULTURE**

The notion of culture has become popular in social psychology. Most research dwells on cultural differences between large-scale categories (individualist West versus collectivist East, e.g., Hofstede, 1980), or on differences in self-construal (independent vs. interdependent self, e.g., Markus & Kityama, 1991). Whereas culture at the global level certainly affects the way in which small groups operate—for example, leadership processes—culture can also be analyzed at a more microsocial level: Different groups have

different cultures and thus different ways of thinking, acting, and relating to and among one another (e.g., Moreland & Levine, 2003).

From a social identity perspective, we would expect that social identity processes in small groups would be more evident in collectivist than individualist societies (e.g., Hinkle & Brown, 1990), and that people in small groups with a strongly individualistic norm or local culture would, paradoxically, behave more individualistically as a function of increased identification (e.g., Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002; McAuliffe, Jetten, Hornsey, & Hogg, 2003).

### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Although the social identity perspective started out with a focus on large-scale intergroup relations and later had a strong social cognition emphasis, it is actually intended to be an analysis of groups as a whole. It is just as applicable to small, face-to-face, task-oriented groups as it is to large, impersonal social categories. In this article, we have outlined the historical development and background of the social identity perspective and then shown how it has been, how it is, and how it could be applied to small groups. The emphasis of this article has been conceptual, so we have not provided an empirical overview of specific studies and programs of research; for a more empirical emphasis, see Abrams, Hogg, Hinkle, Otten (in press). However, we have provided a reasonably representative coverage of the relevant literature.

The relevance of the social identity approach to small groups is significant. However, in this article, we have focused only on a handful of areas: differentiation within groups; leadership; deviance; group decision making; organizations; computer-mediated communication; mobilization, collective action, and social loafing; and group culture. These are the areas in which most work has been done and which are therefore best placed for further developments in the near future.

The strength of the social identity analysis lies in the existence of a set of clearly specified conceptual components that articulate

with one another to link social cognitive, social interactive, and social structural processes. This allows the approach to address the range of phenomena related to self-conception as a group member. One weakness has been limited emphasis on processes in small interactive groups. This article has shown, we hope, how that weakness is largely a chimera—and is being overcome. One current debate is over the relationship between different identities (e.g., Mullen, Migdal, & Rozell, 2003). The question is whether identities are hydraulically related to one another so that the more one identity prevails, the less others do. Or, can multiple identities be simultaneously salient? These issues point toward one significant future development in social identity research: In intergroup contexts, can people simultaneously identify with a subgroup and superordinate group, and if so, may this be a means of defusing intergroup conflict and constructing groups and identities that celebrate diversity (Hogg & Hornsey, in press)?

We hope that this article will convince researchers, particularly small-group researchers, that the social identity perspective is not exclusively about macrosocial intergroup relations but that it certainly does have something valuable to say about processes in small interactive groups.

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