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## *Social Identity Theory: Past Achievements, Current Problems, and Future Challenges*

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**Agenda 2000**

**Social Identity Theory: past achievements,  
current problems and future challenges**

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*Abstract*

*This article presents a critical review of Social Identity Theory. Its major contributions to the study of intergroup relations are discussed, focusing on its powerful explanations of such phenomena as ingroup bias, responses of subordinate groups to their unequal status position, and intragroup homogeneity and stereotyping. In addition, its stimulative role for theoretical elaborations of the Contact Hypothesis as a strategy for improving intergroup attitudes is noted. Then five issues which have proved problematic for Social Identity Theory are identified: the relationship between group identification and ingroup bias; the self-esteem hypothesis; positive–negative asymmetry in intergroup discrimination; the effects of intergroup similarity; and the choice of identity strategies by low-status groups. In a third section a future research agenda for the theory is sketched out, with five lines of enquiry noted as being particularly promising: expanding the concept of social identity; predicting comparison choice in intergroup settings; incorporating affect into the theory; managing social identities in multicultural settings; and integrating implicit and explicit processes. The article concludes with some remarks on the potential applications of social identity principles. Copyright © 2000 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

New centuries—and new millennia even more so—often prompt reflections on how far we have come and how far (and where) we have yet to go. I want to use the opportunity provided by this Agenda 2000 series to engage in such a reappraisal of one of social psychology's pre-eminent theoretical perspectives, Social Identity Theory (SIT). I use the word 'pre-eminent' advisedly because there can be no question that social identity concepts are widely diffused and extensively employed as explanatory tools throughout our discipline. This can be seen from the frequency of references to SIT and related topics in our major journals which seem to have increased linearly over the past twenty years (Abrams & Hogg, 1998; Brown & Capozza, 2000), from the popularity of 'social identity' as key words in conference proceedings on both sides of the Atlantic (e.g. meetings of the European Association of Experimental

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Social Psychology (Oxford, 1999) and Society for Experimental Social Psychology (St Louis, 1999)), and from the publication in the past two years alone of no less than four edited books specifically devoted to reporting and evaluating developments in social identity theory and research (Abrams & Hogg, 1999; Capozza & Brown, 2000; Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 1999; Worchel, Morales, Paez & Deschamps, 1998). This influence is as apparent in the field from which SIT originally sprang, intergroup relations, as it is in such diverse areas as attitudes and behaviour, deindividuation, group cohesion, performance and decision making, leadership, social influence, and stereotyping.<sup>1</sup>

The reasons behind this rapid absorption of SIT into the mainstream of the discipline will doubtless be of interest to future historians of science. Elsewhere, we have suggested that it was a mixture of historical accident—the period of its conception (1970s) was particularly ripe for a theory of its type—and scientific utility, especially in offering the prospect of resolving some theoretical and meta-theoretical problems that had preoccupied social psychologists for decades (Brown & Capozza, 2000). Perhaps foremost of these was that it offered the possibility of addressing a classic social psychological problem of the relationship of the individual to the group and the emergence of collective phenomena from individual cognitions. This analysis has been developed more formally in Self Categorisation Theory (SCT)<sup>2</sup> where it is shown how uniform behaviour can result from the internalisation of the same group concept and categorical attributes by ingroup members (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987).

In this article I want to do three things. In the first section I will revisit the brief history of SIT as I assess its achievements in explaining a variety of intergroup phenomena which had hitherto been poorly understood. Despite these successes, the mushrooming of SIT-inspired research over the past twenty years has, not surprisingly, highlighted a number of problems with the theory. These are discussed in the second section. Then, in the third section I outline an agenda for the future challenges that SIT will need to meet if it is to maintain its position in the front ranks of theoretical perspectives in the discipline.

## THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

The core ideas of SIT are probably sufficiently familiar by now not to require extensive presentation here. As is well known, Tajfel & Turner (1986) posited a distinction between personal and social identity, which they argued underpinned the difference between interpersonal situations (in which behaviour is mainly under the control of personological variables) and group situations (determined largely by category-based processes). SIT is concerned with the latter and starts from the assumption that social

<sup>1</sup> For reasons of space and personal predilection I will limit myself in this article to the field of intergroup relations.

<sup>2</sup> Although it is not uncommon to see conflation of SIT and SCT in bibliographic citations, it is important to be clear that the theories are, in fact, different (Turner, 1999). One particular in which they differ is in their scope. SIT was developed to explain a range of problems in intergroup relations; SCT aims to provide a more general account of group processes, including intergroup behaviour but also such phenomena as stereotyping, group polarisation, social influence and leadership. It would not be possible to do justice to both theories in the space of a single article and so here I concentrate mainly on SIT.

identity is derived primarily from group memberships. It further proposes that people strive to achieve or maintain a positive social identity (thus boosting their self-esteem), and that this positive identity derives largely from favourable comparisons that can be made between the ingroup and relevant outgroups. In the event of an 'unsatisfactory' identity, people may seek to leave their group or find ways of achieving more positive distinctiveness for it. There are different strategies which may be adopted to this end and various conditions under which these are thought more or less likely to be used. Supplementing these basic principles, Tajfel and Turner (1986) also noted that there are three classes of variables that might influence intergroup differentiation: people must be subjectively identified with their ingroup; the situation should permit evaluative intergroup comparisons; the outgroup must be sufficiently comparable (e.g. similar or proximal) and that pressures for distinctiveness should increase with comparability.

How have these few assumptions been used to make sense of various intergroup phenomena? Here I want to focus on four areas where, it seems to me, SIT has made its most significant contributions: ingroup bias; responses to status inequality; intragroup homogeneity and stereotyping; and changing intergroup attitudes through contact.

### Explaining Ingroup Bias

The widespread occurrence of biased perceptions, judgements and behaviour has never seriously been questioned. From Sumner's (1906) anecdotal observations to Mullen, Brown and Smith's (1992) more formal compilation and analysis, it is by now a common-place that group members are prone to think that their own group (and its products) are superior to other groups (and theirs), and to be rather ready behaviourally to discriminate between them as well. The prevalence of this ingroup favouritism, even in circumstances where there are few or no obvious extrinsic causes for it, is readily comprehensible in SIT's terms. The most common form of favouritism—biased intergroup evaluations—is a prototypical manifestation of the theory's hypothesised need for positive distinctiveness. SIT seems to provide a good explanation for that most gratuitous form of ingroup favouritism of all, that found in minimal or quasi-minimal group settings where all plausible causes of intergroup discrimination *except* group membership are excluded (Rabbie & Horwitz, 1969; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy & Flament, 1971). Especially noteworthy—and especially explicable by SIT—is the common observation that such minimal intergroup discrimination often involves a maximising difference motive, even at the expense of absolute ingroup gain (Tajfel *et al.*, 1971). Further support for the hypothesis that social identity processes underlie this form of ingroup bias was the discovery that group members seem to feel better about themselves after engaging in such discrimination (Lemyre & Smith, 1985; Oakes & Turner, 1980; see also Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). This is a direct demonstration of SIT's claim that people show intergroup differentiation partly to feel good about their group (and themselves). Although, as we shall see later, the 'self-esteem hypothesis' within SIT has attracted other problems, in this respect at least, the presumed association between discrimination and self-esteem seems borne out.

One of the attractions of SIT is that it explains the occurrence of ingroup bias even in the absence of objective or instrumental causes—for example, conflicts of economic interests. In that sense it provides a valuable complementary account to that offered by Realistic Group Conflict Theory (RCT) (Sherif, 1966). However, it seems likely that social identity processes may *interact with* as well as supplement the instrumental motivations postulated by RCT. For example, Struch and Schwartz (1989) found that perceived conflict (between religious groups in Israel) was related to outgroup aggression (as predicted by RCT) and that this relationship was stronger for those who identified strongly with their ingroup. Brown, Maras, Masser, Vivian and Hewstone (manuscript under review) observed a similar effect with real (rather than perceived) conflict. English passengers on a cross-channel ferry who had been prevented from travelling by the actions of an outgroup (a blockade by French fishermen) had less favourable attitudes towards French people as a whole than those whose travel plans had not been thwarted. And there were indications that this effect was stronger for those identifying strongly with their nationality. Indeed, national identification by itself was the most consistent predictor of xenophobic attitudes, an association observed in other studies of inter-nation or inter-ethnic attitudes (Brown, Vivian & Hewstone, 1999; Gonzalez & Brown, 1999; Pettigrew, 1997). I shall return to this correlation between identification and intergroup differentiation later, but there is no doubt that, in particular contexts, strength of ingroup identification is a powerful predictor of intergroup attitudes.

### **Understanding Responses to Status Inequality**

From the outset, a significant portion of SIT was devoted to explaining the diverse reactions of members of dominant and subordinate groups. This was necessary because a naïve extrapolation from the ‘need for distinctiveness’ assumption of the theory leads to the prediction that generally one should find the most ingroup bias from members of lower status groups since their identity is the least positive. In fact, of course, it was apparent quite early on that one *generally* observes more ingroup bias among members of higher-status groups (Blake & Mouton, 1961; Kahn & Ryan, 1972; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1987; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood & Sherif, 1961; Turner, 1978; see Mullen *et al.*, 1992). Such findings led to a specification in SIT of the conditions under which one would expect ingroup bias and heightened identification from subordinate groups, and the forms that favouritism might take; and when, alternatively, one might expect disidentification and outgroup preference. The primary factors leading to the first outcome were thought to be perceptions of the intergroup status relationship(s) as illegitimate and unstable, and group boundaries which were relatively impermeable and thus not readily permissive of social mobility. A number of responses to such conditions were thought possible, ranging from direct (and biased) comparisons with the dominant group on the consensually accepted dimensions of value, to more indirect strategies involving re-evaluating the importance of those dimensions, searching for new ones, or finding alternative outgroups to serve as comparators. By and large, this analysis of intergroup inequality has received some support in several studies (e.g. Caddick, 1982; Doosje, Ellemers & Spears, 1995a; Ellemers, Wilke & Van Knippenberg, 1993; Jackson, Sullivan, Harmish & Hodge,

1996; Reichl, 1997; Turner & Brown, 1978; Van Knippenberg & Van Oers, 1984; see Ellemers, 1993, for a review). As we shall see below, though, there are some additional complexities to be considered which interfere with precise predictions about which identity maintenance strategies will be adopted.

The early research on responses to inequality inspired by SIT tended to focus on perceptual and judgemental consequences, particularly as those were manifested in ingroup biases of various kinds. Subsequently, researchers turned their attention to behaviours or, more accurately, behavioural intentions, particularly in relation to reactions of collective protest by subordinate groups. An important theoretical perspective in this area has been Relative Deprivation Theory (RDT) (Gurr, 1970; Olson, Herman & Zanna, 1986; Runciman, 1966; Walker & Smith, in press). RDT proposes that the driving force behind feelings of discontent and subsequent collective action is a perception of discrepancies between what one's group currently experiences and what it is entitled to expect. There can be both historical and contemporary sources of such discrepancies, the most pertinent for the present discussion being social comparisons with other groups (Tyler & Smith, 1998). An important contribution of SIT has been to reveal not only how the discontent fuelled by relative deprivation is affected by social identity processes, but also how collective protest itself can sometimes be better predicted by group identification than by relative deprivation.

The link between identity and discontent has been found to take two forms. In some studies identification has been shown to *moderate* the effects of deprivation. For example, Smith, Spears and Oyen (1994) and Kawakami and Dion (1993) found that felt collective deprivation was more acute for those whose group (rather than personal) identities had been made salient experimentally (see also, Smith, Spears & Hamstra, 1999). Similarly, in field studies of abortion activists and participants in the women's movement, intergroup attitudes and participation were better predicted by relative deprivation for those identifying strongly with the groups concerned (Hinkle, Fox-Cardamone, Haseleu, Brown & Irwin, 1996; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996). In other studies, by contrast, feelings of deprivation themselves have been seen to be *directly* affected by strength of group identification. Gurin and Townsend (1986) found that collective discontent among women and motivation to engage in political action for legislative change was consistently predicted by gender identification. Likewise, Abrams (1990) found that deprivation among Scottish adolescents was strongly predicted by their strength of national identification measured both contemporaneously and a year previously. Also, Tropp and Wright (1999) observed clear evidence of associations between ethnic group identification and relative deprivation among two ethnic minority groups in the USA.

In the above studies the most proximal determinant of collective action was presumed to be relative deprivation, with group identification seen as an antecedent or moderator. However, in other research groups identification itself has been found to be a primary predictor of propensity to participate in social movements for change, *independently* of deprivation. An early example of this is Tougas and Villieux (1988) who found that women's (favourable) attitudes towards affirmative action policies were separately correlated with both gender identification and collective relative deprivation. Similarly, participation in trade union, gay, and elderly people's action groups was generally best predicted by identification with the activist groups concerned (Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996; Simon, Loewy, Stürmer, Weber, Freytag, Habig & Kampmeier, 1998).



Earlier it was noted how SIT predicts that permeability of group boundaries is generally debilitating of identification and ingroup favouring bias. A similar hypothesis can be derived for people's willingness to protest collectively against injustice, and this prediction was supported by Wright, Taylor and Moghaddam (1990). They arranged for a group to be unjustly deprived and then, under different conditions of the possibility and likelihood of leaving that group, observed the group members' reactions. Only under conditions of complete group impermeability was there any noticeable tendency for collective protest; the perception that even a token few deprived group members could join a more privileged group was enough to mitigate this protest and encourage individual forms of remedial action (see also Boen and Vanbeselaere, 1998). Using a similar paradigm but with real-life categories, Lalonde and Silverman (1994) found something similar. The effect was particularly pronounced when collective identity was made salient.

### **Stereotyping and Perceptions of Group Homogeneity**

A third major achievement of SIT has been to change the way social psychology thinks about stereotyping, and particularly its cognitive concomitant, the perception of homogeneity in groups. The seeds for this new approach can be found in Tajfel (1981) in which he sought to integrate the then emerging trends in social cognition with the group based motivations derived from SIT. Central to his argument was the idea that categorization and stereotyping cannot be understood by considering them solely as information-processing devices which facilitate and simplify individual thinking. Such a view neglects their social role as tools for understanding particular intergroup relationships and justifying behaviour towards outgroup members, hence linking them directly to social identity processes. One immediate consequence of rethinking stereotyping in this way was the realisation that it may not be very helpful to regard stereotypes as 'faulty distortions' which need to be corrected or overcome since, from particular (in)group points of view, they may be rather reliable guides to judgement and action. A second implication was that they might be more contextually determined, and hence more labile, than some previous models had given them credit for. Both of these arguments have been extensively elaborated in SCT and the research it has inspired and so, for reasons of space, I will not discuss these developments further (see e.g. McGarty, 1999; Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994; Turner *et al.*, 1987).

Of course, the categorization process underlying stereotyping implies perceiving members of a given category as possessing various common attributes—in other words, being seen as more similar to each other than they are to members of another category (Tajfel, 1969). Such perceptions of intragroup homogeneity have been intensively studied and here SIT has made a significant contribution in at least two directions: first, in challenging the conventional wisdom that outgroups are always perceived as being more homogeneous than ingroups; and second, in showing how perceptions of group homogeneity in *general* (i.e. of both ingroups and outgroups) are linked to social identity processes.

As is well known, a common finding is that outgroup members are seen as more similar to each other than are ingroup members (Linville, Fischer & Salovey, 1986; Ostrom & Sedikides, 1992; Quattrone, 1986). Indeed, so prevalent is this outgroup

homogeneity phenomenon that it is still frequently presented in textbooks as an inevitable consequence of social categorisation (Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 1999; Baron & Byrne, 2000; Myers, 1996). This asymmetry in intergroup perception is usually explained in terms of differential familiarity with ingroup and outgroup members (Linville, Fischer & Salovey, 1989), or as a result of the different ways information about ingroups and outgroups is stored or processed (Ostrom, Carpenter, Sedikides & Li, 1993; Park, Judd & Ryan, 1991). In fact, none of these explanations can provide an adequate account of the full range of relative intragroup homogeneity effects. Particularly troublesome for them is the by now well-documented existence of *ingroup* homogeneity (Devos, Comby & Deschamps, 1996; Simon, 1992a). This is likely to occur among minority groups or on judgemental dimensions strongly associated with or defining of the ingroup (Brown & Smith, 1989; Kelly, 1989; Simon, 1992b; Simon & Brown, 1987; Simon, Glässner-Bayerl & Stratenwerth, 1991). Moreover, since ingroup homogeneity can be observed both among minimal groups (where there is equal and negligible knowledge of group members) and in real groups, maintaining or even increasing over time (Brown & Wootton-Millward, 1993; Oakes, Haslam, Morrison & Grace, 1992; Ryan & Bogart, 1997), it is unlikely that variations in familiarity can explain the phenomenon. The fact that minority group status usually leads to enhanced ingroup identification, and that ingroup homogeneity is most frequently seen on identity relevant attributes, points instead to identity maintenance or protection as the underlying process.

Turning now to overall perceptions of homogeneity, we find group identification playing a similarly influential role. For example, reactions to low ingroup status, with its negative implications for identity, can be to emphasise ingroup variability so as to mitigate the consequences of being tarred with the same brush (Doosje, Spears & Koomen, 1995a). Moreover, if that status designation is made to seem unstable (see above), then it is those who identify more strongly who react by seeing the ingroup as more homogeneous (Doosje, Spears, Ellemers & Koomen, 1999). In fact, in general, high identifiers tend to see both ingroups *and* outgroups as more homogeneous than low identifiers, particularly if the intergroup context is salient (Doosje *et al.*, 1995a; Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 1997; Kelly, 1989). That these effects are found whether identification differences are based on standard scales or derived from experimental manipulations, strongly implicates social identity as playing a causal role in mediating these perceptions of group homogeneity.

### Changing Intergroup Attitudes through Contact

The initial stimulus for the formulation of SIT was the widespread occurrence of ingroup favouritism, even in contexts where there was little obvious rationale for such bias. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the main focus of much of the work inspired by SIT has been on those 'negative' aspects of intergroup relations (Brown, 1996). Nevertheless, despite this bias in favour of bias, SIT has provided a common springboard for three modifications to the Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954), all aimed at improving intergroup attitudes.

The first is the decategorisation model proposed by Brewer and Miller (1984). Noting the frequent consequence of social categories becoming salient (i.e. increased



discrimination and bias), Brewer and Miller concluded that the best way of reducing intergroup differentiation was to make those categories less useful as psychological tools. They thus proposed various tactics—for example, personalising the intergroup situation or finding additional categorical dimensions that cut across the original ones—whose result should be to ‘decategorise’ the current situation in question and hence make the occurrence of ingroup bias less likely. There is now a good deal of evidence which supports this idea, albeit mainly from laboratory research with *ad hoc* groups whose transitory nature makes their psychological abandonment easier to achieve (Bettencourt, Brewer, Croak & Miller, 1992; Bettencourt, Charlton & Kerna-ham, 1997; Marcus-Newall, Miller, Holtz & Brewer, 1993; Miller, Brewer & Edwards, 1985; but cf. Rich, Kedem & Schlesinger, 1995). A second approach, instead of trying to remove categorisation from the psychological field, seeks to redraw the category boundaries so that any outgroup becomes subsumed into a new and larger super-ordinate category (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman & Rust, 1993; Turner, 1981). Because ingroup and (former) outgroup members now share a ‘common ingroup identity’, they should be drawn closer together and intergroup discrimination should be reduced. Once again, there is now an impressive literature documenting the potency of this strategy for changing intergroup attitudes for the better (Dovidio, Gaertner & Validzic, 1998; Gaertner, Mann, Murrell & Dovidio, 1989; Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman & Anastasio, 1994).

Both the decategorisation and common ingroup identity models involve the dissolution of category boundaries and hence the abandonment of subgroup identities. When the groups concerned are real-life entities, such a strategy may be psychologically and practically harder to implement. It may be difficult to resist using some subgroup categories if they are chronically accessible, and some groups, particularly minorities, may actively resist policies which mean their assimilation into a dominant cultural identity. Furthermore, contact strategies which break the link between the individual outgroup members actually encountered and the larger outgroup may impede the generalisation of any positive intergroup attitudes (Brown & Turner, 1981). For these reasons Hewstone and Brown (1986) argued that there were advantages in a third approach, in which some subgroup salience was retained while otherwise optimising contact conditions (Allport, 1954). There are various ways this has been investigated: one approach has been to stress the typicality of the outgroup members with whom the contact was occurring (Wilder, 1984); another is simply to draw the participants’ attention to their respective group memberships during the encounter (van Oudenhoven, Groenewoud & Hewstone, 1996). The common theme is to shift the setting towards the group pole of the interpersonal-group continuum (Brown & Turner, 1981) while ensuring that the interaction that takes place is between equal-status protagonists and is of a cooperative nature. Several studies, conducted in various intergroup contexts involving real-life groups, have provided support for this idea (Brown *et al.*, 1999, 2000; Gonzalez & Brown, 1999, unpublished manuscript; Scarberry, Ratcliff, Lord, Lanicek & Desforjes, 1997; Van Oudenhoven, Groenewoud & Hewstone, 1996; Wilder, 1984).

It is interesting that SIT has provided the same point of departure for these three perspectives and yet each generates such different predictions for the optimal conditions for intergroup contact. In a later section I discuss how these conflicting viewpoints may be at least partially reconciled.

## PROBLEMS FOR SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

Any theory which generates the volume of research that SIT has is likely to encounter the occasional empirical refutation and reveal any conceptual ambiguities it may possess. In my view, such difficulties are a sign of a theory's continuing vitality and should be welcomed as opportunities to refine and modify it rather than defensively rejected or simply ignored. As I see it, there are five main issues which have proved problematic for SIT: the relationship between group identification and ingroup bias; the self-esteem hypothesis; the phenomenon of positive–negative asymmetry in intergroup discrimination; the effects of intergroup similarity; and the choice of identity maintenance strategies by low-status groups.

### The Relationship between Group Identification and Ingroup Bias

As noted at the outset, SIT rests on the assumption that a positive social identity is mainly based on favourable intergroup comparisons. A plausible inference to draw from this simple idea is that there should be a positive correlation between strength of group identification and the amount of positive intergroup differentiation (or ingroup bias). From early on in the life of the theory (e.g. Brown & Ross, 1982) this hypothesis has been of enduring interest to researchers in the SIT tradition and continues to be tested to this day (e.g. Perreault & Bourhis, 1998). The first review of studies investigating this relationship concluded that, at best, the support for SIT was modest (Hinkle & Brown, 1990). Across the 14 studies surveyed, the overall correlation between identification and bias was close to zero ( $+0.08$ ); and while the majority (64 per cent) of associations were positive, even among this subset the mean correlation was not very strong ( $+0.24$ ). Moreover, these median values disguised some variation in the size and direction of the correlations across studies.

This heterogeneity led Hinkle and Brown (1990) to propose a simple taxonomic model whose aim was to specify better the boundary conditions in which the identity processes hypothesised by SIT might apply. We suggested that groups, group contexts and even group members might be distinguished along the dimensions of Individualism–Collectivism and Autonomous–Relational orientation. It seemed to us that the direct link between identification and bias proposed by SIT would be most likely to occur in the Collectivist  $\times$  Relational combination, and least so in the Individualist  $\times$  Autonomous cell. The first tests of this model provided some support for it: across three studies the mean correlation between identification and bias was  $+0.55$  in the former combination and only  $+0.05$  in the latter (Brown, Hinkle, Ely, Fox-Cardamone, Maras & Taylor, 1992). Although the model's early promise has not always been fulfilled—Brown, Capozza, Paladino and Volpato (1996) found a contrary pattern—a recent meta-analysis of 15 independent tests of the Hinkle–Brown model found an overall correlation between identification and bias of  $+0.23$  ( $p < 0.001$ ) which was reliably moderated by Collectivism and Relationalism, among other variables (Aharpour & Brown, manuscript under review).

This whole line of work, including the rationale for the identification-bias hypothesis, has been trenchantly criticised by Turner (1999). The burden of his critique is as follows. First, the hypothesis was never explicitly stated or even implied in original

versions of SIT. Mainly, according to Turner, this was because ingroup bias was only ever thought to be one of several identity maintenance strategies. Second, research investigating this hypothesis has been correlational, thus opening the possibility that variables other than group identification are responsible for the observed associations (or their absence). Third, measures of identification are problematic because they invoke an interpersonal or, at best, intragroup frame of reference. Moreover, they may be complex (i.e. non-unitary) measures. Fourth, studies which have attempted to test the hypothesis may have used inappropriate group memberships or evaluative dimensions for the assessment of identification and bias respectively. Finally, taxonomic approaches are inherently flawed, apparently because they imply that group characteristics are static and fixed rather than being contextually variable.

Let us consider each of these points. First, it can readily be conceded that no formal statement of the hypothesised correlation can be found in any published versions of SIT (e.g. Tajfel, 1974, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). Nevertheless, if group identification is based on a positive ingroup evaluation, and if people are motivated to achieve or maintain a positive social identity, and if ingroups are evaluated primarily in relation to relevant outgroups, *therefore* one should predict an association between identification and bias. This at least seems to have been the rationale for several independent investigations of a possible link between identification and intergroup attitudes (e.g. Abrams, 1990; Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Duckitt & Mphuthing, 1998; Grant, 1992, 1993; Kelly, 1988; Perreault & Bourhis, 1998; Pettigrew, 1997).

Second, it is true that most of these studies have employed correlational designs with all their usual interpretational difficulties. This has usually been because investigators have been studying real-life groups in field settings where experimental manipulations of identification would be practically impossible to implement or psychologically difficult to achieve. However, one or two studies have varied identification experimentally (e.g. Jetten, Spears & Manstead, 1997; Noel, Wann & Branscombe, 1995).

Third, the first attempts to measure identification (Brown, Condor, Mathews, Wade & Williams, 1986) did, as Turner points out, employ an overly interpersonal format for the scale items. This was quickly abandoned, however, and most studies from Kelly (1988) onward have used scales with a more neutral phraseology. These scales may indeed comprise more than one component, as had been anticipated in their construction (Brown *et al.*, 1986), and recent work suggests that the affective (or commitment) aspect of identification may be particularly predictive of intergroup differentiation (Ellemers, Kortekaas & Ouwerkerk, 1999a). Nevertheless, it remains that the subcomponents of identification scales are often intercorrelated and, as a result, the overall scales themselves usually have internal reliabilities in excess of 0.80 (Ellemers *et al.*, 1999a; Jackson & Smith, 1999).

Fourth, has research in this literature really focused on situationally inappropriate identities or evaluative dimensions? If this was the case, then one might expect rather low levels of identification and little evidence of ingroup bias. In fact, neither is typically true. Space does not permit an exhaustive analysis of this whole corpus of work, but if we focus on just the two studies singled out by Turner (1999), Brown *et al.* (1986) and Oaker & Brown (1986), we find that the levels of group identification were high and there was substantial evidence of ingroup favouritism in both studies. Such data hardly seem consistent with subjectively unimportant category memberships or irrelevant comparative dimensions.

Finally, does a taxonomic approach necessarily imply stable group characteristics? Much obviously depends on how the taxonomy is defined. Hinkle and Brown (1990) originally conceived of their classificatory scheme as applying at any of three levels of analysis—individual, group and group context—and made it clear that a prevailing orientation in a group could be expected to change according to circumstances (Hinkle & Brown, 1990, p. 67). Indeed, there is evidence that it *is* possible to vary experimentally people's relational orientation, with reliable consequences for the correlation between national identification and xenophobia (Mummendey, Klink & Brown, in press). Still, it is possible that groups may differ from each other generically in the kinds of social identity functions that they serve, and that not all these identity functions are well described by SIT, at least as currently formulated. I return to this point later.

### The Self-esteem Hypothesis

As we have seen, a central assumption of SIT is that ingroup bias is motivated by a desire to see one's group, and hence oneself, in a positive light. There is thus presumed to be a causal connection between intergroup differentiation (in its many guises) and self-esteem. Abrams and Hogg (1988) succinctly encapsulated this idea in the form of two corollaries: that positive intergroup differentiation result in elevated self-esteem (people feel better about themselves having judged or treated the ingroup more favourably than the outgroup), and people with initially depressed self-esteem (perhaps because the ingroup is not of very high status) should show more differentiation in order to restore it to 'normal' levels. Twenty years of research have not unequivocally supported either corollary, although the first has fared rather better than the second. Rubin and Hewstone (1998) concluded that 9 out of 12 attempts to test the first hypothesis provided supportive evidence, while only 3 out of 19 supported the second.

What are the implications of these findings for SIT? Turner (1999) has argued that they are minimal since he disputes whether SIT contains or implies the two corollaries. He is particularly critical of the prediction that subordinate status should instigate increased bias in the service of self-esteem because, he argues, such a hypothesis overlooks other variables which may moderate responses to low status (see above). Furthermore, he suggests that many tests of the corollaries have employed measures which inappropriately tap personal (rather than collective) and trait (rather than state) feelings of self-esteem. Others, too, have stressed the importance of distinguishing between the locus and types of self-esteem that is measured (Long, Spears & Manstead, 1994; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998) although, ironically, two of the most supportive experiments for the self-esteem hypothesis actually employed personal indices of self-esteem (Lemmy & Smith, 1985; Oakes & Turner, 1980).

A rather different interpretation and resolution of this confusing literature is offered by Farnham, Greenwald and Banaji (1999). They suggest that the generally weak and inconsistent correlations between self-esteem and bias may be attributable to social desirability factors. Research participants may feel diffident about expressing overly high (or low) self-esteem or manifesting too much intergroup discrimination. These self-presentational concerns could conceivably reduce the variability on both indices and hence depress any correlation between them. The use of measures with less obvious or controllable response formats may obviate this difficulty. Farnham *et al.*

(1999) showed that their implicit measure of self-esteem correlated reliably with an implicit measure of ingroup bias, but less well with conventional (i.e. explicit) measures of self-esteem. As I shall argue later, increased attention to automatic processes represents a particularly interesting challenge for SIT.

Whatever the merits of these methodological arguments, it seems that the original self-esteem plank of the SIT model is now much less surely established than it once was. Perhaps this is why some have started to de-emphasise the motivational role of self-esteem and to argue instead that it may be better seen as a by-product of discrimination rather than a direct cause or effect (Hogg & Abrams, 1990; Hogg & Mullins, 1999). Hogg and Abrams (1990) speculated that in many laboratory settings being categorised as a group member might create an element of uncertainty and it is the reduction of this (by showing discrimination) which causes increases in self-esteem. Note that Lemyre and Smith (1985) found that mere categorisation resulted in lowered self-esteem in one of the conditions of their experiment. In support of this idea Hogg and Mullin (1999) found that prior exposure to the minimal group setting consistently reduced levels of discrimination and led, somewhat less consistently, to changes in self-esteem. Whether uncertainty reduction is as potent a causal factor outside the laboratory remains to be seen, but, at the very least, it does raise the possibility of recognising a wider range of motives associated with social identification than those specified by SIT.

### **The Positive–Negative Asymmetry Phenomenon**

As I noted earlier, the initial findings from the minimal group paradigm were an important stimulus to and subsequent evidential support for SIT. It was thus somewhat surprising, and more than a little disconcerting for SIT, when Mummendey, Simon, Dietzw, Grünert, Haeger, Kessler, Lettgen and Schäferhoff (1992) reported that when the rewards conventionally distributed in the minimal paradigm were replaced with negative outcomes (e.g. exposure to aversive noise), the very well-replicated phenomenon of discrimination virtually disappeared. Only when additional factors were added—for example, altering the relative status and size of the ingroup—did the ‘usual’ discrimination reappear (Mummendey *et al.*, 1992, Experiment 2). Moreover, this asymmetry in discrimination when positive and negative outcomes are at stake seems to be a rather general effect. Evaluative ratings on negatively worded scales typically elicit less ingroup bias than those on positively phrased items, and in general the magnitude of discrimination in the negative domain is less than half that observed on positively valenced dimensions (Mummendey & Otten, 1998). If we put these results together with the earlier conclusion by Brewer (1979) that ingroup bias in minimal group situations typically involves favourable treatment of the ingroup but little obvious outgroup derogation, and the observation by Struch and Schwartz (1989) that measures of aggressive intention towards an outgroup were quite uncorrelated with measures of ingroup bias, we are led to the slightly uncomfortable inference that the psychological processes specified by SIT seem to be only applicable to discrimination and favouritism in the positive domain. If group members can feel better about their ingroup (and themselves) by rewarding it more, why should they not feel the same by punishing it less?

I discuss the potential of SIT for understanding affectively laden intergroup behav-



our more generally in the final section. Here I want to focus on how some recent research has sought to 'rescue' SIT from the challenge presented by the positive-negative asymmetry effect in minimal group situations. Mummendey and Otten (1998) advance three possible explanations of the asymmetry effect: normative, cognitive and recategorisation. Although they have adduced evidence for all three, it is the third which is most germane to SIT because it suggests that the reduction or abolition of discrimination in the case of negative outcomes is a result of some cognitive restructuring of the experimental situation brought about by the 'common fate' experience of being asked by the experimenter to do something unusual or normatively inappropriate. Finding themselves 'all in the same boat' in this way may lead participants to recategorise the situation into 'we the experimental participants' versus 'the experimenter', thus subsuming the original categories (e.g. Klee, Kandinsky) into a new superordinate category. Such a recategorisation would reduce bias because former outgroup members are now seen as members of a new and larger ingroup (e.g. Gaertner *et al.*, 1993; Turner, 1981). According to this account, the reason why discrimination with negative outcomes reappears with minority or low-status ingroups is that such conditions make it more difficult for the recategorisation to occur due to the heightened salience usually associated with such groups. More direct evidence for the recategorisation explanation has been provided by Mummendey, Otten, Berger and Kessler (in press) and Gardham and Brown (in press). Most pertinently, in the latter study it was found that the asymmetrical pattern of discrimination was, as predicted, mediated by an index of comparative group identification. There was stronger superordinate than subordinate group identification in the normatively 'inappropriate' allocation conditions, and this seemed to control the levels of bias observed.

A different explanation is provided by Reynolds, Turner and Haslam (2000). They argue that providing participants with negative outcomes to allocate makes it more difficult for them to define themselves in terms of the minimal categories because people resist seeing themselves in a negative light, albeit less negative than the outgroup. As a result, the 'normative fit' (Oakes *et al.*, 1994) of those categories is attenuated and they become less used (and useful) as guides to action. In a study of evaluative intergroup differentiation between two real-life groups, Reynolds *et al.* (2000) found that the asymmetry effect seemed to disappear if the fit between ingroup and outgroup typicality and trait valence was experimentally controlled. It remains to be seen if this can be replicated using less tightly constrained measures of discrimination (e.g. rewards and punishments) and artificial categories for whom there are no obvious stereotypical attributes and where there can be no possibility of historical or contextual confounds.

### **The Effects of Intergroup Similarity**

SIT is essentially a theory of group differentiation: how group members can make their ingroup(s) distinctive from and, wherever possible, better than outgroups. Self-evidently, therefore, groups which discover themselves to be similar to each other should be especially motivated to show intergroup differentiation (Brown, 1984a; Turner, 1978). This hypothesis has been extensively tested and has received rather equivocal support. On the one hand, groups perceiving themselves to hold similar norms of attitudes, or to enjoy equivalent status, have been found to show more



intergroup attraction and less bias than dissimilar groups (e.g. Brewer & Campbell, 1976; Brown, 1984b; Brown & Abrams, 1986; Grant, 1993; Jetten, Spears & Manstead, 1996, study 1; Roccas & Schwartz, 1993), findings which run contrary to SIT's prediction. On the other hand, and more consistent with SIT, other studies have found that intergroup similarity does seem to provide increased intergroup differentiation—though not necessarily any greater hostility—especially if the groups are extremely alike and the intergroup context is destabilized in some way (Brown & Abrams, 1986; Diehl, 1988; Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984b; Jetten *et al.*, 1996, study 2; Turner, 1978; Roccas & Schwartz, 1993; White & Langer, 1999).

Resolving these contradictory findings seems difficult. One possibility is suggested by an extension of Brewer's (1991) Optimal Distinctiveness Theory. Brewer argues that individuals look for a compromise between the conflicting needs for uniqueness and assimilation. This compromise results in an 'optimal' choice of ingroup for identification purposes which is relatively small, but not *too* small. Perhaps the same trade-off applies at the intergroup level. It is possible that people, *qua* group members, want to establish that their group has enough in common with other groups to avoid feeling stigmatised but simultaneously need to retain enough distinctiveness to satisfy identity needs. This would imply the most favourable attitude towards outgroups of intermediate similarity to the ingroup, groups that are neither so different that they have nothing in common nor so similar that they threaten distinctiveness.

Other hypotheses make different predictions. One, derived from the concept of displacement in frustration-aggression theory (Dollard, Doob, Mowrer & Sears, 1939), predicts least antagonism to highly similar or dissimilar groups and most towards groups of moderate similarity (Brewer & Campbell, 1976). A similar hypothesis, although derived from very different theoretical premises, was formulated and tested by Jetten *et al.* (1998). Noting that most tests of the similarity hypothesis define similarity solely in terms of the groups' central tendencies (e.g. their mean positions on some attitude or status dimension), Jetten *et al.* (1998) proposed that the groups' variabilities around those means could also be important. Extreme similarity is represented by two groups whose modal positions are close and which are sufficiently heterogeneous to cause overlap between them; extreme dissimilarity occurs with two 'distant' and homogeneous groups. In two studies Jetten *et al.* (1998) found most ingroup bias in the intermediate cases ('close' and homogeneous or 'distant' and heterogeneous) and little at the extremes of similarity or dissimilarity. This obviously runs counter to the hypothesis mooted above although it would be interesting to see if the same pattern would hold for affective measures of dislike as well as for evaluative ingroup bias. Indeed, inspection of the outgroup evaluations in Jetten *et al.*'s studies reveal little evidence of any overt outgroup derogation.

### **Choice of Identity Maintenance Strategies by Low-status Groups**

In an earlier section I noted that SIT had originally speculated that there could be several 'identity-protecting' responses by members of low-status groups. These included the individualistic tactic of leaving the group (or disidentifying), various 'socially creative' ways of reconstruing or redefining what were the relevant comparison dimensions or groups, and the more collectively assertive approach of contesting the dominant group's 'right' to its superior status position. To these strategies

others can be added. Doosje *et al.* (1995b) suggest that group members may try to use perceptions of group variability to mitigate some of the effects of subordinate status ('even if we're poor, we're not all poor'). Blanz, Mummendey, Mielke and Klink (1998), following Haeger, Mummendey, Mielke, Blanz and Kanning (1996), suggested that, in addition to changing comparison groups, people may resort to comparisons over time or against absolute standards to find some positivity ('even if we are poor, we are better off than we used to be'). Blanz *et al.* (1998) also speculated that recategorisation could be an identity-maintenance option: either by reclassifying the ingroup as belonging to a superordinate (and superior) group or by splitting the ingroup into subcategories, one of which might be less 'inferior' than the other(s).

Although there is evidence for the psychological reality of all of these various identity maintenance strategies (see, *inter alia*, Blanz *et al.*, 1998; Brown & Haeger, 1999; Brown & Middendorf, 1996; Doosje *et al.*, 1999; Ellemers, 1993; Mummendey, Klink, Mielke, Wenzel & Blanz, 1999b), an awkward theoretical problem remains: is it possible to predict which strategy will be adopted in any particular intergroup context? The original versions of SIT offered only the most general predictions: for example, individual mobility was presumed to be the 'line of least resistance', especially when intergroup status relations are stable and legitimate and group boundaries are not completely impermeable; changing the outgroup comparator to a group nearer to the ingroup in status would be more likely if leaving the group was psychologically or physically difficult; and other more competitive strategies would occur if intergroup relations became destabilised or delegitimated (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). However, given the plethora of strategies open to low-status groups, clearly such predictions are in need of refinement.

One promising avenue in this regard concerns the role of group identification. Ellemers *et al.* (1997) hypothesised that the more committed group members would be the least likely to opt for the individual mobility solution to an unsatisfactory identity, and found support for this idea in two experimental studies. Field research in quite different contexts has also found consistent (negative) correlations between group identification and such individualistic strategies (Abrams, Ando & Hinkle, 1998; Abrams, Hinkle & Tomkins, 1999; Mummendey, Kessler, Klink & Mielke, 1999a). However, attempts to predict exactly which other strategies might be chosen have met with less success. Thus, Turner and Brown (1978) found that with unstable and illegitimate status relationships both direct competition (ingroup bias on the primary comparison dimension) and social creativity (preference for alternative modes of comparison) were observed among low status group members (see also Caddick, 1982). On the other hand, Brown and Ross (1982), while finding clear evidence of the biased *use* of alternative dimensions by low-status groups (which contrasted with outgroup favouritism on the status defining dimension), did not observe that they *valued* those dimensions any more than did their high-status counterparts, even under conditions of identity threat (see also, Mummendey & Schreiber, 1983, 1984a,b). More recently, Mummendey *et al.* (1999b), investigating intergroup relations in 'post-unification' Germany, found identification to be positively associated with direct outgroup competition and re-evaluation of comparison dimensions and negatively with individual mobility. These effects are consistent with SIT. However, unexpectedly, both the stability and permeability of East-West status relations were *negatively* correlated with individual mobility. And a preference for temporal comparisons was not predicted by any identity-related variables. Even the link between

strength of identification and social creativity disappeared when a more complete analysis including relative deprivation variables was conducted.

This imprecision in being able to specify how members of low-status groups will react to their negative identity needs rectifying. Both psychologically and politically, there is all the difference in the world between members of underprivileged groups directly challenging the dominant group's position, emphasising unconventional values, turning to the past for solace, seeking out other oppressed groups for more comfortable comparisons, or 'jumping ship' altogether. At present, only the choice of the latter option seems well predicted by SIT; the remaining strategies have yet to be theoretically and empirically differentiated.

## CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

In the previous section I concentrated on the areas where SIT has encountered difficulties. In this section I want to adopt a more forward perspective and try to identify the directions which seem most fruitful for future research to explore. Some arise out of the 'problems' just discussed; others represent relatively new and thus far unexplored lines of enquiry. There are five areas which seem particularly ripe for development: the very concept of identity itself; predicting comparison choice; the introduction of affect more centrally into the theory; managing multiple identities simultaneously; and incorporating implicit processes into the analysis of identification and its effects.

### Expanding the Concept of Social Identity

In an earlier section I noted that levels of group identification and ingroup bias could be simultaneously high in particular intergroup contexts and yet be essentially unrelated. Hinkle and Brown (1990) inferred from this that, at the very least, it seems likely that social identities can be sustained in ways *other* than via intergroup comparisons. We speculated that comparisons over time or against abstract standards could sometimes serve as the basis for ingroup evaluation, and hence identity maintenance. This might occur because of certain contextual variables especially facilitated such alternative modes of evaluation or because groups habitually employed them as a response to the particular social situations they typically faced. In this section I want to explore the implications of this latter conclusion for the ways SIT might reconsider the concept of social identity. There are two interesting directions that such a reconceptualization might take.

The first is to give greater recognition to the enormous diversity of groups that can serve as the basis of people's social identity. At present, SIT's acknowledgement of this issue is limited to the incorporation of certain structural variables into its analysis—for example, status, permeability, stability and so on—and the presumption, mainly implicit in the original SIT but fully explicated in SCT (Turner *et al.*, 1987), that different groups will value particular attributes more than others or will endorse some normative standards of behaviour rather than others. The incorporation of normative or ideological factors into the theoretical equation is a welcome move and has received

empirical support (Jetten *et al.*, 1996, 1997). However, I suspect a more radical shift in thinking may be necessary.

At present, SIT does not differentiate between different kinds of groups. With the qualifications just noted, all groups—be they small face-to-face units or large scale societal categories—are thought to be psychologically equivalent for their members, at least as far as the operation of social identity processes is concerned. Some years ago, we questioned the wisdom of this assumption, suggesting that different groups might serve quite different identity functions (Brown & Williams, 1984). More recent research is beginning to elaborate what this means. For example, Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi and Ethier (1995) found that participants, when asked to rate and classify a large number (64) of groups, typically organised them into five major clusters. Clear distinctions emerged between occupational groups, political affiliations and larger categories like ethnicity and religion. Brown and Torres (1996) and Lickel, Hamilton, Wierzchowska, Lewis, Sherman and Uhles (2000) largely replicated this finding in three different cultures, even when restricting the stimuli to participants' *ingroups*. Not only did these studies reveal that different kinds of groups were imbued with different psychological meanings and properties, but when different identities were experimentally invoked, once again disparate correlations between identification and ingroup bias were observed, despite the fact that levels of identification were approximately the same (and positive) in all cases (Brown & Torres, 1996). It seems to me that an important step for SIT to take is to incorporate these central dimensions of group diversity and no longer to assume that a group is a group as far as key social psychological mechanisms are concerned.

A second possible conceptual development follows closely from the first. If there are different kinds of groups that need to be accommodated within SIT, then it may also be the case that group memberships can serve a variety of identity functions, several of which are not currently encompassed by SIT's account of social identity mechanisms. Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi and Cotting (1999) asked members of different groups to rate important aspects of their group membership. Factor analysis revealed that these could be reduced to seven functions: self-insight, intergroup comparisons, cohesion, collective self-esteem, interpersonal comparisons, social interaction opportunities and romantic relationships. It is significant, I think, that only two of these functions (the second and fourth) are described by SIT; the others are tapping different needs. Moreover, Deaux *et al.* (1999) found that groups stressed rather different functions: members of a sports team, for example, emphasised intergroup comparison, self-esteem and social interaction; religious group members highlighted self-insight, self-esteem and cohesion (see also Aharpour & Brown, 1997, for similar variations in identity functions among trade unionists, football supporters and students). These observations suggest that there is much more to social identification than maintaining positivity through biased intergroup comparisons, prevalent though these may be. The important next step is to understand how all these various identity functions are related to different forms of intergroup behaviour, both positive and negative.

### Predicting Comparison Choice

I noted above that a current weakness of SIT is that it is underspecified when it comes to predicting which identity strategies will be adopted in particular situations. As we

saw, a recurring theme of those strategies is that they involve changes in comparison choices, either to a more comparable group or with the past, and so on. Yet, rather curiously, SIT has concerned itself little with the *choice* of comparator (for exceptions, see Bourhis & Hill, 1982; Brown & Haeger, 1999). A typical study in the intergroup literature obtains judgements about a specified ingroup and outgroup(s) or elicits reward allocations to such targets. The existence of biases in these judgements and behaviour is taken as evidence that intergroup comparison has occurred. Participants are seldom given a choice of outgroup referent, still less the chance to make temporal comparisons. But, in real life, people will often be able to exercise choice over the comparator—for example, in collective bargaining trade unionists are typically quite strategic about which other occupational group or which temporal base-line offers them maximum advantage. And, of course, the referent chosen makes a big difference to the comparison outcome, and hence to identity. An important future project will be to understand more about such comparison choices and here there are three directions which seem promising.

The first is to identify the contextual and personal variables that determine the nature and direction of spontaneous intergroups comparisons. In the *interpersonal* domain comparison choice has been extensively investigated with the general conclusion that people 'similar but slightly superior' on related attributes are the most common preference (e.g. Collins, 1996; Wood, 1989). Presumed motives for these preferences are self-evaluation, enhancement and improvement, most emphasis being placed on the first two (Collins, 1996). In the intergroup domain the primary motivations (according to SIT) are assumed to be group enhancement and improvement. What consequences does this imply for comparison choice? At present the data is still fragmentary but there is evidence from quite disparate naturalistic situations involving groups of unequal status that both upward *and* downward comparisons can be the modal choice of lower status groups (e.g. Blanz, Mummendey, Mielke & Klink, 2000; Brown and Haeger, 1999; Finlay & Lyons, 2000). Probably, experimental work will be necessary to understand these equivocal results (see Smith *et al.*, 1999, for some initial work along these lines). It will also be necessary to recognise that there may be both group and individual differences in the propensity to engage in intergroup comparisons. Brown *et al.* (1992) and Gibbons and Buunk (1999) have developed simple instruments which reliably measure people's intergroup and interpersonal comparison orientations respectively. Gibbons and Buunk (1999) have shown that their measure predicts people's interest in and reactions to comparisons with individuals; it is quite possible that similar differences can be observed at an intergroup level (Brown, 2000).

A second issue concerns the determinants and consequences of temporal comparisons (i.e. with one's ingroup at some past or future point). Blanz *et al.* (2000) found that these were particularly popular with the low-status group they studied (East Germans), although Brown and Haeger (1999) found no greater use of them by the lower status countries in their sample. In a developmental perspective it seems that the relative importance of temporal and social comparisons changes markedly over the life-span (Brown & Middendorf, 1996; Butler, 1998; Suls, 1986). We still know very little about the antecedents and prevalence of such identity-maintenance strategies, mainly because the option to engage in temporal comparisons has seldom been open to research participants. What we *do* know is that, if primed to make such comparisons in a national context, the link between national identification and



xenophobia can be broken (Mummendey *et al.*, in press). Given the potential practical significance of this finding, it would seem important to explore its ramifications in other intergroup contexts also.

A third issue concerns the extent to which comparisons are under people's conscious control. The whole tenor of SIT, and even more so in its descendant SCT, is that people engage in intergroup comparisons for strategic purposes. This implies a high degree of voluntary control over the selection of comparative referents. However, working in an interpersonal domain, Gilbert, Giesler and Morris (1995) have suggested that many comparisons are made automatically, and only later 'unmade' if they prove to be inappropriate or uninformative. Although their findings have not always been replicated (e.g. Webster & Smith, 2000), and have yet to be extended to intergroup comparisons, they do pose a fascinating challenge to the emphasis in SIT on people's deliberative identity maintaining or enhancing strategies. I revisit this question below.

### **Adding an Affective Component**

A third important item for any future research agenda for SIT must be to theorise how, when and why groups display dislike, hostility and other forms of negative affect toward one another. As should be clear by now, SIT is a theory about intergroup differentiation rather than outgroup derogation. Its principal dependent measures are indicators of ingroup bias. In practical terms what this usually means is that both ingroups and outgroups are evaluated (or treated) favourably, only the former more so than the latter (Brewer, 1979). Moreover, it is not unknown for ingroup and outgroup evaluations to be *positively* correlated with each other (Turner, 1978), and ingroup biases in such judgements are typically not correlated with feelings of dislike for the outgroup (Brown, 1984b; Brewer & Campbell, 1976; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Struch & Schwartz, 1989). In short, to borrow Brewer's (1999) telling phrase, it is a theory of ingroup love rather than outgroup hate.

Yet it is, above all, a theory of intergroup relations and many intergroup relations in today's world are marked by very real manifestations of outright prejudice and hostility. If SIT is to help in the understanding and resolution of these social conflicts then it must be elaborated to take account of and predict such displays of negative emotion and behaviour. I readily admit that what follows is highly speculative and founded on precious little research but at least it is a starting point or, rather, four starting points.

The first comes from Smith's (1993) attempt to incorporate appraisal theories of emotion into the SIT framework. Smith suggests that it may be useful to distinguish five major emotional states—fear, disgust, contempt, anger and jealousy—each of which may have its own antecedent conditions and which also have very different consequences for intergroup behaviour. Smith (1993) suggests that, for example, fear and jealousy may be more typical of lower-status groups while disgust and anger may be more likely from dominant groups. Although Smith's model still needs further elaboration to specify the conditions under which one emotion will change into another, it does seem to be a promising direction to pursue.

A second interesting approach is offered by Fiske, Xu, Cuddy and Glick (1999). They urge social psychologists to pay greater attention to the *content* of intergroup



stereotypes, and not just their process aspects. Noting that group stereotypes are often somewhat ambivalent, containing both positive and negative attributes, Fiske *et al.* (1999) suggest that the rich variety of traits can be arranged along two dimensions: one representing competence and the other warmth (see also Operario & Fiske, in press). The dimension which prevails in any particular stereotype is then thought to give rise to intergroup orientations of (dis)respect and (dis)liking respectively. Fiske *et al.* (1999) further propose that stereotype content may be consistently related to the social structural variables of status and interdependence. Thus, high-status groups will be likely to be seen as 'competent', and hence be respected; groups with whom we are positively interdependent should be seen as 'warm', and consequently liked. Although one might take issue with Fiske *et al.*'s (1999) conclusion that 'few groups are both disliked and disrespected' (p. 476)—tell that to victims of genocide the world over—there are obvious links between their analysis and that of Smith (1993) that it would seem prudent for intergroup relations researchers to follow up.

A third analysis is provided by Brewer (1999). She identifies a number of societal and social psychological variables which may facilitate the translation of ingroup narcissism into outgroup derogation (or worse). These include: societal complexity—simpler societies with fewer cross-cutting category divisions may be more prone to intense intergroup antagonism than more complex societies; the development of ideologies of moral superiority which then legitimate maltreatment of outgroups—such ideologies are more likely to emerge in larger and more depersonalised ingroups; the presence of superordinate goals without a corresponding superordinate identity, in which case groups may find aversive the loss of subgroup identity implied by the cooperative endeavour; the endorsement of common values by different groups which, paradoxically, may make mutual claims for group distinctiveness more threatening. Once again, while much still needs to be done to turn these intriguing suggestions into testable hypotheses, they do point the way forward as to how SIT might bridge the gap between differentiation and dislike.

A fourth development comes from Leyens, Paladino, Rodriguez-Torres, Vaes, Demoulin, Rodriguez-Perez and Gaunt (2000) and concerns the different ways we may attribute emotional states to ingroup and outgroup members. Leyens and his colleagues find that some emotional traits are typically regarded as uniquely and essentially human—for example, shame, resentment, love and hope—while others are seen as being shared with non-human species—for example, anger, pain, pleasure, excitement. They have unearthed some evidence that emotions of the former type are more likely to be associated at both a conscious and unconscious level with ingroups than with outgroups. In other words, people seem to perceive their fellow ingroup members as more prototypically 'human' than they do outgroup members. In extreme circumstances, Leyens *et al.* speculate, such beliefs could lead to actual 'dehumanisation' of the outgroup, thus legitimating *inhuman* treatment of it. It will be of no little theoretical and practical importance to chart just how and when such differential emotional attributions develop, and to understand what part they play in the acquisition and maintenance of our most significant social identities.

### Managing Identities in Multicultural Contexts

I noted above how SIT provided an important stimulus for three elaborations of the Contact Hypothesis which, despite making divergent predictions, have all received

some measure of empirical support. An important task for the future is to achieve some integration of these three models or, perhaps more likely, to specify when circumstances favour the application of one rather than the others. The urgency of this task is underlined by the increasingly multicultural nature of many societies: national or supranational categories may contain several ethnic, linguistic or religious subgroups. There is thus a political problem of devising policies to ensure that contact between these groups results in the most harmonious (or least destructive) outcomes, and a theoretical problem of understanding how (or if) multiple social identities can be simultaneously sustained. Three recent developments promise to shed some light on these problems.

Pettigrew (1998) has provided a comprehensive review of the Contact Hypothesis and its derivatives. One of his conclusions is to propose a temporal integration of the three apparently competing models drawn from SIT (Brewer & Miller, 1984; Gaertner *et al.*, 1993; Hewstone & Brown, 1986). He suggests that an optimal sequence of contact between antagonistic groups would be first to attempt to decategorise the intergroup encounters. This might facilitate the development of one of Allport's (1954) conditions, acquaintanceship potential, and hopefully minimise any anxiety which can sometimes be associated with intergroup encounters (Greenland & Brown, 1999; Islam & Hewstone, 1993). However, as noted earlier, contact which remained at that interpersonal level would not make it easy for any positive attitude change to generalise. Thus, Pettigrew (1998) advocates a second stage in which subgroup identities are allowed to regain some salience in order to facilitate the generalisation process (Hewstone & Brown, 1986). Finally, to capitalise on the undoubted powerful benefits of a common ingroup identification (Gaertner *et al.*, 1993), he suggests that policies which recategorise the subgroups into meaningful superordinate units may be an optimal, if not always achieved, end stage of the sequence. Such a temporally ordered strategy would undoubtedly be difficult to implement in particular educational or work-place settings, and certainly poses some research problems for its proper evaluation. But such difficulties have to be set against the social costs of *not* finding better ways of organising intergroup contact in the many 'hot spots' around the world. Viewed in that light, a political and research investment in exploring the efficacy of such an integrative approach seems well worth-while.

A rather different approach is suggested by acculturation theory (e.g. Berry, 1984; Bourhis, Moise, Perreault & Senecal, 1997). According to these models, there are some different acculturation strategies formed by the crossing of two orthogonal orientations: identification with own culture (high/low) and identification with the host community (high/low). Research suggests that the 'integration' strategy (high on both orientations) is often the preferred strategy among minority groups and seems to be associated with the least acculturative stress and better educational outcomes (Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok, 1987; Berry, Kim, Power, Yong & Bujaki, 1989; Lieb-kind, in press; Van de Vijver, Helms-Lorenz & Feltzer, 1999). The other strategies, 'assimilation' (low, high), 'separation' (high, low) or 'marginalization' (low, low) are generally thought to lead to less favourable outcomes. It is not difficult to map these last three acculturation strategies onto the three contact models discussed above: Gaertner *et al.* (1993), Hewstone and Brown (1986) and Brewer and Miller (1984) respectively. Thus, the seemingly optimal 'integration' or dual identity strategy (Gonzalez & Brown, 2000) represents some combination of the Gaertner *et al.* (1993) and Hewstone and Brown (1986) approaches, a point already noted by Gaertner *et*

*al.* (1993, p. 20). There is now some experimental evidence which suggests that simultaneously maintaining subgroup and superordinate identities in contact settings can lead to favourable outcomes (Dovidio *et al.*, 1998; Gaertner, Dovidio, Rust, Nier, Banker, Ward, Mottola & Houlette, 1999), although there are also indications that the advantages of this approach may be confined to minority groups (Dovidio & Kafati, 1999; Gonzalez & Brown, 2000). The challenge now is to discover the conditions under which majority groups, too, can be induced to adopt such a dual identity approach in their dealings with outgroups.

Mummendey and Wenzel (1999) have provided some clues as to why the evocation of a superordinate category may not always be efficacious. Drawing on SCT, they suggest that redefining the intergroup situation in terms of a more inclusive category might cause the subgroups to 'project' their own ingroup attributes as being more prototypical for the superordinate group. In some circumstances this could lead to disagreement over how the superordinate category should be represented, thus sowing the seeds of social conflict. Mummendey and Wenzel (1999) go on to outline different properties of prototypes which will favour (or inhibit) the potential of using superordinate categories for increasing intergroup tolerance. The optimal superordinate prototype, they suggest, is one which is sufficiently ill defined (to permit multiple interpretations of the inclusive category), is of limited scope (i.e. containing relatively few defining dimensions to limit the possibilities for disagreement), is rather heterogeneous in its definition (i.e. a large variance around the normative or modal position(s)), and is complex rather than simple in terms of the number of modal positions which it comprises. Although much still needs to be done to clarify the psychological validity of these distinctions and to establish their impact on intergroup relations (see, Wenzel, Mummendey, Weber & Waldutz, 2000, for initial evidence), Mummendey and Wenzel's (1999) model is interesting since it seems to predict quite different outcomes from the dual or common ingroup identity approaches discussed above.

### **Social Identity Processes at an Implicit Level**

Social psychology has become increasingly interested in the distinction between automatic and controlled processes, and in the relationship between the two (Wegner & Bargh, 1998). This interest has spanned phenomena at the cognitive, affective and behavioural levels and has found expression in many domains including, most pertinently for this article, stereotyping, judgements and behaviour in intergroup contexts. A few exemplary studies will illustrate some of the trends of current research.

Some seem to show that, at an automatic (i.e. unconscious or implicit<sup>3</sup>) level there are rather pervasive ingroup favouring biases associated with ethnicity which appear to be only weakly or not at all related to more explicit measures of intergroup evaluation or prejudice (e.g. Chen & Bargh, 1997; Devine, 1989; Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson, Johnson & Stoward, 1997; Fazio, Jackson, Dunton & Williams, 1995; Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998; Smith & Henry, 1996). There is also evidence that such biases may be generic since they can be observed using such subliminal

<sup>3</sup>I will use these three terms as roughly synonymous in this presentation (see Maass, Castelli & Arcuri, 2000, and Wegner & Bargh, 1998, for further analysis of these concepts).

primes as 'we' and 'they' or minimal (i.e. meaningless) category labels (Otten & Wentura, 1999; Perdue, Dovidio, Gurtman & Tyler, 1990). Parenthetically, it is also worth noting that the latter studies found that the biases derived from differential associations of *ingroup* primes with valenced target stimuli rather than from responses to outgroup primes. This parallels ingroup favouritism on more explicit measures (Brewer, 1979).

However, in contrast to this work which seems to imply that ingroup favouritism is a general, perhaps even inevitable, automatic reaction to social categorical stimuli, there is now a substantial body of research which shows that automatic responses can be moderated—even to the extent of reversing in direction—by individual differences in prejudice level or group identification (Lepore & Brown, 1997, 1999; Kawakami, Dion & Dovidio, 1998; Locke, MacLeod & Walker, 1994; Locke & Walker, 1999; Wittenbrink, Judd & Park, 1997). Such findings argue against the 'universalist' tenor of the work just referred to above because they reveal that people high and low in prejudice—or identification, if we can take variations in white participants' prejudice level as surrogates for their ethnic group identification—manifest quite different patterns of stereotype activation.

Self-evidently, all this research is concerned with intergroup phenomena; some of it has directly or indirectly employed measures of identification. How, then, can SIT help us to explain or interpret the findings that it has generated? The short answer is: as it stands, very little. Notice, first of all, that the emphasis in SIT is very much on the strategic—i.e. voluntary—nature of the social psychological processes involved in social identity maintenance or enhancement. As discussed earlier, group members' behaviour in different intergroup contexts can be variously described as attempts to escape from or avoid esteem threatening situations, or to redefine (or change altogether) those situations in ways more favourable to the ingroup, or to reduce uncertainty, and so on. Indeed, Tajfel himself wrote eloquently on the need for social psychologists in general to pay greater attention to people's *active* attempts to make sense of and to change their social environments (Tajfel, 1966, 1969, 1981). Such a constructivist perspective is obviously apparent in SIT. As a result, research within the SIT tradition has concentrated exclusively on controlled processes, relying almost invariably on various explicit measures of intergroup attitudes and behaviour.

Thus, it seems that a final area where SIT requires elaboration is to develop the theoretical and methodological tools which will help us to understand which (if any) social identity processes operate at an automatic level, how they do so and with what consequences for attitudes and behaviour at a more controlled level. It is to be hoped that analyses of the relationship between implicit and explicit processes that are currently being undertaken elsewhere in the discipline will prove useful in this respect (e.g. Dovidio, Kawakami & Beach, *in press*; Greenwald, Banaji, Rudman, Farnham, Nosek & Mellott, 2000; Maass *et al.*, 2000; Wegner & Bargh, 1998). One interesting hypothesis which has been advanced by Dovidio *et al.* (1997) is that implicit measures of social attitude (e.g. as derived from response time association measures or subliminal primes) may be most predictive of spontaneous or automatic behaviour, while more explicit measures (e.g. traditional attitude scales) relate better to deliberative and controlled behaviour. Translating this into the domain of social identity processes, this implies that implicit measures of identity (e.g. Farnham *et al.*, 1999) would be most closely associated with intergroup *avoidance* behaviours (e.g. aversive prejudice (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986) or intergroup anxiety (Stephan & Stephan, 1985)), while

more traditional identification measures would, in appropriate contexts, best predict more directly assertive actions against the outgroup (e.g. discrimination or derogation (Brown *et al.*, manuscript under review)).

## CONCLUSIONS

One of the authors of SIT, although not normally remembered as an applied social psychologist, drew much of his inspiration from his own personal experience of one of the last century's major social conflicts and was passionately concerned that social psychology should engage more closely with such societal problems as minority rights, nationalism and racism (Tajfel, 1981). In this concluding section I want to draw together some of the threads of my review of SIT to consider its potential for application in the social and political arena.

Given the main focus of the theory on intergroup relations, it is evident that its most obvious areas of applications lie in those domains where groups—be they national, ethnic or religious—are in dispute with each other. As I made clear at the outset, SIT's main contribution here is to complement those theoretical explanations that locate those disputes in objective clashes of interests. From the little we know so far, it seems likely that the most ardent proponents of those conflicts are those who are most strongly identified with the protagonist groups. Or, looked at slightly differently, such objective conflicts are likely to become particularly intense to the extent that the respective group memberships are psychologically salient and mutually exclusive. It follows, then, that policies which lead to the abandonment or the redirection of social identifications could be beneficial. Since the former (abandonment) is both psychologically and practically implausible, it would seem that the redefinition of identities to incorporate more overlapping or inclusive categories is the most promising direction for policy-makers to take. As noted above, it seems likely that such redrawing of category boundaries needs also to take cognisance of the apparent need, especially for minority groups, to retain elements of their distinctive subgroup identities. Pursuing this same dual-identity strategy for majority groups may be more problematic, however.

Turning now to attempts by minority or lower-status groups to achieve equality of treatment and recognition by the majority, the lessons from SIT seem clear. The first is that fostering a strong sense of collective relative deprivation is obviously an important motivator for members of such groups to seek some societal redress for their grievances. However, at least as important—and, in some contexts, even more so—is the need to foster a strong psychological allegiance to the minority group in the first place. This, as I indicated earlier, may be a necessary precondition for collective action and, occasionally, may be sufficient as well. In addition, bearing in mind the effects of different structural conditions on propensity/desire for social change, it seems that developing clearly visible identity markers and less permeable category boundaries can also pay dividends for such groups. The available research, admittedly still fragmentary in nature, points to the dangers of subordinate groups endorsing political strategies based on the mobility of a few successful 'tokens'. Such tactics seem to be invariably associated with a weakening of the minority group

identity and hence a lowered collective commitment by its members to the change in their group's outcomes that they may desire.

Finally, let me end on a cautious note. Earlier I noted that one of the major challenges for SIT remains to provide a better understanding of the affective aspects of intergroup behaviour, particularly when these assume hostile or destructive forms. One important ingredient in that task will be to develop a theoretical account which links identity processes to the formation and dissemination of belief systems that allow group members to justify such treatment of outgroup members or which legitimate continued inequality. It would be idle to pretend that we are much closer to making that link than we were in 1984 when, in his last (posthumous) contribution, Tajfel made exactly the same plea. Commenting on what he saw as the key elements in the study of collective behaviour, he wrote:

The point of departure in the study of collective behaviour must be an adequate theoretical approach to the social psychological issues of intergroup relations. This is to some extent represented in the so-called 'social identity' perspective, but social identity is not enough. The subtle and complex interactions between group strategies striving to achieve positive group distinctiveness, and the strategies instrumental in attempts to change or preserve the status quo must be taken into account as a fundamental issue in theories and research. None of this can be properly understood without considering another set of complex interactions: the interplay between the creation or diffusion of social myths and the processes of social influence *as they operate in the setting of intergroup relations and group affiliations* (Tajfel, 1984, p. 713).

If I can take the liberty of drawing the social policy implications of that last sentence, it is that our communities, workplaces and schools must be restructured so that racist, sexist and other pernicious ideologies lose their functional and psychological appeal, and hence become devalued as legitimating devices. How such structural change can be achieved is a task which confronts us all, social psychologists and concerned citizens alike.

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