



Social identity theory

Self-categorisation theory



Identifying ourselves and others

- ▶ Human identifications– often by assigning self and others to groups
 - ▶ How do we do this?
- ▶ What are the bases for identifying groups themselves?
 - ▶ What are the criteria that differentiates groups?
- ▶ Why do we view some groups more positively than others?
- ▶ Why do we compare (or try to compare) our own group in more favourable terms than others?

Minimal Group Paradigm

(Tajfel, Billig, Bundy and Flament, 1971)

- ▶ We are naturally inclined to seek ways to identify with others
 - ▶ It takes very little for this to occur
- ▶ Schoolboys
- ▶ Preferences for Kandinsky or Klee (only knew own group)
- ▶ Task 1 – to distribute money between pairs of recipients identified only by code number and art preference
 - ▶ Participants strongly favoured own group even when no self-interest (not a recipient)
- ▶ Task 2 – randomly allocated to group X or group Y – no personal characteristics could be inferred by preferences
 - ▶ Still strongly favoured own group





Minimal Group Paradigm

- ▶ Further research: points, not money
- ▶ Robust finding – merely being categorised as a group member led to ethnocentrism and competitive intergroup behaviour
- ▶ Uncertainty v Certainty; decrease uncertainty – decrease identification and discrimination
- ▶ Critique includes: demand characteristic, positive/negative resources, giving/taking away



Social Categorization

- ▶ ***'Social Identity theory of intergroup relations'*** (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)
- ▶ Intergroup relations, group processes and the social self
- ▶ Assumption – society is structured into distinct groups
- ▶ Premise – membership of large, intermediate or small group provides social identity
- ▶ Social identities:
 - ▶ describe attributes
 - ▶ prescribe cognitions and behaviours
 - ▶ associated with ethnocentrism, in-group favouritism, intergroup differentiation
 - ▶ Conformity and cohesion (link to stereotypes)



Social Identity Theory

(Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

- ▶ SIT: an attempt to avoid explaining group and intergroup processes in terms of aggregated personality predispositions or interpersonal relationships
 - ▶ Theoretical reductionism
 - e.g. authoritarian personality theory; frustration-aggression hypothesis
- ▶ SIT: Individual processes and social forces
 - ▶ Social regulation
 - ▶ Self-regulation
 - ▶ In-group norms, out-group stereotypes
 - ▶ Boundaries, competitiveness



Social Identity Theory

(Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

- Personal identity – qualities and characteristics which are strictly individual
- Social identity - that part of the individual's self-concept which derives from:
 - his/her knowledge of his/her membership of a social group (or groups)
 - the value and emotional significance of that membership
- Our self-concept partly depends on how we evaluate the in-group relative to other groups
- The self as a group member - multiple selves/identities



Social Identity Theory

(Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

- Emphasises categorization as the social cognitive underpinning of social identity phenomena
- Social categories/groups - prototypes:
 - Cognitive representations
 - Vague set of attributes - e.g. feelings, beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, behaviours
 - The 'ideal group member' – possibility that none of the group actually embody this
- Meta-contrast principle – maximising intergroup differences
- Entitativity (Campbell, 1958) – group as coherent, distinct, unified



Social Identity Theory

(Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

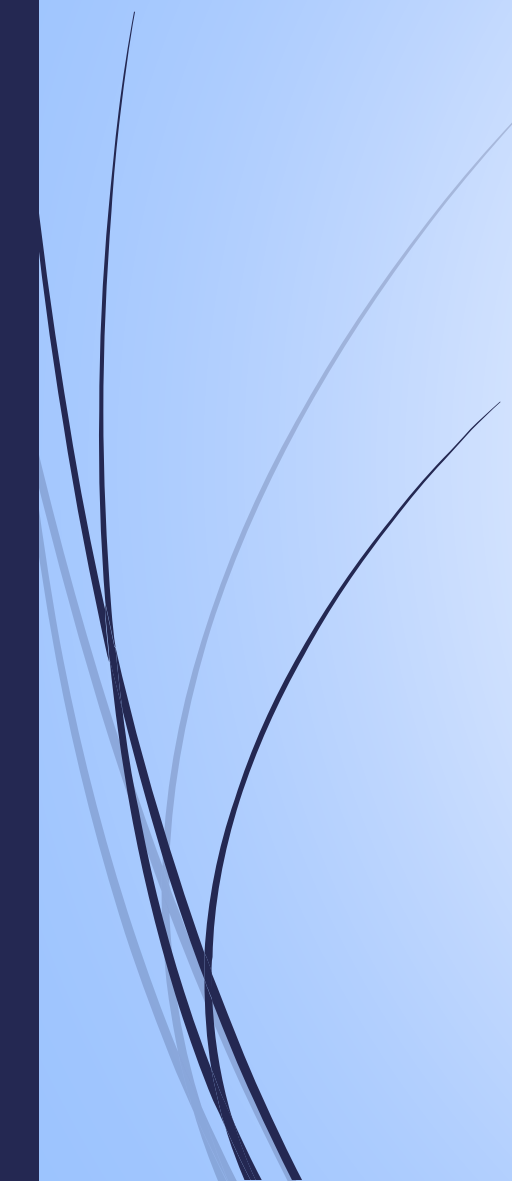
- ▶ When are social categories psychologically salient?
 - ▶ Chronically accessible (in memory)
 - ▶ Accessible in the situation (obvious clues)

And they

- ▶ Account for similarities and differences between people (do they fit situational structure? – *Structured fit*)
- ▶ Account for people's behaviour (do they fit category norms? – *Normative fit*)



Social Categorization



- Prototypes only become stereotypes if attributes are shared by the group members
 - Fuzzy notion that encapsulates the context-dependant features of group membership
 - Exemplary members/Ideal types
 - Can be assessed by closeness to the ideal
- Context dependent – comparison out-group and relevant in-group members present
- Categorisation of others – depersonalisation; use of relevant prototype for comparison. Lack of knowledge of other group members?



Categorization

Sharpens intergroup boundaries

- Group stereotypes and norms
- Assignment of individuals (including the self) to relevant category (by self and others)
- Salience of categories determined by social context

Motivation Processes:

- Self-enhancement
 - Status of groups involve struggles over prestige and status (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)
 - Guides social categorization processes – stereotypes and norms favour in-group
- Uncertainty reduction
 - Social referencing – what to think and how to behave



Social Identity Theory

(Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

Key aspect

Processes of categorization and self-enhancement connect to **subjective belief structures**

- ▀ Nature of relations between groups
- ▀ May not be accurate
- ▀ Ideological constructs

▀ Influence:

- ▀ Stability and legitimacy of intergroup relations
- ▀ Possibility of social mobility (psychological change from one group to another)
- ▀ Social change (psychological change of existing values of groups)

Social Identity Theory: Status

- If status is legitimate and stable, it is possible to pass legitimately into a dominant/higher status group (higher status identity)

- Less solidarity with own group
- Little intergroup competition
- Attempt to dis-identify with current group
- **Social mobility**

- If status is illegitimate and unstable, not possible to move to dominant/higher status group (retain lower status identity)

BUT, the social order can be changed

- Strong solidarity
- Direct intergroup competition
- Identification with current group
- **Social change**

Self-categorization theory

(Turner, 1985)

- Theoretical development of SIT
- Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, 1985; Turner et al, 1987) '*Social identity theory of the group*'
- Hierarchical nature e.g. 'Humans' -- 'Males' -- 'Fathers', 'Brothers' etc.
- Accentuation of perceived **similarities** between people belonging to the same category/group
(e.g. 'students' -- 'psychology students')
- Accentuation of perceived **differences** between people belonging to different categories/groups
(e.g. students/non-students; psychology students/engineering students)



Self-categorization theory

(Turner, 1985)

- Categorization-accentuation process
 - Makes interpretation of social world and environment subjectively meaningful
 - Guides what is actionable in specific contexts
 - Accentuates perceived similarity to subjective representation of defining features of in-group (to own perception of prototype)
 - Individuals seen as, reacted to and act as embodiments of the relevant in-group prototype



Self-categorization theory

(Turner, 1985)

- Depersonalisation of self underlies group phenomena
 - From unique individual to group member
 - Not dehumanised, not de-individuated
- When in contextually-relevant group, self-perception, beliefs, values, behaviours etc. align with that group's prototype
- Individuals → Group members
- Individuality → Group behaviour



Self-categorization theory

(Turner, 1985)

- Members of the same group generally share a social field
- Exposed to similar information
- Interpret information from the same perspective
 - subjective cognitive representations of prototypes are similar/shared
- Comparison to out-groups influence in-group definition
 - Psychology students v. engineering students
 - UWTSD students v. Aberystwyth University students v. Cambridge students
- Social identity is dynamic - responsive to social contexts



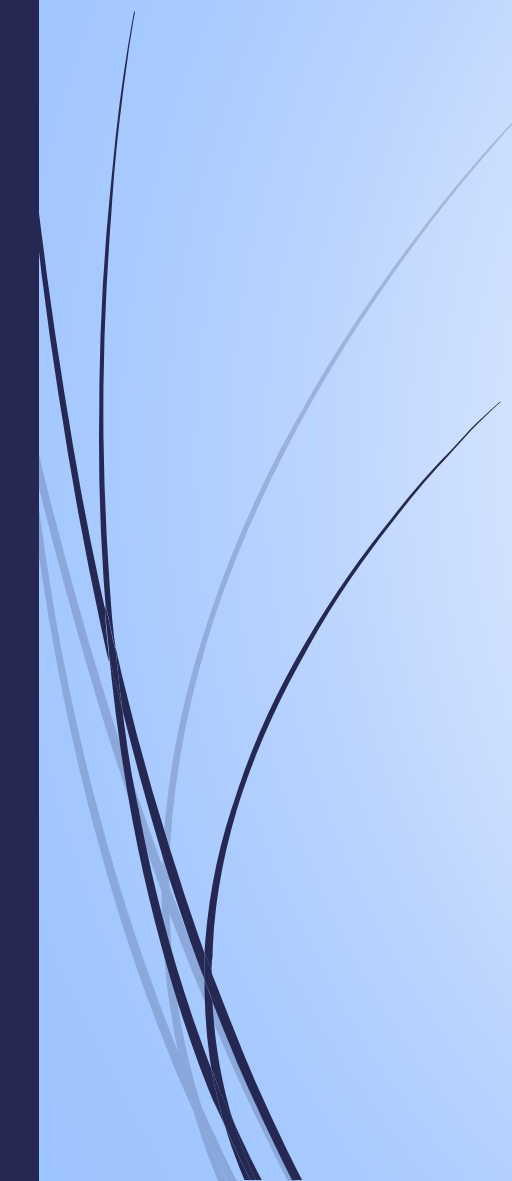
Self-categorization theory

(Turner, 1985)

- Responsiveness – key aspect of social identity and self-categorization theory
- Cognitive system maximises meaning in a social context uses most salient/relevant categorization
 - What increases clarity and separateness
 - Maximises within-group similarities and between-group differences
 - What 'fits' in order to answer the question/make sense of what is happening
e.g. use categories of man/woman to explain behaviour – but might actually be due to political or moral beliefs



Reading



- ▶ Locate at least one social psychology text that features social identity theory and self-categorization theory.
- ▶ Read around both theories and make your own notes.
- ▶ This is the first step to broadening your knowledge and deepening your understanding of these theories.