



Social identity theory

Self-categorisation theory

Minimal Group Paradigm

(Tajfel, Billig, Bundy and Flament, 1971)

- ▶ 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 viewed as 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 for social categorisation?
 - Chronically accessible (in memory)
 - Accessible in the situation (obvious clues)

And they

- Account for similarities and differences between people (if 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



Categorization

Sharpens intergroup boundaries

- ▶ Group stereotypes and norms
- ▶ Assignment of individuals (including the self) to relevant category
- ▶ 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, but 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*'
- Accentuation of perceived **similarities** between people belonging to the same category/group
(e.g. psychology students)
- Accentuation of perceived **differences** between people belonging to different categories/groups
(e.g. psychology students/engineering students; students/non-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
- 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 similarities and differences
 - What 'fits' in order to answer the question/make sense of what is happening
e.g. man/woman to explain behaviour – but might be political or moral beliefs

Identity and Social Identity theories

Similarities

- Structure and function of the socially-constructed self
- Reciprocal associations between self and society
- Behaviour organised into meaningful units
- Behaviour – discontinuous clusters / self – discrete identities
- Identities internalised and used to define the self
- SIT – social identification & self-categorisation
- IT – naming self as a member of social category
- Social identity theory (incl. self-categorisation theory) – explanation of group behaviour through uses of concepts that
 - Articulate both societal and psychological processes
 - Recognise the primacy of society over individual

Identity and Social Identity theories

Differences

- ▶ Level of analysis:
 - ▶ IT not essentially a psychological theory - little emphasis on cognitive processes
e.g. focus: labelling self – social categories; behavioural roles basis for identity
 - ▶ SIT – psychological – details socio-cognitive processes
e.g. focus: detail of cognitive processes and structures (categorisation, prototypes)
- ▶ Evaluation of others
e.g. SIT focus: favourable in-group evaluations – due to identity salience
- ▶ Contextual factors
 - ▶ IT – Identity changes due to role position changes
 - ▶ SIT – Social comparative factors, self-esteem motivation, uncertainty reduction, social explanation



Identity and Social Identity theories

- Intergroup behaviour
 - IT: role behaviour
 - SIT: intergroup relations and group behaviour
- IT: little emphasis of identities on relations with out-group members
- SIT: emphasises effects of salient social identity on perceptions of and conduct towards others
- Roles and Groups
 - SIT: 'positions' within a group, rather than 'roles' (roles v. group membership identities)
 - IT -definition derives mainly from roles – role identities (roles/group membership same)
 - does not emphasise wider social attributes

Identity and Social Identity theories

- Social Context and Identity Salience
 - IT: the 'self' - relatively stable, changes in response to role changes (e.g. Serpe, 1987)
 - though some argue more responsive to context (e.g. Burke, 1980, 1991)
 - SIT: Social identity - enduring construct, but the content of social identity is dynamically responsive to immediate contextual factors
 - different contextually-relevant behaviours for same social identity
 - IT: more emphasis on conditions under which particular social identities will be chronically salient
 - Also more emphasis on interpersonal social interaction to influence enaction of roles and their modification – identity dynamics



Seminar today:

Identity theory, social identity theory, self-categorisation theory

Group task:

- Consider similarities and differences in more depth
 - Use literature to consider alternative viewpoints of similarities and differences
 - Share findings with class
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