



SOCIAL



*identifications*

A social psychology of  
intergroup relations  
and group processes

**Michael A Hogg and Dominic Abrams**

Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams

# Social Identifications

A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF INTERGROUP  
RELATIONS AND GROUP PROCESSES



London and New York

First published 1998  
by Routledge  
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Reprinted 1990, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1999

*Routledge is an International Thomson Publishing company*

© 1998 Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 0-415-00695-3

## Foreword

Social identity theory – the topic of this book – refers to a body of ideas that has been evolving continuously and sometimes very rapidly since the beginning of the 1970s. The first published paper that introduced these ideas appeared in 1972 (Tajfel 1972a), but the tradition of work may be dated from the initial research on the effects of social categorizations on intergroup behaviour already begun by Henri Tajfel and his colleagues (Tajfel, *et al.* 1971). The results of these studies were unexpected and in terms of conventional theories unexplicable. As Tajfel put it, they were ‘data in search of a theory’. Social identity theory began as an attempt to make sense of these data. Many researchers around the world have since been influenced by the social categorization findings. The ‘minimal group paradigm’ which Tajfel and his colleagues created has now become a standard procedural tool of experimental research on intergroup behaviour. Social identity theory remains distinctive as being the only major theoretical tradition deriving from this work.

The initial ideas (those subsequently published in a few pages at the end of the 1972 article) had already been formulated by Henri when I arrived to work with him in Bristol in 1971. He argued that social groups needed to establish a positively valued distinctiveness from other groups to provide their members with a positive social identity. He illustrated this hypothesis by pointing to the results of the minimal group experiments (my first work as his research student in 1971 was to use the hypothesis to generate a systematic explanation of social categorization effects and related forms of intergroup discrimination; Turner 1975). Originally, then, and at the time that the term was fixed upon (about 1978) in preference to others that were also current (Henri himself used it only rarely and much later) social identity theory referred to a specific analysis of basic processes in intergroup discrimination and its application to the explanation of real-life social conflict and change. However, this is no longer the case: other ideas have made their appearance, relying on, developing, transforming the earlier thinking, but always in some way related to it. Strictly speaking, there are now in fact two social identity theories: the original intergroup theory, which is an analysis of intergroup

conflict and social change and focuses on individuals' need to maintain and enhance the positively valued distinctiveness of their ingroups compared to outgroups to achieve a positive social identity (Tajfel 1972a, 1981a; Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986; Turner 1975), and the more recent self-categorization theory (Turner 1982, 1984, 1985; Turner *et al.* 1987), which represents a general theory of group processes based on the idea that shared social identity depersonalizes individual self-perception and action. Correspondingly, the term social identity theory is now sometimes used to refer to the intergroup theory, sometimes to refer to both theories and sometimes to the family of ideas shared by social identity researchers. The fundamental hypothesis shared by both theories is that individuals define themselves in terms of their social group memberships and that group-defined self-perception produces psychologically distinctive effects in social behaviour.

It is a mistake, therefore, to think that the theory is simply about intergroup relations or that research on it has remained within any one empirical paradigm. On the contrary, one of its hallmarks has been the vigour with which it has extended itself into many different areas of social psychology. To summarize all the issues to which it has been applied would be tedious because there are now so many, but a selective survey would have to include the effects of social categorization on intergroup relations, intergroup conflict and ethnocentrism (including racial prejudice and inter-ethnic contact), social change, the social psychology of language, identity and the self-concept, psychological group formation, the distinction between interpersonal and intergroup behaviour, group cohesion, social attraction, social influence and conformity, social co-operation (e.g. 'social dilemmas' and social interaction in mixed-motive settings), crowd behaviour, group polarization, social stereotyping, attribution theory, equity theory and the metatheory of social psychology. Some of its most exciting recent implications have to do with social perception/cognition and, being a part of the development of social psychology in Europe, it has implied from the beginning an emphasis on 'the social dimension' of social psychology (Tajfel 1984) and a rejection of individualism. Many researchers have been attracted to the fact that the theory has always espoused a combative anti-individualistic metatheory. Jaspars (1986), for example, in discussing whether social psychology in Europe has produced any genuinely different intellectual focus for the subject points to the social identity idea 'that the individual often acts as a representative of a social category and employs such categories to achieve a social identity and self-evaluation' (p. 11) as the key theme of the 'social' emphasis in European work.

Much of the excitement of the theory lies in the fact that it has proved so readily applicable to such a wide variety of problems and fields. Social identity processes are beginning to emerge as major and pervasive aspects of human social psychology, with a relevance that extends way beyond the conventional and artificial limits of intergroup behaviour or group interac-

## XII FOREWORD

tion. This book, then, is most timely. There is a definite need for a single source that can serve to summarize and introduce the main ideas, findings and applications of social identity theory and show how it has become an important new approach to social psychology. Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams have taken on a large and difficult task. They have deliberately adopted a carefully balanced (and the only workable) approach, both presenting social identity theory as a working perspective in the field and outlining their personal views. The theory is not an orthodoxy or dogma (which is one reason why after eighteen years it is more alive than ever, still developing and its impact still growing) and it would be wrong to try to present it as such. The authors have done a thorough and excellent job in providing a comprehensive overview of what has been achieved.

John C. Turner  
Sydney, October 1987

## Preface

This book is about social groups: about what happens between them and what happens within them. It is about intergroup behaviour and group processes. It is also about the psychological bases of being a group member – of 'belonging' to a group. In considering these issues we discuss traditional social psychological approaches, and in this sense the book is a text. However, we are intentionally partisan. The aim is to highlight limitations and shortcomings of these approaches, and to argue for an alternative *social identity* approach, an approach which has its roots in research into intergroup relations conducted in the late 1960s and early 1970s by Henri Tajfel and his colleagues at the University of Bristol. The book thus provides an introduction to and overview of the social identity approach in social psychology.

Our book is primarily written for social psychologists, their students, and critics. We had a readership in mind: graduate and senior undergraduate students of social psychology, and more broadly social scientists interested in what social psychology might have to offer as regards the explanation of intergroup relations, prejudice, discrimination, and group processes.

The book is intended to fill a gap. There are already many books which report research stemming from the social identity perspective, but none which integrates the various insights and advances into a single and developed argument. Some are highly technical and detailed (e.g. Doise 1978; Tajfel 1978a; Turner *et al.* 1987), some rather restricted in focus (e.g. Hewstone 1983; St Clair and Giles 1980; Turner and Giles 1981), while others are simply collections of chapters by different authors without any concerted attempt to fuse the messages of each (e.g. Tajfel 1984). There are also textbooks which report some of the research, but which do not incorporate the theoretical critique from which the research has emerged. Some merely report the phenomena associated with social identity, such as intergroup discrimination (e.g. Deaux and Wrightsman 1984), others restrict their coverage to a few topics, and are intended more as general social psychology texts (e.g. Brown 1986; Eiser 1986). What is lacking is an integrated and comprehensive exposition of the social identity approach,

#### XIV PREFACE

which is accessible to people who are interested in but not necessarily familiar with, well versed in, or wedded to, the approach. We hope to have provided just such a book.

We recommend that it be read from beginning to end as an unfolding story. However, it has been structured so that those who like to 'dip' may do so: Chapters 1 and 2 are essential reading, but can be read in conjunction with any one of the subsequent chapters because pivotal theoretical points are reiterated. We have deliberately shied away from including boxed examples, cartoons, anecdotes, test-yourself questionnaires, and other devices often used to haul the reader through general textbooks. Nor are we concerned with the minutiae of every experiment conducted using the social identity perspective, but rather with the themes, directions, and discoveries which it provides. We limit ourselves to describing a few experiments and paradigms where it is necessary for understanding the arguments. Our concern is to show the utility of the theoretical approach, and this is best done through the reinterpretation and analysis of evidence from established social psychology. We have chosen to refer to a large number of primary sources and texts in order to illustrate and back up points, and to assist the reader who wishes to delve more deeply into relevant literature. The book is thus also an introduction to and overview of the social psychology of intergroup behaviour and group processes.

This, then, is the first *social identity text*: the first book to integrate the diverse applications and approaches of the social identity approach. Naturally, in such a limited space it is impossible to convey every twist and turn, every theoretical nuance, every empirical uncertainty. The book presents an argument and illustrates the way it can be supported. For more detailed accounts the reader is directed to other sources (see the end of each chapter).

Having read this book, the reader should be ready and able to enquire further. We provide the structure, set the questions, and promote the social identity approach to the answers.

The book was conceived one rainy afternoon in one of our offices at the University of Bristol Department of Psychology. Its progress from that day in 1984 was slow but steady, and was aided by innumerable and various contributions from friends, relatives, and colleagues. Our first debt is to those who provided the initial climate of encouragement and support necessary to get us going on the idea in the first place – in particular, John Edwards for his stoic calm, and Sonia Jackson for the invigorating mayhem of Henleaze Gardens. Without their prompting and questioning we might never have entertained the possibility of writing a book, even though the need for it was staring us in the face. We would also like to thank Tory Higgins for his encouragement given at a later stage in the enterprise. Our second debt is to our students, whose interest in the social identity perspective and whose eagerness to discuss and debate its implications increasingly made us aware of



the need for a text on the subject. From them we learnt a great deal. Our third debt is to our teachers: those who originally introduced us to the social identity approach, fired us with their enthusiasm, and inspired us throughout – John Turner, Rupert Brown, Howard Giles, Mick Billig, and the late Henri Tajfel. Our contemporaries have also been our teachers, and are owed a debt: John Colvin, Susan Condor, Karen Henwood, Penny Oakes, Nick Pidgeon, Steve Reicher, Phil Smith, Margaret Wetherell, Jennie Williams, and numerous others associated with the ‘Bristol school’ of intergroup relations research. Discussions late into the night in Bristol and Canterbury will not soon be forgotten.

Shortly after deciding to write the book, Michael Hogg moved to Australia to take up a Postdoctoral Research fellowship at Macquarie University in Sydney, working with John Turner. A year later he moved to the University of Melbourne to take up a lectureship in psychology. In the meantime Dominic Abrams had moved to Scotland to take up a ‘new blood’ lectureship at the University of Dundee. Progress on the book was inevitably delayed. We are grateful to the British Council, who came to the rescue: Dominic Abrams was awarded an academic-travel grant, which enabled him to visit the University of Melbourne for three months in 1986. During this time we completed the work, further assisted by an Arts Faculty special-research grant to Michael Hogg from the University of Melbourne.

We would like to thank those who helped prepare various drafts of the manuscript: Anna Shewan, Mair Rowan, and Margaret Grubb at Dundee, and Trish Cochrane, Gabby Lyon, and Sylvia Negro at Melbourne. Special thanks must go to Susan Condor, Helen DeCieri, Tim McNamara, and Kevin Grady for taking the time to read carefully the manuscript, or parts of it, and provide us with specific comments and general advice to Diane Houston for preparing the subject index, and to Mary Ann Kernan, our editor, for her constant encouragement, pragmatic guidance, and unfailing tolerance. The final version, is however, solely our responsibility.

Finally, this book could never have been written without the support of our personal friends and relatives: Eve Hogg, Marion Meade, Sonia Jackson, Tilli Edelman, Angie and Nick Emler, and particularly Bridget Hogg and Diane Houston. We would simply like to thank them all.

Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams  
*Melbourne, July 1987*

# Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	x
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 The social identity approach: context and content</b>	<b>6</b>
Introduction	7
Social psychology	8
Social identity: themes, questions, and context	14
Social identity: theory	19
Conclusion	29
<b>3 Intergroup behaviour</b>	<b>31</b>
Introduction	32
Psychodynamic approaches	32
Relative deprivation	37
Realistic conflict of interests	42
Minimal groups	48
Social identity theory	51
Conclusion	61
<b>4 From stereotyping to ideology</b>	<b>64</b>
Introduction	65
Descriptive approaches	66
Categorization and stereotyping	68
Social identity and stereotyping	73
Attribution, social representation, and ideology	78
The elimination of stereotyping and prejudice	84
Social cognition and stereotyping	86
Conclusion	90

## VIII CONTENTS

<b>5 Intragroup behaviour: Processes within groups</b>	<b>92</b>
Introduction	93
Group dynamics	93
Group cohesiveness	94
Social identity	105
Some further extensions	112
Conclusion	115
<b>6 Social presence and social performance</b>	<b>116</b>
Introduction	117
Social presence	118
Social performance	124
Social identity and the social performer	128
Conclusion	133
<b>7 Collective behaviour</b>	<b>135</b>
Introduction	136
Early theories of the crowd	136
De-individuation	140
Collective action as normative behaviour	147
Social identification and collective behaviour	149
Conclusion	156
<b>8 Conformity and social influence</b>	<b>157</b>
Introduction	158
Conformity as normative behaviour	158
Traditional conformity research and theory	160
Limitations of traditional approaches to conformity	167
Social identity and conformity	171
Conclusion	184
<b>9 Language, speech, and communication</b>	<b>186</b>
Introduction	187
Language, speech, and communication in social psychology	187
Language, speech, and communication outside social psychology	191
Social psychology of language	194
Conclusion	205
<b>10 Conclusions</b>	<b>207</b>
Introduction	208
Theory	209
Application to relations between the sexes	210
Theoretical advances	216
Conclusion	217

## CONTENTS IX

<i>References</i>	219
<i>Author index</i>	257
<i>Subject index</i>	265

# 1

## Introduction

There was here a Nazi extermination camp between July 1942 and August 1943. More than 800,000 Jews from Poland, USSR, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Austria, France, Belgium and Greece were murdered. On 2 August 1943, the prisoners organized an armed revolt which was crushed in blood by the Nazi hangmen.

This chilling message is inscribed in six different languages on six large stones which stand sentinel in the silence of the forest near the small village of Treblinka in Poland. It documents the systematic premeditated extermination of human beings at the rate of 2,200 each day. While the gas chambers were reaping their grim harvest of human life at Treblinka, so too were they at Maidanek, Sobibor, Chelmo, Belzec, Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, and many others. In Auschwitz alone, more than 2,000,000 people were exterminated between January 1942 and the summer of 1944. The magnitude of human suffering is simply beyond comprehension; it is mind-numbing in its enormity.

This is genocide – the ultimate expression of prejudice and discrimination. It is intergroup behaviour at its most horrific extreme: the attempted annihilation of an entire race. But it is only the tip of the iceberg of people's inhumanity toward their own kind: hatred, domination, subjugation, exploitation, degradation, oppression, and extermination are the hallmarks of history. And yet, people are perhaps the most sociable of all creatures: delighting in and thriving upon the company of others. They not only spend the overwhelming part of their waking lives in the presence of others, but more fundamentally they are products of history, culture, and society. They are socially constructed. Their views, opinions, values, activities, and means of communication are learnt or acquired from others. Their behaviour is largely governed by norms, or agreements between people, concerning appropriate or acceptable ways to behave and opinions to hold under particular circumstances. Without such agreement, communication, which lies at the core of human existence, would be impossible – it depends upon the existence of an agreed-upon set of rules, or a grammar.

## 2 SOCIAL IDENTIFICATIONS

How can we explain the apparent paradox of how the cohesion required for social existence can coexist with the divisions in society? In this book we confront the issue by focusing upon the social psychological nature of group membership. We try to understand the social psychology of people in groups – their intergroup and their intragroup behaviour. In particular, we present a specific approach to this analysis which we feel represents a promising advance on existing social psychological approaches. This is the *social identity approach*.

Let us return to the paradox. The key to a solution lies in the fact that, while a society is made up of individuals, it is patterned into relatively distinct social groups and categories, and people's views, opinions, and practices are acquired from those groups to which they belong. These groups can be considered to have an objective existence to the extent that members of different groups believe different things, dress in different ways, hold different values, speak different languages, live in different places, and generally behave differently. Some groups endure over many generations, others are relatively transitory; some are vast with many many millions of members, others are extremely small; some are very prestigious, others are treated with contempt. There are often striking differences between national groups (Italians, Germans), religious groups (Buddhist, Muslim, Protestant, Catholic), political groups (socialist, conservative), ethnic groups (Tamils and Singalese in Sri Lanka), sex groups (male, female), tribal groups (Karen, Lahu, Akha in Thailand), youth groups (punk, skinhead), university faculty groups (Science, Arts, Law), and so on. Small decision-making groups also have their own relatively unique ways of operating and norms of conduct, as do occupational groups. The important point is that the groups to which people belong, whether by assignment or by choice, will be massively significant in determining their life experiences.

It is now only a small step to recognize that groups have a profound impact on individuals' *identity*. That is, people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others (whether members of the same group – *ingroup* – or of different groups – *outgroup*), is largely determined by the groups to which they feel they belong. While this may be very vivid in the case of, for example, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, it can also be observed at the level of short-lived decision-making groups in business organizations, relatively transient committees, and in the instant camaraderie felt among strangers brought together on a package tour. The question that arises is *how* do people identify with a group, and precisely what are the consequences of such identification?

This is essentially a social psychological question as it pivots on the issue of how society bestows self-conception; how it constructs individuals through the mediation of groups represented by normative or consensual practices, and how in turn individuals recreate these groups. It addresses how 'Each of us changes himself, modifies himself to the extent that he changes and

modifies the complex relations of which he is the heart' (Gramsci 1971: 352). It asks what are the psychological and social psychological processes involved in the relationship between individuals and groups, and what factors govern the form taken by relations between groups. What determines whether intergroup relations are hostile, competitive, and antagonistic or whether they are co-operative and relatively amicable? These questions lie at the very heart of social psychology, and address perhaps some of the most important phenomena of human existence, such as identity, the self, group solidarity, international relations, prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, conformity, and collective behaviour (riots, demonstrations, etc.).

Although, as we show in this book, social psychology tackles these issues and has advanced our understanding, it tends to make a distinction between the study of, on the one hand, large-scale social categories (race, sex, nation, etc.), and, on the other, small collections of individuals who are in the same place at the same time and who are all interacting mutually with each other. Traditionally, social psychology only considers the latter to constitute a group. It explains group behaviour in terms of interaction between individuals, and largely fails to consider the way that groups furnish individuals with an identity. That is, the emphasis is on the *individual in the group*. Of course, this perspective makes it very difficult to deal with large-scale group phenomena and with the societal construction of self. We are, however, very optimistic, since over the last fifteen years or so a new approach has gradually developed in social psychology which turns the traditional perspective on its head and focuses on the *group in the individual*. This is the *social identity approach*.

The central tenet of this approach is that belonging to a group (of whatever size and distribution) is largely a *psychological* state which is quite distinct from that of being a unique and separate individual, and that it confers *social identity*, or a shared/collective representation of who one is and how one should behave. It follows that the psychological processes associated with social identity are also responsible for generating distinctly 'groupy' behaviours, such as solidarity within one's group, conformity to group norms, and discrimination against outgroups. Furthermore, this perspective has enormous potential for improving and extending the explication of an array of phenomena which have traditionally been approached by social psychology from a more 'interpersonal' perspective. The purpose of this book is to show how the social identity approach can dramatically enhance and enrich an understanding of social groups.

In Chapter 2 we focus on *theory*. We describe the social identity perspective in terms of its various assumptions and its specific theoretical propositions. The main aim of this chapter is to provide the foundation on which all subsequent chapters build. A second and very important aim is to locate the social identity perspective in the broader framework of social psychology and the social sciences. We therefore spend some time at the

#### 4 SOCIAL IDENTIFICATIONS

outset discussing contrasting perspectives on human behaviour in both social psychology and social theory, and identifying their relative strengths and weaknesses. On this basis we furnish an historical context for the social identity approach, spell out its metatheoretical underpinnings, and propose ways in which it represents an advance on other social psychological approaches.

While later chapters can be read in isolation, they are designed to be read always in conjunction with Chapter 2 and assume a familiarity with the critical context of the approach and its theoretical premises. Each chapter is designed to show how the social identity perspective contributes to our understanding of a specific psychological issue, and to extend and elaborate those aspects of theory relevant to that issue. The general format of these chapters is one in which the issue and its importance in social psychology and everyday life is stated, traditional social psychological approaches are described and critically discussed, limitations are located in a relatively general critique of certain approaches to social psychology (spelt out in detail in Chapter 2), the contribution of the social identity approach is discussed and evaluated both theoretically and empirically, and prospects and future directions for the social identity perspective in the area and in related areas are considered. However, it should be noted that each of these later chapters can stand on its own as a relatively detailed critical overview of social psychological theory and research in the area covered by the chapter. Taken together they cover a large portion of the social psychology of group phenomena.

Chapter 3 deals with *intergroup behaviour*: the manner in which individuals relate to one another as members of different groups. This chapter discusses intergroup discrimination, relative deprivation, competition and co-operation, status and power, and other intergroup phenomena. Chapter 4 extends the analysis of intergroup relations by examining *stereotyping*: the way groups are perceived. We discuss the shared nature of social stereotypes and the way in which people can assign these stereotypes to themselves. We examine the way in which stereotypes are embedded in social representations or ideologies associated with social categories and how they are related to causal attributions. We also discuss the structure of stereotypes, the stereotypic content of social beliefs, and the nature of prejudice.

We then shift emphasis to what goes on inside groups, that is on *intragroup behaviour*. Chapter 5 addresses the question of what determines group solidarity or cohesiveness, and confronts the question of how, in a psychological sense, a group comes into being. What transforms an aggregate of unrelated individuals into a distinct social group with its own defining characteristics? In dealing with these issues we discuss communication networks and structures in small groups, leadership patterns, group productivity, decision-making groups, and the impact of group norms on all these.

Chapter 6 continues the emphasis on life within the group, but this time



we discuss *social presence* and *social performance*; the focus is on the person in the group and the impact of the psychological presence of group members on the motivation and behaviour of the individual, rather than on intragroup processes. We examine how theories of social facilitation, social impact, self-awareness, and self-presentation contribute to our understanding of individuals' behaviour in group contexts, such as negotiation and bargaining.

In Chapter 7 we deal with the social behaviour of the group as a whole. We explore the bases of *collective behaviour*: protests, demonstrations, riots, revolutions, and examine the extent to which classical theories of the crowd, theories of de-individuation, self-awareness, numerical distinctiveness, and blind conformity are successful in accounting for forms of collective behaviour.

Right at the heart of social behaviour lies *social influence*, the process through which people affect each others' opinions and behaviours. This important issue is discussed in Chapter 8, where we focus specifically upon the influence process associated with *conformity* to group norms. After discussing the contribution of traditional perspectives on conformity, we show how the social identity perspective changes our understanding of social influence and an array of conformity phenomena: group polarization in decision-making groups, leadership, brainwashing, and active minorities sponsoring social change.

The major vehicle of social influence is communication. In Chapter 9 we discuss communication but principally dwell upon *language*. Speech style and language can function as some of the most potent symbols of identity, so it is not at all surprising that the social identity perspective is of great utility in understanding an array of sociolinguistic phenomena.

The final chapter (Ch. 10) functions as a short summary and overview, in which we integrate the various themes and strands of the social identity approach and then illustrate it with, and apply it to, a concrete intergroup context, that of the relations between the sexes. We are brief and descriptive – painting a broad canvas in bold strokes, rather than constructing a detailed technical drawing – because the aim is to convey something of the way in which the social identity approach as an integrated whole can be, and is, employed to explicate the behaviour of 'real' social categories. The chapter closes with some *conclusions* concerning the relative advantages of the social identity approach in comparison to other approaches discussed in the book. We also specify those areas where we feel current and future initiatives in social identity theory and research are being taken.