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INTRODUCTION: PART 1

Sources of Social Identity

Tom Postmes and Nyla R. Branscombe

Over the past decades we have witnessed an exponential increase in interest in what is now known as the "social identity approach"—a set of concepts, ideas, and principles contained in social identity theory and self-categorization theory. The breakthrough of this approach with its key concepts for social psychological research was swift and far-reaching (see Dumont & Louw, 2007), although it was not until this past decade that it has been recognized in the majority of psychology textbooks as one of social psychology's key theories. The breakthrough in other social science disciplines has been an even more recent phenomenon.

The huge success of the social identity approach to the self runs parallel to a more general growth in popular and scientific awareness of what social identities are, and why they are important (Giddens, 1991). Modern society is awash with issues that have a social identity dimension, and this development is fueled by the decreasing influence of overarching social identities such as religiosity, which were previously so ubiquitous and natural as to remain unquestioned (e.g., Baray, Postmes, & Jetten, 2009; Taylor, 2007). As a result, modern citizens are having to meet increasingly contradictory demands of different identities in their personal lives (e.g., professional and private). In society, they face the consequences of the erosion of identities that were hitherto unquestioned and thus ignored (e.g., national identities), and they are challenged by the excesses that conflicts between different social identities may bring (e.g., terrorism and polarization between ethnic, political, and religious identities). Overall, people are increasingly faced with the idea that social identities can be treated and traded as commodities (e.g., acquired through lifestyles or consumption).

The roots of the success of the social identity concept in psychology go back considerably further than its recent leap to fame. The social identity approach was developed during an immensely productive period from 1967 to 1982, when Henri Tajfel and his colleagues worked on social identity theory and its empirical foundations at the University of Bristol (see Robinson, 1996; Turner & Reynolds, 2002). Social identity theory evolved from early studies of prejudice (Tajfel, 1969) and intergroup differentiation (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel, Flament, Billig, & Bundy, 1971), and was developed in a series of publications that provided the essential theoretical building blocks (e.g., Tajfel, 1974) and finally explicated the full theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). John Turner and his colleagues later began developing self-categorization theory, which was at the same time an extension of

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Tajfel's ideas about social identity and their social influence, and an elaboration of the cognitive underpinnings of the self, with key publications in 1982, 1985, and 1987, and later elaborations in Australia where Turner worked from 1983 onwards.

The purpose of this volume is to bring together in one place all the publications that form the foundations of the social identity approach. There are numerous reasons why we believe that this is both timely and important. The main reason is that, as readers will be able to judge for themselves, these publications are a rich source of ideas and insights that have lost none of their relevance despite the passing of several decades. If anything (and this may explain the enormous success of these theories of late), the importance of the core ideas of the approach is probably more evident today than all those years ago, because questions of social identity have become so central in modern society.

A second reason is the strong desire, which we encounter on a daily basis, of scholars and students with a recent or new interest in social identity to read for themselves not only the secondary accounts of these theories and their development but also the primary sources. They face not just the problem of deciding what the key sources are, but also interpreting how they are related to each other and how they influence subsequent work. A more detailed rationale for the selection of readings in this volume is given below, but our central aim with this volume was to select those that tell the "story" of social identity research. To help narrate this story, we added three new chapters (an introductory chapter by John Turner and Kate Reynolds, along with two concluding chapters by Alex Haslam, Naomi Ellemers, Steve Reicher, Kate Reynolds, and Michael Schmitt) that were designed to place the original works in context, reflect on their contribution, and look ahead at their future influence.

In addition to these new chapters, this volume also includes some classic papers (e.g., Tajfel, 1972; Turner & Oakes, 1986) that are less about the theories themselves and more about the vision of social psychology that motivated their development and their elaboration in the empirical research that flowed from them. We expect that knowing about this vision will greatly facilitate the interpretation of the theoretical work itself. As one example of this, the significance of the social identity concept as introduced by Tajfel (1974, 1978b) and elaborated by Turner (1985) cannot be understood without appreciating the deep dissatisfaction of both scholars with explanations of social behavior that focused exclusively on predictors at the individual or the sociological level (Tajfel, 1972), and the desire that stemmed from this dissatisfaction for a social psychology that would be able to breach the old dualism of the individual and society (Turner & Oakes, 1986). The beauty of the social identity concept, and its immense explanatory power, derives from the fact that it is a concept that does not reside exclusively at the individual or social level. Social identity exists at both individual and group level simultaneously and bridges the gap.

A final, practical, reason for compiling this volume is that although the content and style of these core sources are still highly accessible, the sources themselves were anything but accessible (until now). This is an unusually fragmented literature: the readings in this volume were scattered across many different books and journals, some of which were not widely circulated. The original texts span more than two decades, and only the very best university libraries would be able to provide access to all of these sources, let alone hold them in one location. The core texts are all long out of print, and they cannot even be found second-hand on the web (and the few that are for sale fetch prohibitively high prices).

In sum, the purpose of this volume is to provide access to and a fresh perspective on the sources of social identity, not least to provide a firm footing for future research in this field. We hope that readers will enjoy (re)discovering these core sources of social identity and will be as inspired by them as we have been and continue to be. In the remainder of this introductory chapter we provide a brief overview of the impact of the social identity approach in contemporary science, followed by some elaboration of our reasons for selecting these particular papers from two very productive psychologists' long careers.

Assessing the Impact of the Social Identity Perspective

It is worthwhile systematically analyzing the impact of social identity and self-categorization theories in order to catalog not just how often, but also when and where the core sources have been cited. One systematic way of doing this is through an analysis of citation patterns for the most important (and most commonly cited) publications associated with each theory: Tajfel and Turner's (1979) chapter "An integrative theory of intergroup conflict" (republished in 1986 under the title "The social identity theory of intergroup behavior") and Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell's (1987) book *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory*. This process provides an opportunity to ground our analysis in the metrics that are routinely used to assess the impact of academic work.

Figure 1 presents the data that result from this analysis. Two points are immediately striking here. The first of these is simply that the impact of the two theories has been enormous. Both references have been cited more than 2000 times, putting them well above the 250-citation benchmark for a "citation classic" (a benchmark that, incidentally, has also been surpassed by at least 18 other key texts on social identity and self-categorization principles, including many of the other sources in this volume). The second is that it took a while for the approach to become really successful, with notable increases in the gradient of citations after 1990 and 2000. The rise in interest continues until today.

Further analysis of these results (displayed in Figure 2) shows that two-thirds of the citations for these works have been in psychology and, within psychology, two-thirds of each set of citations have been in the social field. Beyond the bounds of social psychology it is in applied areas of psychology, and in particular in the sphere of management and business, that the theories have had most influence (for reviews see Ellemers, de

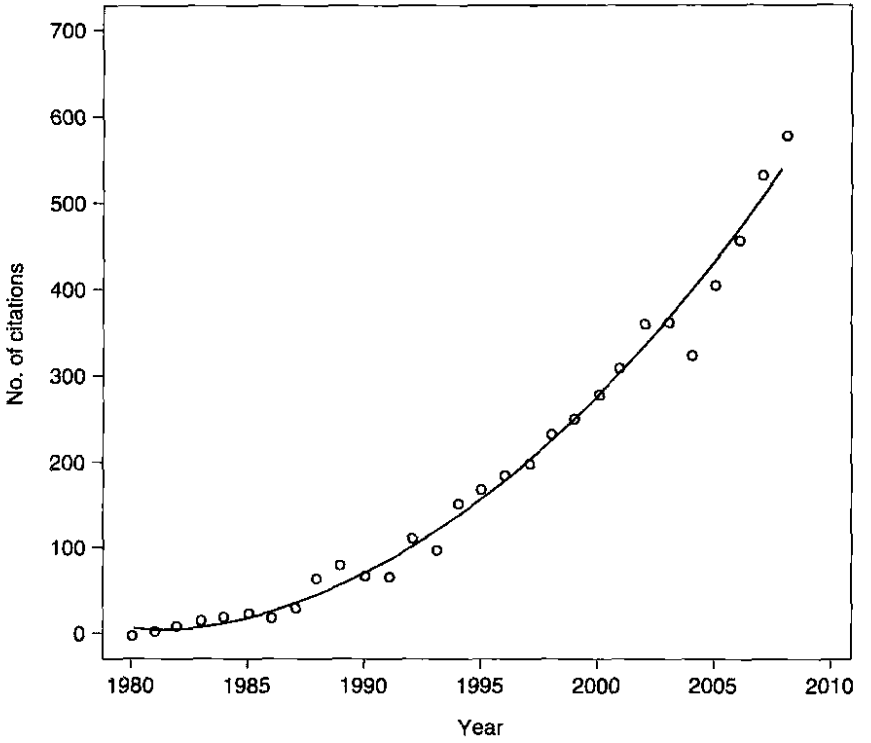

FIGURE 1 ■ Impact of Tajfel and Turner (1979, 1986) and Turner et al. (1987) over the years.

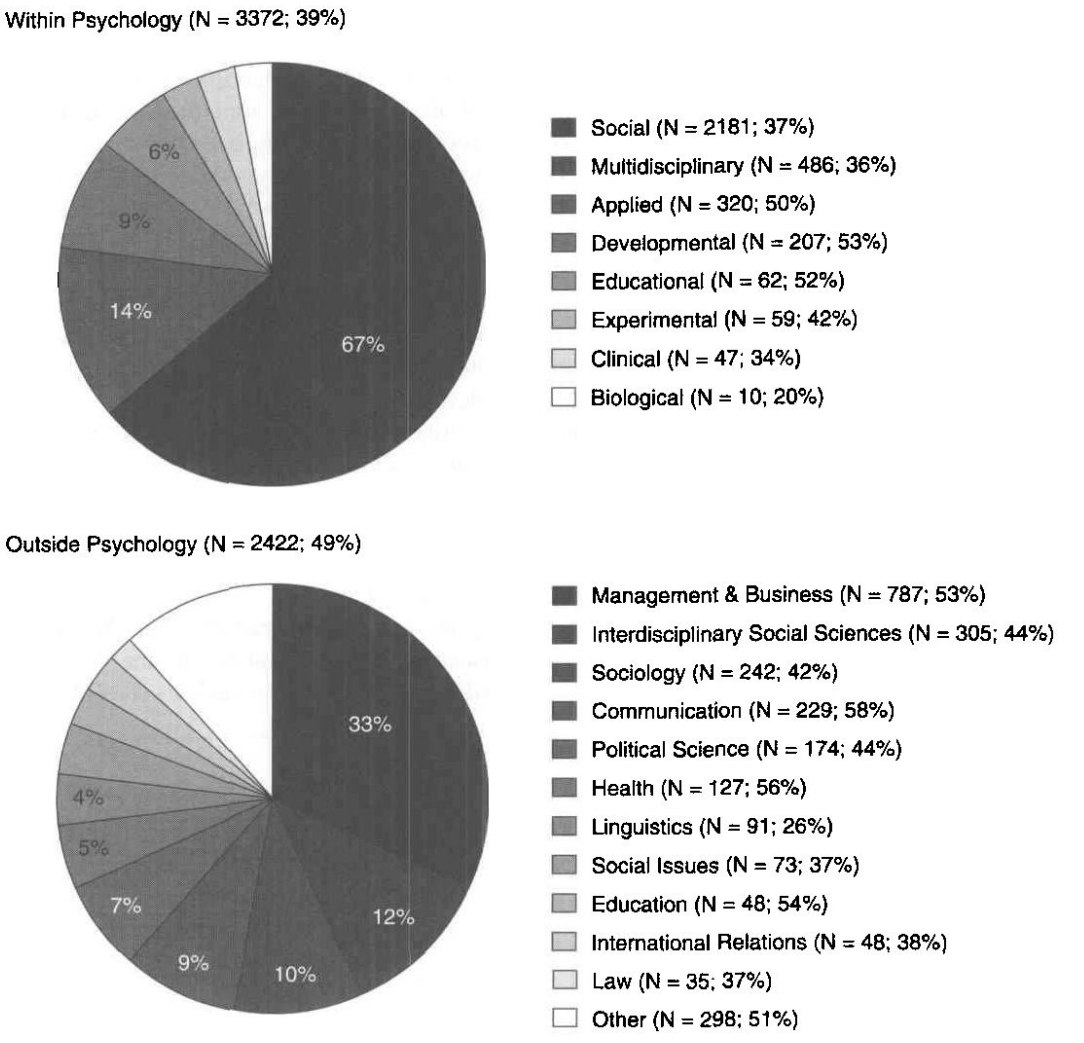

FIGURE 2 ■ The impact of Tajfel and Turner (1979, 1986) and Turner et al. (1987). The first number in parentheses indicates the number of papers in each category; the second number indicates the percentage of papers in each category that have been published in the last 5 years. Analysis is based on 4444 citations to January 2009. Some papers are included in more than one category.

Gilder, & Haslam, 2004; Hogg & Terry, 2000). Indeed, Ashforth and Mael's (1989) groundbreaking paper on "Social identity theory and the organization" has become a citation classic in its own right, with over 1400 citations. These patterns reflect the recency of this upsurge of interest in the social identity approach within the organizational domain (with more than 50% of citations in the last 5 years).

Beyond this, the theories' impact has otherwise been incredibly widespread. Indeed, there is scarcely an area of social science where the approach has not made some discernable contribution. At a disciplinary level this has been most pronounced in the fields of sociology, communication and linguistics, political science, and health, where a number of key scholars have applied the approach to core topics in those disciplines (e.g.,

speech accommodation—Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991; computer-mediated communication—Spears & Lea, 1994; social movements—Klandermans, 1997; trade unionism—Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996; well-being and stress—Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Haslam, O'Brien, Jetten, Vormedal, & Penna, 2005).

It is interesting to note, too, that recent growth in the theories' impact has generally been as strong outside social psychology as within it. Thus, of the citations that have been made in social psychology journals, 39% have been made in the last 5 years, but of those in non-psychology journals this figure is 49%. Here the fields in which growth has been most dramatic are communication (where 58% of citations have been in the last 5 years), health (56%), and management and business (53%). The two chapters by Haslam and colleagues at the end of this volume elaborate on these trends and on likely future developments.

Why Has the Perspective Been so Influential?

Beyond the question of where the social identity perspective has been influential, it is also instructive to consider why it has been influential. Following Haslam (2001) we can suggest at least three answers to this question. First and most straightforwardly, the core tenets of the perspective have proved remarkably valuable in helping researchers to explain and understand important aspects of social behavior. Compared to other theories whose explanatory potential is quickly compromised by boundary conditions and limited ambitions, a strength of social identity and self-categorization theories is that their defining ideas are applicable to, and testable in, a wide range of fields and settings.

Furthermore, these ideas have generally received strong support in empirical research. Accordingly, they have been translated into an array of "stock" experimental techniques that researchers have been able to employ with relative ease (e.g., assigning participants to minimal groups, manipulating comparative context, making group memberships salient, measuring social identification). For both reasons, the social identity perspective has proved to be immensely practical for researchers who are interested in doing research that effectively results in new knowledge.

Second, in the areas where it has been used as an explanatory tool, the perspective has provided a novel and refreshing alternative to established theorizing. In particular, the perspective has been an important resource for researchers who object to the individualistic reductionism of mainstream social psychology (see Reading 2) and contend both that there is more to the psychology of groups than just the sum of their individual parts, and that collective aspects of the self and of behavior are valid, authentic, and rational (see Reading 11). Moreover, once this social dimension of the perspective is embraced, it proves to be a highly versatile intellectual resource that can be used to develop a coherent and integrated understanding of diverse topics (see the two concluding chapters in this volume). In this it serves as a tonic to the general tendency for psychologists to develop unique and highly localized mini-theories that remain specific to the particular phenomenon (or effect) in which they are interested. In this sense social identity theory and self-categorization theory together are characterized by broad explanatory scope and parsimonious hypotheses.

Third, the theory is aligned with a more sophisticated political analysis of social behavior than is afforded by many competing models. Too many social psychological analyses are premised upon a model of society in which individuals are the primary agents and their fate is determined either by various forms of individual competence (or lack of it) or by generalized psychological forces. However, such approaches overlook the fact that individuals in society belong to groups that are meaningfully differentiated on a range of potentially important dimensions (e.g., class, power, wealth, access to resources) and that this social structuring has important psychological consequences (Haslam, 2001; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996; Pfeffer, 1998). Part of the appeal of the social identity perspective is not only that it accounts for such differentiation (and its consequences), but that it does so by appreciating rather than denying

social, material, and political forces (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994; Turner & Reynolds, 2002). The social identity perspective encourages researchers to turn toward the material facts of group life—economics, sociology, geography, and history—in order to fully understand the social structuring of the mind (Turner, 2006). Not only has this feature contributed to the specific impact that the perspective has had in both political psychology and political science, but it has also been important for researchers who are sensitive to the dynamic interplay between politics and psychology that is germane to many key issues in the social sciences and the humanities (e.g., in geography, sociology, and economics, and in linguistics, theology, and history).

Structure and Contents of this Volume

Compiling a list of essential social identity texts is not an easy task. There are many who have contributed to the formation of the core ideas of both theories. In line with the aims of this volume, our choice was to focus on the core sources only, and to ignore later elaborations, articulations, and diversifications. This meant focusing primarily on the early work of Tajfel and Turner. Furthermore, we decided to focus first and foremost on theoretical pieces, and thus to ignore empirical research such as the minimal group studies (e.g., Tajfel et al., 1971; Turner, 1975) and Tajfel's early research on categorization (1959; Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963). Even after these tough choices, making a selection was not an easy task. Although this selection includes what we see as important work, we are the first to recognize that we have been forced to exclude other great works.

The structure of the book is more or less chronological. There are five core sections, the first two about social identity theory, the next two about self-categorization theory, and a final section with conclusions. The sections are prefaced by two introductory chapters (this one, and one by John Turner and Kate Reynolds whose purpose is to tell the story of social identity, placing the formation of both theories in context). The second introductory chapter provides the reader with an understanding of the personal history of Henri Tajfel, the formation of the research group in Bristol, and the subsequent developments (for more detail see Turner, 1996). Against the backdrop of this personal and professional history, the chapter narrates how key ideas and intellectual themes appeared and were subsequently elaborated on. Thus, the chapter provides the context within which social identity and self-categorization theories were developed, it outlines the core ideas in each theory, and clarifies the relationship between these theories. The overarching purpose of the chapter is to make readers aware of the "big picture" of the ideas and work at Bristol before diving into the detail of the following readings.

Section I contains two readings that outline Henri Tajfel's vision for social psychology. These provide an insightful backdrop and conceptual introduction to social identity theory. Reading 1 is one of the important reflections on "the crisis" in social psychology: Tajfel (1972) asks whether, and how, experimentation can successfully address social issues. His response is to reject naïve empiricism and reductionism, but not experimentation per se: If researchers acknowledge that experiments are not conducted in a social vacuum, they may design experiments that offer valuable insight into the social psychological processes that shape our behavior and interactions. Valid experiments, therefore, are only possible in the service of solid theories that acknowledge and incorporate the socially constructed nature of key ingredients of our psychological processes. Although one may question whether social identity research has lived up to these ideals (Condor, 2003), this position does clarify Tajfel's perspective on the relationship between his influential experiments on minimal groups and the broader issues of intergroup relations they addressed: Social identity theory was never intended to be an explanation of "minimal group effects". In fact, the ambitions of the theory were much broader than that[1] (and the perceived

[1] Interestingly, Tajfel also qualifies these theoretical ambitions by expressing strong doubts about whether a "grand theory of social behaviour" is possible.

importance of the experiments, despite their influence, were much more modest).

Reading 1 identifies a strong and consistent influence on Tajfel's work: the idea (derived in part from Berger & Luckman, 1966) that the "psychological" perceptions that we may study in experiments are grounded in perceptions (e.g., stereotypes, norms, social identities) that are socially constructed and socially shared and thus meaningful only with reference to social relations outside the experiment. It follows that the social relationships that connect the experiment to the larger social structure within which it takes place cannot be dismissed as "error" or "noise" without rendering the theoretical interpretations of the findings reductionistic and individualistic. Importantly, it is this individualism that Tajfel identifies as the theoretical hurdle to overcome if social psychological theories (including the later developed social identity theory) can ever aspire to make a worthwhile contribution to our understanding of large-scale social phenomena such as intergroup relations.

Tajfel's strong commitment to avoiding the pitfalls of reductionism and individualism are also central to Reading 2 (Tajfel, 1979). This paper was written shortly after the integral statement of social identity theory and responds to a perceived criticism of it. Taylor and Brown (1979), although certainly sympathetic to social identity theory, suggested that it does not fully succeed in its ambition of being non-individualistic. Tajfel's response is piqued. His response is particularly interesting because, in it, he does not just clarify in what ways he believes social identity theory to be (namely more than a theory about "individuals interacting with others as individuals"), but he also provides an indication of the future tasks that theory has yet to achieve. For Tajfel, therefore, the work on social identity theory was anything but finished when, only a few years later, he died.

Section II contains the readings that outline the ideas that, together, comprise social identity theory. In Reading 3, Tajfel (1974) provides his early ideas about social identity. This shows that, even at this early stage, most of the key ingredients of social identity theory and their interrelations are already in place. The reading argues that the minimal group studies demonstrate that intergroup conflict is not merely caused by (negative) attitudes and "objective" conflict of interest between groups, but that these very attitudes and conflicts "must be *determined, to some extent at least, by* [a] continuing process of *self-definition*" (Tajfel, 1974, p. 67, emphasis added). He then articulates the concept of social identity (p. 69). Tajfel discusses the relationship between social categorization, social identity, and social comparison, and goes on to outline what would later be known as social identity theory. A few things are worth highlighting: In making social comparisons, individuals search for positive intergroup distinctiveness, but this is not a "need" in and of itself: "the reason for this cognitive, behavioural and evaluative intergroup differentiation is in the need that the individuals have to provide *social meaning through social identity* to the intergroup situation" (Tajfel, 1974, p. 76, emphasis added). Tajfel then outlines the actions that maintain a positive self-view (for disadvantaged groups in particular): individual mobility (leaving the group), social creativity (redefining what is positive about the group), and social action (changing intergroup relations).

Tajfel (1974) also reflects on the concept of social identity: this should not be seen as a "static concept" but "as an *intervening causal mechanism* in situations of social change" (p. 76). Finally, what is interesting about this reading is his discussion of the relevance of the concept of social identity for high status (or "superior") groups, a question that has not attracted a great deal of attention until quite recently (see concluding chapters, this volume).

Readings 4, 5, and 6 are each from Tajfel's edited volume *Differentiation between Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (1978). Each of these is a classic in its own right, and together they provide a broad overview of the many different concepts and ideas that underpin social identity theory. In Reading 4, on interindividual and intergroup behaviour, Tajfel (1978a) introduces the interpersonal–intergroup continuum, linking it to perceptions of self and others (depersonalization and dehumanization) as well as

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