



Introduction: Part 2

The Story of Social Identity

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In this chapter we shall outline briefly the origins and development of the social identity perspective in social psychology from its beginning in 1971 up to the present (around 2009). This is a long and complex journey. Social identity ideas came into being to make sense of unexpected experimental data having to do with the effects of social categorization on intergroup behaviour (Tajfel, 1972a; Tajfel, Flament, Billig, & Bundy, 1971; Turner, 1972, 1975). But what started as a limited analysis of specific processes in intergroup behavior has developed over some 30 or more years into a broad-ranging and powerful new perspective on human social psychology, with relevance to almost every significant problem, finding, or theory in the field. In fact, its relevance to all the social sciences has become increasingly clear. It is useful to try to summarize the story of this development to provide a context for understanding current research and to give some feeling for where both social identity work and social psychology need to go in the future. Our emphasis will be on trying to show how core principles and themes developed rather than reviewing endless empirical studies, and also on dispelling the many misconceptions that exist. As we move toward the present, the discussion will

inevitably become more selective, thematic, and brief.

Why should anybody want to make the effort to follow and understand this story? The short answer is because it outlines a new vision of human beings and human minds: one that is rich, productive, and empirically and theoretically coherent. This view rejects the dominant individualistic conception of the human mind and argues that a defining feature is the social and psychological interdependence of the individual and the group. Human beings are neither merely individuals nor merely group members. Their individual and group selves, and personal and group aspects, exist in an uneasy but creative interplay, both collaborative and antagonistic. The social identity tradition is the most recent and easily the most powerful attempt to date to come to grips with the scientific reality of the psychological group. This issue is at the heart of social psychology, with the consequence that insights into the functioning of the psychological group and its relationship to the self-process are relevant to every fundamental problem of social psychology.

Properly grasped, the social identity perspective offers an opportunity for intellectual and theoretical coherence and predictive power that the





14 ■ Introduction: Part 2

science has not had since Lewin's field theory (Lewin, 1948, 1952). Its implications extend beyond social psychology to psychology at large (and especially the problem of cognition) and the other social sciences. One does not have to agree with this view to find value in the perspective. Science progresses by testing ideas rather than by closing one's mind to them. Regardless of whether a researcher agrees or disagrees, those who are serious about understanding human beings need to be aware of the social identity perspective and the arguments it puts forward on the limitations of the current individualist orthodoxy and the alternative it offers.

The chapter will not be a summary of everything that has been done over some 35 years, nor will it be a list of all the individuals or the research that has contributed to the large body of work on social identity. This is impossible and perhaps not even helpful. It is easy to miss the forest for the trees. Our aim is to try to map the forest through insights provided by Turner, who was involved in the story from the very beginning. The chapter provides a historical overview of the basic theoretical ideas and how they developed, so that the contributions to this volume can be understood in the broader historical context. It also highlights very briefly the more specific contribution of these basic theoretical developments in the areas of stereotyping, leadership and power, social change, and personality—four areas (amongst others) that have been a focus of Turner and colleagues' research since the 1980s and 1990s until the present day. None of this means of course that there are not many others who have made important contributions to social identity research and ideas. The late Henri Tajfel started the story, writing the first social identity paper in 1971 (or possibly 1970). Turner wrote the second, also in 1971. Tajfel died in 1982, having led collaborative work with Turner on social identity theory or SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). Although Tajfel was supportive of the turn to self-categorization theory or SCT (Turner, 1978, 1982, 1985), he was unable to participate in the significant developments to come.

Beginnings: Social Identity and Positive Distinctiveness

John Turner met Henri Tajfel in 1971 at the University of Bristol in the UK when he applied for and then began a PhD there under his supervision. Tajfel had already had a complicated and difficult life and achieved much in social psychology (see Turner, 1996). Turner had just obtained a degree in social psychology at the University of Sussex (after some eventful years and delays). In terms of background, the two were chalk and cheese. Tajfel was a Polish Jew, of middle class background, who had become French and then British, been educated on the continent, and was committed to unraveling scientifically the causes of prejudice. Turner was English, working-class, and a Londoner, who got to university by accident, courtesy of a free state education and state support. Tajfel's dominant social categorization was ethnicity and Turner's was class, but they understood each other implicitly, agreeing about the kinds of analyses of society and social psychology that were needed and those that were nonsense. Both had thought about the meta-theory of social psychology a lot. Both had accepted the reality of mind as an evolutionary product and human universal, but rejected a conception of social psychology as a reductionist "psychologizing" of society (see Tajfel, 1972a; Turner & Oakes, 1986, 1997). There was an embrace of the interactionist position pioneered by Kurt Lewin and others, where the psychological nature of individuals had to be apprehended within an understanding of groups and membership in society.

In 1971 in the first volume of the new *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Tajfel and colleagues (Tajfel et al., 1971) published seminal studies on the effects of social categorization on intergroup discrimination. Their procedure became known as the minimal group paradigm. In discussing these data in the journal article there was no mention of social identity, but instead a relatively circular appeal to a "generic norm" of ingroup favouritism or ethnocentrism. By the time Turner got to Bristol in September 1971, Tajfel (1972a) had produced a new explanation. It appeared in a few pages at the





end of a chapter for a French textbook on social categorization. The story of social identity begins with this chapter.

In these few pages Tajfel introduces and defines the concept of social identity and puts forward the hypothesis that people are motivated by a need for a positive social identity and the idea that to preserve, maintain, or achieve a positive social identity they must establish a positively valued distinctiveness for their own groups compared to other groups. Tajfel used the data from the minimal group paradigm to illustrate what he meant by the idea that people are motivated by the desire to establish positive distinctiveness for their ingroups compared to outgroups. He also discussed how the effects of social comparisons on intergroup relations differ from their effects in intragroup relations, where Festinger (1954) had argued that they produced a drive for uniformity pressures. The minimal group data had shown that social categorization into groups in isolation from and unconfounded by all the variables normally thought to cause group formation and negative intergroup attitudes was sufficient for discrimination in which the ingroup was favored over the outgroup. As Tajfel put it, they were data in search of a theory: His ideas about social identity and positive distinctiveness heralded what later became SIT into life.

It is true that these data themselves were the product of a longstanding interest in social categorization and prejudice, both in Tajfel's academic and personal life (Turner, 1996), but the minimal group paradigm was novel, as were the ideas created in response to it. Rabbie and Horwitz (1969) had earlier asked the same question about the role of social categorization (was it alone sufficient for intergroup discrimination?) but their paradigm was not fully minimal and their findings and explanation were different (Turner, 1975; Turner & Bourhis, 1996). Tajfel did not present his ideas as "SIT". No such term or theory existed at this time. In discussing what he saw as the central explanatory idea in this analysis, Tajfel was explicit that it was the notion that social comparisons between groups were aimed at establishing positively valued distinctiveness for one's own group.

Turner's first task was to review the role of

social categorization in intergroup relations and the findings of the minimal group paradigm in order to flesh out the explanation of the minimal group data in terms of the need for a positive social identity and the drive for positive ingroup distinctiveness, which he did in a review paper written before the end of 1971. Turner showed how social identity processes could provide a systematic account of minimal and other forms of intergroup discrimination and ingroup bias (in terms of a process that he called social competition) that was not based on a conflict of interests *à la* Sherif (e.g., Sherif, 1967). In the paper, Turner developed the theoretical implications of this account for both the study of intergroup relations and processes of self-categorization. Tajfel liked this paper a lot and asked Turner to present it at the Small Group Meeting of the European Association of Experimental Social Psychology (EAESP) on Intergroup Relations, held at Bristol in February 1972. This meeting was the first at which social identity ideas were publicly presented and it generated excitement of various kinds. Subsequently, after circulating the paper for several years and with some collection of data, it was published in 1975 (Turner, 1972, 1975).

Social identity research thus began with an explicit focus on problems of *intergroup* discrimination and ethnocentrism, not the nature of the psychological group. Its key hypothesis was that people need to achieve positive ingroup distinctiveness to gain a positive social identity, not that there is a distinction between personal and social identity. Neither paper argued that ethnocentrism was universal or that social categorization automatically and inevitably produced ingroup bias, and the analysis did not argue that some intrapsychic drive for self-esteem is the basic factor in either group formation or intergroup discrimination.

In terms of the need for self-esteem, Turner (1975) explicitly derived it from the interaction between social comparisons between groups and the social values that existed in society and that members used to define their group identities (Turner & Reynolds, 2001). Tajfel (1972b) had already explained that he saw social values as





16 ■ Introduction: Part 2

derivatives of social ideologies. Thus, from the start, the need for self-esteem, for positive self-evaluation, was seen as fully “social-psychological” (Tajfel, 1972b; Turner & Oakes, 1986) rather than being independent from social context and self-definition. Turner (1975) also pointed out, in a sign of what was to come, that there were several strategies available to perceivers to achieve a positive self-evaluation other than intergroup discrimination, including changing one’s self-categorization and redefining the dimensions and values that defined an identity.

These two papers (Tajfel, 1972a; Turner, 1972) provided an essential foundation for what was to come, but were more appropriately described as “positive distinctiveness theory” at this time rather than what became “SIT”. Indeed Tajfel never liked the term SIT, which was coined by Turner and Brown (1978) as a deliberately abbreviated title, because he thought it did not do justice to the positive distinctiveness analysis. Tajfel thought it would mislead and in this he has been proven right.

An Intergroup Theory on Three Legs: The Emergence of SIT

Tajfel summarized the basic processes at work in the new analysis as the “social categorization–social identity–social comparison–positive distinctiveness sequence”. This sequence gave us an understanding of important processes in group psychology that could shape intergroup behavior (rather than individual behavior) and could be used to supplement the processes already specified by Sherif in his realistic group conflict theory (e.g., Sherif, 1967). Human beings defined themselves in terms of social categorizations that provided them with social identities. These were important aspects of their self-concepts based on group memberships. These identities were defined and evaluated by intergroup (not intragroup) comparisons on dimensions associated subjectively with perceivers’ social values and hence there was a motive to define social identity positively, meaning positively different from other relevant groups, where social and psychological conditions encour-

aged comparisons in terms of such identities. The motive for positive ingroup distinctiveness, when instigated, could lead to competitive, ingroup-favoring intergroup responses under certain conditions and other responses under other conditions.

From 1971 to 1976 the work was done that produced the next two important “legs” of what Tajfel and Turner (1979) called a “conceptual tripod”. Turner’s empirical work (Turner, 1975, 1978) examined what happened in the minimal group paradigm when a “self–other” categorization was superimposed on the ingroup–outgroup categorization of anonymous others, so that people could react to ingroup and/or outgroup others compared to the (personal) self. He found that people would ignore the ingroup–outgroup categorization where they could make decisions that directly favoured self provided that the social categorization had not been used previously to define self and remained minimal. On the other hand, they acted on an ingroup-favoring basis even at the sacrifice of personal and direct self-interest under conditions where the social categorization had become more meaningful and salient to them because they had used it previously. These findings confirmed several things: that social categorizations had to be accepted and to some degree internalized by members to have an effect (discrimination was not automatic and inevitable), that self–other and ingroup–outgroup categorizations could be seen as competing alternative ways of defining the self, and that under the right conditions individual self-interest was less powerful than group identity.

Tajfel saw all this as well and, on reading these conclusions, immediately was stimulated to make a big conceptual breakthrough (which had clearly come from his life experience and been in his mind for many years; see Turner, 1996). This was the “interpersonal–intergroup continuum”. At one level the continuum clarified that the minimal group findings did not imply that people were only group members, that they always acted in terms of social identity processes and showed ethnocentrism just because they belonged to social categories, and so on. It became clear that social identity processes were only expected to have





effects in selected situations where conditions were right and that there was more work to be done specifying such conditions. At another level, it was a big conceptual advance because it enabled Tajfel and Turner to make a *qualitative psychological distinction* between individual and collective behavior. Acting as a group member was psychologically different from acting as an individual (as Sherif had said) and people were capable of doing both. The language of social categorization was important for specifying what this meant operationally. It also highlighted that more work was needed on the conceptualization of social categorization itself (the task that created SCT).

SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) offers specific hypotheses about the causes and effects of shifts along the interpersonal–intergroup continuum. Being a theory of what goes on in society between groups, it has to incorporate an account of when people act or are likely to act collectively, and this is the continuum. In fact, however, the continuum has been replaced by the personal–social identity distinction of SCT, which built on the earlier conceptualization but better formulated its key insights. SCT did this so successfully that many completely confuse the two theories, but this is an important area where the two theories are in fact very different. We shall come back to this point, but for the moment it suffices to make clear that Tajfel referred to the continuum as “acting in terms of self” versus “acting in terms of group”, whereas the essence of the personal identity versus social identity continuum was that both were acting in terms of self (Turner, 1978, 1982). Did or would Tajfel have denied this? Of course not. As soon as the reformulation was made (in 1978) he recognized its value and embraced it. The personal–social identity distinction has become so successful that it has moved from academic to popular media and is used routinely without awareness of the theoretical context.

In 1974 Tajfel gave a series of lectures in which he set out to explore the relevance of the basic-process analysis for real-world societies in which intergroup relations are characterized by hierarchies of power, wealth, and prestige. He put the social psychology into the context of social structure—

the organized social environment. These lectures became the basis for his chapters in Tajfel (1978) and the whole set of ideas formed the basis for a major research program on social identity and intergroup relations funded by the British Social Science Research Council from 1974 to 1977. Turner became the director of the experimental wing of the program in 1974 and then joined Tajfel as co-director with Howard Giles in 1976. Giles, with Richard Bourhis, joined the project to look at the role of language in social identity; Tony Agathangelou and Sue Skevington worked on the field wing; and Turner and Rupert Brown pursued experimental studies. The first experiment conducted (Turner & Brown, 1978) clarified some of the issues in the extended analysis, in particular elaborating the notion of “insecure group relations” into perceived instability and illegitimacy, much of which then found its way into Tajfel and Turner (1979).

Given the collective psychology and the interpersonal–intergroup continuum, the final leg of the tripod was to specify how the members of groups in different positions in society reacted to each other as a function of that psychology. It was important to take into account the degree to which people were objectively and subjectively able to move from one group to another, whether group boundaries were seen to be permeable or impermeable, since this was relevant to shift along the continuum. It was also important to consider from both the dominant/high status and the subordinate/low status point of view the extent to which “cognitive alternatives” to the status quo were perceived. As a function of the different status positions of the groups, they had motives either to maintain or achieve positive distinctiveness and how they acted to do so varied with their collective understanding of the intergroup relationship as stable or unstable and/or legitimate or illegitimate. Each group could follow one or more different strategies (individual mobility, social creativity, or social competition; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Brown, 1978) depending on their specific understanding of their situation and other relevant factors.

Thus, far from arguing that low self-esteem, negative social identity, or low social status always





18 ■ Introduction: Part 2

predicted more ingroup favouritism, from the beginning the theory was more complex and sophisticated. SIT was capable of predicting a variety of intergroup attitudes and responses (including leaving one's own group) depending on an interaction between at least four factors: status position \times acting individually versus collectively \times perceived stability/instability \times perceived legitimacy/illegitimacy. A high status group member who saw their superiority as illegitimate and unstable and felt little attachment to their group could join the low status group to eliminate a "conflict of values" (dissonance, guilt). A low status group member who saw their inferiority as stable and legitimate and could not join the high status group as an individual was likely to engage in social creativity, finding superiority on alternative dimensions whilst accepting inferiority on the status dimension (and downgrading the latter's importance). SIT (as it now was) suggested a whole array of possibilities and interesting hypotheses to explore (Turner, 1999). What a pity then that critics of the theory have aimed their arrows only at a few misguided hypotheses that had never been in the theory (e.g., that people should show more ingroup bias the lower their personal self-esteem or the more they identified with the ingroup; that the theory cannot predict outgroup favouritism and the effects of legitimacy, that it ignores power, only ever predicts universal ethnocentrism, etc.).

The final theory was completed in 1976 and published as Tajfel and Turner (1979, being updated in 1986). Other work such as the edited book by Tajfel (1978) contained ideas and studies (and often revisions of already available material) that were already known when writing the Tajfel and Turner chapter, which was deliberately a systematization of where they had got to by 1976. There were other articles published after 1979 but nothing superseded what was written then (as a substantive statement of SIT).

SIT was a new kind of theory in social psychology, which may be one reason why it has often been co-opted into the mainstream view of prejudice it rejected. The revolution was begun by Sherif and his colleagues (e.g., Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961), who argued that

intergroup attitudes were not the cause of intergroup relations but their effect, and moreover that to understand how intergroup attitudes were generated and changed one had to examine the relations between groups at their own level, not reduce intergroup prejudices to the psychology of the individual. Sherif's specific theory of how intergroup relations generated intergroup attitudes was a realistic conflict theory, emphasizing conflicts of interests, not lack of contact, familiarity, prejudice, etc. SIT was not a rejection of conflicts of interest but complementary to it, expanding the role of social structure, collective theories, and ideologies and integrating an understanding of self-interest into a richer and more collective view of the self and social identity. Tajfel and Turner were in agreement with Sherif and felt that he would have been a social identity theorist—they were certainly, in principle, Sherifians.

Whereas the orthodox prejudice tradition focuses on the role of a pathological, deviant, or irrational individual psychology in explaining social antagonism, SIT's focus was on the collective psychology of intergroup attitudes, produced within a social structure of intergroup relationships and mediated by people's collective definition, perception, and understanding of those relationships. The theory rejected individualism and reductionism, arguing that all cognition was social-psychological and that the political and macro-societal complexities of intergroup relationships were socially shared, group-based interpretations and were fundamental to racism and social conflict. There is much more to say about the new thinking provided by the theory, but we shall return to it later. For the moment, let us merely note what was distinctive and new about the theory:

1. It focused on group psychology, not individual psychology, to explain racism, prejudice, and conflict.
2. It agreed with Sherif and colleagues that intergroup attitudes followed and did not cause intergroup relations, but added social identity processes to realistic goal relations to explain the effects of intergroup relations.
3. It put intergroup relations into society, a social





structure that determined the character of intergroup relations.

4. It proposed that it was the cognitive interpretation of intergroup relations that shaped intergroup and individual behavior and that such interpretation was a collective, ideological, cognitive activity, not an isolated individual one.
5. It illustrated how processes that impinged on a socially shared, group self could affect behavior. This last point—distinguishing a collective self from the self-concept in general—contained within it a powerful lever for the next step forward.

The Emergence of SCT

From 1971 onwards Turner was interested in the implications of the minimal group paradigm for psychological group formation. By 1978 this had become his central research question. What was a psychological group? How did they form and what was the effect of their formation?

In 1978 the European Laboratory of Social Psychology (LEPS) held a conference on social identity at the University of Rennes in France. Turner wrote and presented a paper “Towards a cognitive redefinition of the social group” that summed up ideas he had been developing about the nature of the psychological group. This paper, subsequently published as Turner (1982) but also as an invited paper in a French journal in 1981, was the beginning of self-categorization theory (SCT), the next stage in the social identity story.

As mentioned, SCT is a different theory from SIT. It is not an extension or derivation, but in fact is a more general account of the self and group processes than SIT was ever intended to be. The term “SCT” did not appear in Turner (1978) but the fact that it was a new explanation of a different problem was obvious to everyone working with Tajfel and Turner at the time. The confusion has been that not everything that uses the words “social identity” is part of SIT. So why was it a new theory? And where did it come from? There have been three main steps in the creation of the contemporary theory. In the first in 1978, the distinction

between personal and social identity was made and the hypothesis that social identity was the basis of group processes was elaborated (Turner, 1978, 1982). In the second in 1982–1983, whilst Turner was at the Princeton Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS), the distinction between personal and social identity was elaborated into the notion of levels of self-categorization and the theory was formalized (Turner, 1985). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, working on the self-concept and stereotyping (the latter with Penny Oakes and Alex Haslam), the hypothesis of self-categorizing as the activation of fixed cognitive structures was rejected in favor of self-categorizing as a reflexive process of social contextual judgment (Turner, 1988; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). This new dynamic perspective enabled a solution to the problem of the validity of stereotyping in terms of the veridical-because-contextual nature of self-categories and a new understanding of the nature of self and its role in socializing and motivating cognition (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994; Turner et al., 1994; Turner & Oakes, 1997; Turner & Onorato, 1999). A new synthesis has been made possible in relation to Tajfel’s original problem of prejudice and theoretically related phenomena of social change, power, personality, and the relativity of cognition.

The problem that stimulated SIT was why did subjects discriminate in the minimal group paradigm? The theory went on to explain the conditions under which groups acted to change their intergroup attitudes and actions in society. It was a theory of intergroup conflict, ethnocentrism, and social change and the main psychological hypothesis was that people sought to achieve or maintain positive ingroup distinctiveness to gain a positive social identity. SCT addressed a different question in the minimal group paradigm—why did subjects identify with the minimal groups at all and why did they act as if they had group identities that mattered to them? More generally, the question was how does psychological group formation take place and, indeed, is there actually a group process that is psychologically real and distinctive, irreducible to the psychology of individuals?

The key hypothesis was that group processes





20 ■ Introduction: Part 2

emerged from a shift towards defining the self as a social category, in terms of social identity, from the self as an individual person, in terms of personal identity. What mattered was not the need for positive social identity but the processes of depersonalization that emerged from self-categorization. How one defined oneself, not positive interpersonal relations, was basic to the group as a psychological process. This is a theoretical point, not a simple empirical one. Of course interpersonal relations are often related to group formation, but they were not considered necessary or sufficient, since what matters is their relationship to the key psychological process of social identification (Turner, 1982, 1984; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, & Smith, 1984). These points are explained in some detail in Turner and Bourhis (1996). The distinction between personal and social identity and the specification of its relevance to the causal production of collective psychology was the beginning of the new theory.

After the great advances of the group dynamics tradition, inspired and led by Lewin and aided by other giants of Gestalt-influenced social psychology (Asch, Sherif, Festinger), North American group research had gradually regressed to a neo-behaviorist individualism in which the concept of group became superfluous because it had ceased to have any explanatory power. By the 1970s, researchers were asking “whatever happened to the group in social psychology?”. The answer was clear—it had been reduced to a collection of individuals interacting to satisfy personal motives and self-interest who had thereby become cohesive and mutually influential. Every process (of interpersonal attraction, cooperation, and mutual influence) when analyzed turned out to be explicable apparently as individuals affecting individuals without any suggestion that the formation of a group relationship could qualitatively change these interpersonal relations, that the relations between group members could be causally affected by their membership in a joint unit. Indeed such suggestions were frowned on as unscientific. It is hard to believe now that in the 1960s and 1970s, talk of psychological products and processes such as group memberships or social norms being “shared” was dismissed by textbooks as poetic license at

best and the group mind at worst (Tajfel’s writings stood out for his continual emphasis on the socially shared uniformities of attitude and behavior). The problem was that these interpersonal theories were not actually supported by the data. They persisted nevertheless because they fit the dominant ideology, the ideology of individualism.

One of these disconfirmations emerged from social identity research. Why did low status groups not simply fall apart psychologically? Why did the members not simply try to move upwards in fantasy if they could not objectively? How did low status, subordinate groups, lacking in resources, prestige, and power, manage to hold on to the loyalty of their members so that they could work to change the status quo? On closer examination of the group cohesion literature (e.g., Lott & Lott, 1965), one found that supposedly they could not! People were attracted to groups that mediated rewards for them. No rewards, no group! But the data showed that groups did sometimes become more cohesive and unified as a function of deprivation, derogation, and defeat, contrary to reinforcement theory (Turner, 1981; Turner, Sachdev, & Hogg, 1983; Turner et al., 1984). Also, other data looking at the effects of social categorization or group formation on interpersonal relations implied very strongly that group formation was a psychological process that actually changed things. People were not just individuals, and being a group member was psychologically different (just as Sherif had highlighted years before). A new theory was needed and what form it could take was evident in the minimal group paradigm and the interpersonal–intergroup continuum (see Turner, 1982; Turner & Oakes, 1989).

What did the theory say? The essence of Turner (1978) was that psychological group formation was a matter of social identification rather than group cohesion. People became a group not insofar as they developed positive interpersonal attitudes on the basis of mutual need satisfaction but insofar as they defined themselves in terms of a shared social category membership. A shared social identity emerged on the basis of cognitive criteria such as shared fate, shared situation, or shared attributes (positive or negative). Turner hypothesized that





people defined themselves as either individual persons or as social categories, in terms of personal or social identity, and that as their self-perception shifted from personal to social identity they would perceive themselves as the relatively interchangeable members of a shared social category. This process of depersonalization or self-stereotyping could be used to explain how the fundamental group processes emerged from social identity. Thus as social identity became salient and people defined themselves in terms of the same shared identity, they would tend to see themselves as more alike in terms of the defining attributes of the identity, giving rise to group-based attraction reflecting group-derived similarities rather than attraction to personal characteristics (the group-based attraction versus personal attraction distinction). Similarly cooperation and mutual influence between members reflected shared social identities. A critical point here is that this formulation allows one to see group formation as an adaptive process that makes group behavior, cohesion, cooperation, and influence possible, and thus does not merely follow but actually enhances the chances of successfully reaching goals.

The paper did various other things such as reviewing the evidence for the role of social categorization in group formation, the effects of the latter, and the idea that social identity varied in salience in a highly situation-specific way. All these ideas have since been pursued with great vigor empirically and have become widely accepted notions in the science. Is there anyone left in social psychology who has not heard of the personal versus social identity distinction and does not know that the salience of the latter changes behavior in predictable ways to make it more collective and group oriented? People now think this is common sense, and yet before 1978 the notion that social identity was fundamentally implicated in the very nature of group behavior was unknown. And even now it is not properly understood, it being widely thought, for example, that ingroup identification is just another individual difference variable rather than a process that, under given conditions, works to eliminate individual differences in a given situation.

Early Applications: Social Influence, Group Polarization, the Crowd, Social Cohesion, and the Problem of Salience

In 1978 Turner applied and received funding for research on the new theory and his research group of research assistants and PhD students (Wetherell, Smith, Reicher, Oakes, Hogg, Colvin), some of whom played both roles, began applying the ideas to different fundamental areas. Some members of this group were already at Bristol (Oakes, Reicher, Smith), whereas others arrived from elsewhere (Colvin, Hogg, Wetherell). The initial research (up to the formalization of the theory in 1982–1983) looked at social influence from different angles (in the Asch conformity paradigm, group polarization, influence within the crowd), psychological group formation and the distinction between personal and group-based attraction (trying to show how group cohesion was a function of social identification rather than interpersonal attraction), and the problem of the salience of social categories. In 1982 (the same year that Tajfel died) Turner began working on a more systematic statement of the theory that resolved some of the basic conceptual and empirical issues that had emerged (Turner, 1985). Then, having moved to Australia after his year in the USA, he prepared the book that would present the theory and allow his PhD students to present their research on the theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). To understand the work from 1978 on, it is best to summarize some key issues in the new statement of the theory and then briefly summarize the research directions as they emerged.

Levels of Self-Categorization

In the year Turner spent at IAS Princeton (1982–1983) he had an opportunity to think about how to conceptualize the categorization processes at work in the personal–social identity distinction. Finding the work of Rosch and her colleagues particularly useful, he recast the relationship between personal and social identity as one of different levels of self-categorization. There were several





22 ■ Introduction: Part 2

critical points. Self-concepts were self-categories; self-categorizations were organized hierarchically by means of class inclusion and the different levels were functionally antagonistic in their perceptual effects at any given time but nevertheless mutually dependent. Lower order self-categories were formed *inter alia* from social comparisons within higher order ones, and higher order ones were formed *inter alia* on the basis of lower level ones. Self-categorization and social comparison were processes that required each other: All categorization reflected comparison and all comparison took place between stimuli categorized as having an identity at some higher level.

These notions were formalized carefully and particular hypotheses derived from them. An important point is that they explain how personal and social identities can be salient at the same time and still be distinct and antagonistic (see Turner, Reynolds, Haslam, & Veenstra, 2006). A great deal of thought also went into the problem of salience and the principles of meta-contrast and relative prototypicality, which are explained in more detail shortly. In addition, a focus was developing the detailed explanation of specific phenomena in terms of self-categorization processes, especially group formation and cohesion, cooperation, and social influence. The notion of meta-contrast and the idea that different individuals would be more or less influential within a group as a function of their relative prototypicality emerged from the attempt to explain group polarization from within the new theory whilst Turner was at the IAS.

The problem of salience emerged as soon as one understood that group behavior was based on social identity and that the influence of social identities was situation specific. Penny Oakes and Turner decided to address it in Oakes' PhD. The first step was adapting Bruner's (1957) formula of relative accessibility \times fit to describe the conditions under which a stimulus was captured by a category. Bruner argued that certain categories would be highly accessible (or likely to be activated) as a function of contextual factors and the current goals, needs, and purposes of the perceiver. Turner and Oakes, in thinking about "fit", never thought in terms of the isolated attributes of some stimulus

and the match between these features and category specifications. They were influenced by Tajfel's (1957, 1969) accentuation theory and in particular the Tajfel and Wilkes (1963) study showing perceptual accentuation effects. When the line length of eight lines and the category membership were correlated (all short lines were in category A and all longer lines were in category B), the judged difference between the shortest of the longer four lines and the longest of the shortest four lines was exaggerated. There was an accentuation of similarities within the classes and differences between the classes on length. Thinking of the fit of social categorizations in terms of peripheral–focal correlations between group membership and members' positions on some response dimension led Turner and Oakes to distinguish between comparative and normative fit. They originally defined normative fit as the degree to which perceived similarities and differences between group members correlated with group memberships in a direction consistent with the normative meaning of the group identities (e.g., men and women differ in relation to independent–dependent characteristics). Defining comparative fit (or the degree of peripheral–focal correlation) arose from Turner's attempt at Princeton to provide a quantitative principle that would allow the prediction of when and why groups would polarize as a function of individuals' pretest views on any issue in any given context.

Turner was supervising Margaret Wetherell's PhD, trying to find a social identity explanation of polarization. He knew that one could explain group polarization as convergence on the normative position of the group if one could explain why group norms sometimes were group averages and sometimes were more extreme. Turner was convinced that there had to be some way of explaining norm formation in terms of social categorization processes that predicted how and why ingroup prototypes formed where they did. He tried to find some way of understanding the peripheral–focal correlation between individuals' group membership and their responses on a dimension so that he could predict exactly which person or position would become most prototypical of the group as a whole and when that prototype would or would not





be polarized. Eventually Turner succeeded by inventing the principle of meta-contrast (Turner, 1985; Turner & Oakes, 1986, 1989). A collection of individuals tend to be categorized as a group to the degree *inter alia* that the perceived differences between them are less than the perceived differences between them and other people (outgroups) in the comparative context. Ingroup–outgroup categorization occurs when the differences perceived between categories are larger than the difference perceived within categories. Furthermore, any specific person tends to be seen as more prototypical of the group as a whole, to the degree that the perceived differences between that person and other ingroup members are less than the perceived differences between that person and outgroup members.

The same principle that predicted categorization of stimuli also predicted the relative prototypicality of instances of any class. This analysis provided a concrete refutation of reductionism and individualism in social influence and transformed the persuasion–norm relationship. People did not produce norms from influence but were able to persuade because they embodied norms, and the norm expressed the identity of the group as a whole in contrast to other groups, not an individual property, averaged or summed, but a Gestalt property of the members in a context. The principle generalizes to all categorization, not merely social categorization (Turner et al., 1994).

Research based on this conception of an identity-based influence process stimulated the development of a more formal analysis of social influence (Turner, 1985, 1991). SIT understood the role of group influence processes in intergroup behavior and social change but did not provide a new theory of influence. SCT did, however. Building on the insights from meta-contrast and prototypicality, one can see that those that embody the group norms and are most representative of the group will be most persuasive or influential. It is this expectation that certain others should perceive the world in the same way as self (perceived difference within and between categories) that makes these others a valid source of information about reality (Moscovici, 1976; Turner, 1991). There is a

shift away from a distinction between physical and social reality testing and ideas of normative and informational processes specified by Deutsch and Gerard (1955) to a single process of influence—referent informational influence (Turner, 1982). Individuals always act in ways informed by understandings of how similar others would respond in the same situation.

Self-Categorization as Relational Flexible Judgment

Understanding meta-contrast, prototypicality, and polarization led to the next big step. If self-categories were inherently comparative then they were infinitely variable, contextual, and relative. This meant that they could not be stored as fixed, cognitive structures in some mental system before they were used, waiting to be prodded into action (as Turner, along with many others, had thought originally). The cognitive structural view of stereotyping and the self-concept had to be abandoned. It also meant that the very variability of self-categories was not an indication of distortion and bias but the very opposite—an indication of their veridicality and orientation to reality. The comparative flexibility of self-categories arose because they were contextual representations of people. They were selective and variable because the frames of reference within which people defined themselves were always changing. If reality keeps changing and self-categories reflect reality, then they must change and be flexible in order to be accurate. Moreover the basic principle at work here, of meta-contrast, is a fully rational one. The salience of self-categories is a function of motives, expectations, knowledge, and reality working in creative synthesis. Self-categorizing is variable, flexible, and selective, is based on past experience, knowledge, and theories, and is reality oriented. These notions have big implications for categorizing, the self-concept and stereotyping, the validity and relativity of perception, and for the nature of human cognition.

The idea of the self-category as an on-the-spot judgment was also facilitated by the work of Medin





24 ■ Introduction: Part 2

and his colleagues (e.g., Medin & Wattenmaker, 1987), showing that categories are expressions of theories and knowledge about how things go together rather than simple similarities, and by Barsalou's (1987) work on the variability of prototypicality judgments, which argues against concepts as fixed mental models. In general, SCT and the way it deals with salience has been much influenced by many significant figures, not merely Tajfel, but also Lewin, Asch, Sherif, Rosch, and Medin. The reworking of self-categorizing as a process of reflexive and comparative social judgment rather than as the activation of pre-existing stored self-concepts meant that the idea of relative accessibility based on Bruner had to be replaced by perceiver readiness, since the former implied that a stored, ready-made category was more or less close to usage rather than being created in the process of use as and when needed (see Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994; Turner et al., 1994; Turner & Onorato, 1999).

None of this implies that self-categories vary arbitrarily unconstrained by continuities of reality, experience, motives, and knowledge. On the contrary, it is the fact that there is a systematic way of relating such variation to changes in reality that enables the theory to argue for the veridicality of self-categorizing, that relativity is not relativism (Turner & Oakes, 1997). The vantage point of the perceiver varies because individuals and groups are continually interacting and these interactions have implications for the self-categorization processes (and emergent similarities and differences) as an individual and group member. A flexible, relational self-process allows for this variation to be represented and acted upon psychologically.

Major Elaborations and Thematic Developments

The story of social identity so far and the theoretical elaborations and developments it offers capture the interplay between psychological processes and the socially structured system of relations in which individuals and groups are defined and function. This perspective provides answers to the

quintessential problem of social psychology: the mind–society interaction. Individuals, groups, and intergroup relations exist objectively. People are defined in society as members of these groups (e.g., religion, gender, ethnicity, age, class, roles, and so on) that have a particular history and social relationship. They have a social location that is shared with others. It is recognized that these groups have a psychological aspect; the norms, values, beliefs, and ideologies are socially transmitted through influence and internalized, fundamentally affecting one's psychology—creating socially-shared regularities that affect the content, structure, and functioning of the mind (see Turner & Oakes, 1997; this volume).

In this view, social psychology is not the extension of general psychological processes to social stimuli or social contexts—it integrates social and cultural patterns and products with psychological explanation. The emphasis on social structure and large-scale social processes, the distinction between personal and social identity, the recognition of different levels of self-categorization and interdependent higher and lower order selves, and the flexible, variable nature of the self-categorization process are the building blocks that give substance to this alternative interactionist view.

This alternative view and its implications for the field perhaps can be appreciated more fully when examining its specific and unique contribution in major thematic areas. What follows can only be a brief overview. There is so much to say in terms of the progress that has been made, so much detail that is needed to explicate the larger ideas, and so much research still waiting to be done (see the concluding chapters in this volume). In the remainder of this chapter four thematic developments are described: stereotyping, leadership and power, social change, and personality. These areas (amongst others) also have been major themes of research for Turner and colleagues throughout the late 1980s and 1990s until the present day. In combination they highlight the diversity of topics to which social identity core ideas are relevant and the exciting possibilities that the perspective offers in developing a more integrated understanding of the person. Some have been a focus for research





over many years and some over the past 5 years or so. As highlighted by Haslam et al. (the two concluding chapters of this volume), though, over the same time period there are other research groups and research areas where SIT/SCT is having a significant impact.

Stereotyping and the Relativity of Perception

In the 1980s and 1990s a research focus was on stereotyping. In answering the question “Why do we stereotype?”, the dominant view is because of shortcomings of the human cognitive system. It is argued that the cognitive system is limited in capacity and therefore cannot apprehend others as individuals in all their detail. Categorization, simplification, and overgeneralization are functional outcomes of these cognitive shortcomings, leading to others being judged as more similar and alike than they really are. The core assumption here is that stereotypes are false and erroneous because they come into existence through weaknesses in human cognitive abilities.

The SCT analysis of stereotyping is different for three main reasons:

1. *Stereotypes are not erroneous but represent life as group members.* It is argued that human beings are group members as well as individuals, and it is accepted that there is collective psychology as well as individual psychology. When human beings define themselves as group members and act as group members, they take on shared beliefs, goals, and attitudes that define “who we are” and “who we are not” in a given context. They build up knowledge, experiences, and theories as group members about groups and group relations. They are perceptually ready to perceive the world in particular ways. Stereotypes reflect these group properties (e.g., norms, values, beliefs), which cannot properly be understood by looking at the individual group members in isolation or as aggregates. Stereotyping first and foremost is understood as an outcome of these group processes.

2. *Stereotyping is tied to the structure of intergroup relations.* It is recognized that people hold the attitudes that they do toward the members of particular groups because they are in a specific kind of relationship with those groups. People are embedded in social structures, they have a particular social position (e.g., high or low status), they have qualities that have certain existing social meaning (e.g., gender), and they occupy certain social roles that denote status and value (e.g., men versus women). To understand stereotyping one must look at the social–structural realities of the intergroup relationships at work in any system of human relations (i.e., who is advantaged and disadvantaged, who has status and who does not, are group goals competitive or cooperative, do the groups have shared interests or not).
3. *Collective theories about intergroup relations are central to stereotyping.* The impact of the structural reality of intergroup relations is mediated by collective theories, ideologies, and beliefs about group life (e.g., what it means to be a man versus a woman). People act in terms of intergroup relationships as mediated by their collective definition, explanation, perception, and understanding of their situation and their relationship to others.

There have been two main responses to these arguments. The first is that stereotyping is distorted by the goals, values, motives, ideologies, and expectations of the perceiver and therefore cannot be useful or valid. In SCT, though, it is argued that *all* perception is relative to the perceiver and affected by his or her knowledge, motives, and expectations, and in particular those that come to the fore to define the self in a given social context. An essential distinguishing feature of the SCT analysis is that both individuation and stereotyping (and all perception) are outcomes of self–other categorization processes (see the concluding chapters of this volume). The shift from individuation to stereotyping is simply a shift in the level of self-categorization from personal identity to social identity.

The other main misunderstanding is that the





26 ■ Introduction: Part 2

SCT analysis of stereotyping essentially embraces and supports relativism. The idea here is that because stereotyping and other forms of cognition are argued in SCT to represent features of reality from the vantage point of the perceiver, the stereotypes that people hold must be equally valid. SCT does argue for relativity but not relativism. Social influence and consensus at higher levels of self-categorization can correct for relativism by seeking agreement across individual and group perspectives. There are social mechanisms to validate and invalidate certain views. Australians, for example, through consensus, discussion, rules, norms, and laws, influence and shape which perceptions and actions are considered right and valid. These social arrangements can vary (or stay the same) as a function of disagreements and arguments about what is correct and true and attempts to seek change or not. As a function of these processes, for example, there have been changes in gender stereotypes and associated laws regarding equal opportunity and discrimination.

The central message is that stereotypes are not rigid or erroneous but reflect perceptions of group relations from the perceiver's vantage point. As others have argued, the one way you can always find "erroneous" stereotypes is to look from outside. Often, what it means is "we don't agree with you". Agreement and disagreement between individuals and groups are an outcome of life as individuals and group members. Acceptance or rejection of stereotypes is informative about the nature of intergroup relations and can motivate social change and the emergence of new shared understandings of what is acceptable and unacceptable.

Social Influence, Leadership, and Power

Beginning in the 1990s also was a more specific application of the SCT analysis of social influence to the issue of leadership and then later power. SCT does not argue for monolithic conformity where all group members will necessarily agree and be interchangeable in their views. Group members can and do disagree and they discuss, argue, and exchange views. In groups, members can and do leave, create

schisms, and come to new understandings of "who we are". The SCT analysis of social influence recognizes that challenging people's current understanding of the world, the creation of uncertainty, and the resolution of disagreements occur amongst those where at some level there is perceived psychological similarity. Disagreement with outgroup members, on the other hand, reinforces self-other differences and affirms one's views as right and correct.

There is disagreement because there is an asymmetry within the structure of the group identity (see discussion on meta-contrast). There are people who will be considered better representatives of the group, a "truer" group member as a function of these processes. Schisms partly relate to boundaries being drawn amongst certain group members in the interests of making claims about who best embodies the norms, values, and beliefs of the group as a whole. There are more central and more peripheral members, people who better embody definitions of "who we are" compared to "who we are not". In this way, it is possible to argue that social influence occurs in groups and that one or more people will be more influential than others.

The SCT analysis has direct implications for the understanding of leadership (Turner & Haslam, 2001) and power (Turner, 2005; Turner, Reynolds, & Subasic, 2008). The idea that group members are more or less representative of a group means that leadership is distributed in groups and there is no clear divide between leaders and followers in terms of some leadership characteristic or "essence". The implication is that leadership success and failure fundamentally depend on group identity and being able to shape and create shared understandings of "who we are" and "what we do". In this analysis there is recognition of the relationship between leaders and other group members in a broader context of group relations.

When it comes to the concept of power, tensions remain between the SCT analysis of influence and social-psychological explanations of power. Put simply, power as defined by control over resources is purported to override social influence processes as described in SCT and related work. The





traditional interdependence model of power argues that control over resources leads to power (liking, influence, dependence) and power leads to influence. Turner (2005) in his three-process theory of power turns this process on its head. The SCT analysis of power argues that the foundation of power is getting others to carry out one's will—the exercise of such power *through* people is the ultimate resource (and allows groups to harness the things/resources they need to achieve their goals). *Persuasion, authority, and coercion* are outlined to be the three processes of power. All three rest on identity and the influence processes that flow from it in the following ways:

1. *Persuasion* emerges from the perception that people share an ingroup membership: there are shared norms, values, beliefs, and goals. The leaders and followers therefore willingly engage in activities that will further their group's goals and aspirations.
2. *Authority* emerges from ingroup membership and structure where there is the perception that the system through which power relations are defined is legitimate. The leaders and followers willingly engage in activities because they accept the relevant roles and responsibilities in the group.
3. *Coercion* emerges when there is not a shared ingroup membership between parties and as such there is a need to bring about compliance through one's capacities to provide positive and negative outcomes. Coercion also requires persuasion and authority over those who bring others (against their will) to act in particular ways.

Power as coercion is argued to be the weakest form of power as it reveals a lack of genuine ability to influence through group identity. It also is likely to create further *disidentification*, weakening persuasion and authority and making these less likely to emerge in the future. Thus, leaders, leadership groups, institutions, elites, and authorities have real social power when they are able to achieve action through influence and persuasion rather than control.

It is through the SCT analysis of social influence,

leadership, and power that it is possible to understand concretely that SCT is a different theory of the group from social interdependence, where it is liking and dependence that underpin group formation. In the three-process theory it is argued that identity confers power and it is not grounded in material resources. Power is an emergent property of specific social and psychological relations between people. The value of resources is indeterminate outside of the framework of a shared social identity (e.g., who and what is valued), and only within it can leaders persuade others or exercise legitimate authority over them. Even coercion ultimately depends on this dynamic: Coercion will not succeed if a leader cannot rely on others to do their bidding. Power is always socially constrained and conferred and is not separate from influence but is itself evidence of influence at work.

From Prejudice to Social Change

SIT and SCT came out of the prejudice tradition within social psychology but it has been necessary to recast the paradigm in order to understand prejudice and social change. The traditional approach, referred to by Turner in the Freilich Foundation Eminent Lecturer Series in 2001 as the "prejudice orthodoxy" (Turner, 2001), argues that the causes of prejudice are:

1. *Specific quasi-pathological personalities* or individual difference factors that, more or less, directly predispose people to generalized prejudice against vulnerable minority (and other) outgroups.
2. *General psychological processes* that, once triggered by some stimulus, state, or event, inevitably and automatically lead to hostility towards outgroups (e.g., frustration, limited cognitive capacity, group formation, and ethnocentrism).
3. *The meaninglessness of intergroup attitudes and stereotypes* where, as outlined above, any group judgment or stereotype, any social categorical representation of a person or group of people, is somehow faulty, biased, and misleading.





28 ■ Introduction: Part 2

4. *The passivity of cultural and social learning* where, through socialization, prejudice is learned from one's society. The assumption seems to be that what culture teaches, one has no choice but to learn (e.g., automatic processing and implicit attitudes).

SIT/SCT and related work over many years together serve as a detailed rejection of these causes. More recently, the focus of thinking and research has been on how prejudices conceptualized as a function of personality, general psychology, deficit psychology, and/or socialization directly impact on social psychological theories of social change. If the causes of current prejudices are unavoidable and deeply rooted in our psychology (even our unconscious), then it is difficult to envisage the possibility of real and genuine social change. Is it any surprise that within social psychology over so many years there has been a focus on explaining system stability and maintenance of the status quo rather than processes of social change? (Turner & Reynolds, 2003).

SIT and SCT offer a different view where prejudice is not inevitable and social change and social progress are possible. Prejudice is an outcome of people's understanding as group members of a particular intergroup relationship. In this intergroup relations perspective, it is necessary to take into account people's group memberships, the real relationships between them, the social structure within which they function, the ideologies that they use to define themselves, and the social system and their relationships. This analysis means that if group relations change through social action, if there is a change to people's social relationships, then prejudice towards particular groups can also change (and this change can be represented in all aspects of cognition—in implicit and explicit processes). It is possible through forms of social organization, conventions, and practices to impinge on, modify, and change people's group identities and associated social norms and affect how they think, feel, and are likely to act.

These ideas offer a much less pessimistic view of humanity and human social relations. Fundamental to social change is the degree to which the

current structure of relations (e.g., dominant and subordinate, high and low status, advantaged and disadvantaged) is widely accepted or rejected. In social identity theory and related work there has been a focus on legitimacy, stability, and permeability as factors that account for system stability through social mobility and social creativity and social change through social competition and conflict (see Tajfel & Turner, 1979). What has been missing is a detailed exploration of the processes by which some action, outcome, or relationship is transformed from one perceived as legitimate to one perceived as illegitimate, and specifically with respect to social change how a subordinate group redefines its relationship with the dominant group from legitimate to illegitimate. Over the last 10 years or so this has been a particular focus of SCT work (Turner & Reynolds, 2002). At the center of this analysis is the recognition that the self is hierarchically organized and that it is possible to shift from intragroup ("we") to intergroup ("us" versus "them") and vice versa.

Legitimacy is understood in this work, in line with the thinking of many authors, as a state of affairs in accord with (or not) a rule, a law, a belief about what is right, proper, or moral. Following SCT, it is action that is in line with or that violates some norm, value, rule, procedure, right, or obligation associated with a shared ingroup membership, where some perpetrator is in violation of a specific rule that "we are supposed to share". The concept of legitimacy itself is intertwined with group identity. A legitimate actor (leader, authority, government, institution), by definition, embodies a shared social identity; in acting in line with a shared social identity, in accord with ingroup norms, identification with the group is enhanced (along with perceptions of fairness, trust, leadership satisfaction, endorsement, and influence). Reciprocally, any actor with whom one identifies is thereby more likely to be seen as legitimate. When some system actor behaves legitimately, one is more likely to identify with and seek membership in it and is more likely to endorse and justify this group. Under these conditions, there is system identification and system justification.

Conversely, when some system actor behaves





illegitimately, in violation of the shared higher order ingroup identity “we are supposed to share”, this facilitates its recategorization as an outgroup. Identification with the higher order ingroup is reduced and it is more likely that there will be interest and sympathy (and ultimately identification) with those that contrast with, and are in opposition to, the actor. Using more system language, through these processes one comes to denigrate and reject the system and its representatives and advance and justify a contrasting (sub-)group.

Along with this analysis there has been an attempt to identify the factors that move system members to interpret, explain, and understand the illegitimacy of their own and others’ experiences (e.g., prejudice) not as an isolated occurrence but as an outcome of the illegitimacy of the system itself and the dominant actors within it. Four of the central factors can be summarized briefly as follows:

1. An illegitimate act is interpreted as an intergroup rather than interpersonal experience (i.e., victims and perpetrators act toward each other as group members rather than as individuals).
2. An illegitimate act is attributed to the shared internal characteristics of the dominant group (i.e., perceiving it to be deliberate, reflecting true attitudes rather than some accident or mistake).
3. An illegitimate act is explained in terms of a “category essence”, a theory of what makes it a social entity (we assume that factors affecting the perceived entitativity of the dominant group include its degree of organization and homogeneity and the perceived extent to which illegitimate acts are intended, repeated, and systematic).
4. The illegitimate “essence” or identity of the dominant group is linked to the social system as a whole through the development and dissemination within the subordinate group of a collective theory or ideology (i.e., the emergence of radical, subversive beliefs that explain the illegitimate “essence” and power of the dominant group in terms of the illegitimate nature of the system and become normative within the subordinate group). At the extreme the very existence of the dominant group will come to be

seen as illegitimate, as an irreversible threat to the very principles it was once assumed to share and embody.

This analysis of illegitimacy and the emergence of a shift from a higher order ingroup “we” to “us versus them”, to a definition of “us” that requires the removal or even elimination of “them”, provides a more systematic analysis of both social change and stability. It helps to explain how system legitimacy and justification or system illegitimacy and system rejection (and vice versa) emerge.

The Nature of the Self-Process and the Person

In thinking about stereotyping as a flexible, relative process of self-categorization that oriented the person to group realities, it became obvious that there were more general implications for self and identity. In Turner (1982) there was a view about how the self-concept was structured and organized that has been developed and refined within SCT. In fact a major theme of SCT has been the reconceptualization of the self. Its major contributions throughout the 1980s and 1990s have been to flesh out what this implies for group behavior such as stereotyping, homogeneity, influence, and prejudice. During the past 5 years or so, attention has turned to what this implies for individuality, personality, and in particular for personal identity. Traditionally there has been a personality model of the self-concept where the personal is the baseline, defining what is real and accurate. The SCT alternative is that personal identity is just one of multiple aspects of self that are all more or less important depending on context. The central arguments are that:

1. *Self-categorization processes are variable.* Individuality, like social identity, is not fixed and stable, but is variable and context dependent. It is not a ready-made set of predispositions or traits, but a flexible definition of the self in relation to current realities. The personal (just like the social) self is an outcome of the person × situation interaction. In SCT the “person” in this equation relates to the knowledge,





30 ■ Introduction: Part 2

experiences, expectations, goals, ideology, and theories that a person brings to a situation (i.e., perceiver readiness). The “situation” in this equation is the events that occur and the way they are given meaning by the perceiver (including about the self through processes of comparative and normative fit). As a function of these interactive processes a particular self-categorization will become salient and determine one’s behavior in a given social context. As such, individuality (like group identity) is a contemporary creation and therefore there can be continuity and change depending on whether the factors that underpin self-categorizing stay the same or vary. If there is stability in background knowledge and the situations a person confronts on a day-to-day basis, one would expect relatively stable self-categorizations to (re)emerge (e.g., “who am I”). If person factors or situational factors change, however, one would expect self-conceptions to change also.

2. *There are interdependencies between different levels of self-categorization.* Group identities, beliefs, and outcomes such as norms, values, and goals shape the meaning of individuality. Understanding how we differ from others in a particular situation is interpreted through the social and political processes that shape our higher order selves (what is valued, considered appropriate, and so on, amongst those we consider most psychologically similar to us at a given time). The SCT analysis of social influence is central here because it reveals how attitudes, behavior, and cognition can change as a function of group processes and intergroup relations. In this way the individual and group are interdependent and personality has to be understood as an outcome of both.
3. *Social change can bring personal change.* Along with social change comes the potential for change in people’s background knowledge, theories, beliefs—their interpretive resources—and the structural position and meaning of their group memberships. With social change often comes the emergence of new group membership and allegiances (e.g., as a function of new patterns of intergroup relations, changes in

the salient level of self-categorization, and influence processes). Along with the emergence of new groups come different norms, values and beliefs, and understandings of appropriate and valued social conduct. In these processes lies the potential for different individual and group aspirations that present the opportunity for new personalities (while others may be modified and attenuated).

This SCT view of the person in which the personal and social are integrated highlights the interplay between individual and collective life. There is much work that is being done on individuality, personality, and the personal self but all of it flows from the different understanding of the self advanced by SCT.

Glimpses of the Future: Social Psychology as a Special Science

The social identity perspective has always seen social psychology as a special science. We reject the idea that it is simply a branch of general psychology applied to social stimuli. The whole trend in individualistic psychology is towards a reifying reductionism—the cause is found in some inner essence—but in social identity research the emphasis should be on the unified psychological-social field, in a much more Lewinian spirit. People are transformed by their social relationships and activities, and this includes their minds, and theory must make such transformation possible and explicable.

Group life and social context are not factors that moderate the functioning of the mind, they fundamentally shape it. Social-psychological processes arise from the functioning of the human mind in an organized social environment. The social context qualitatively affects their mental functioning. Thus humans are not merely individuals and neither are our minds. We have both collective selves as well as personal selves. The group is an emergent psychological process that makes possible collective products, which in turn become psychological forces, social values, ideologies, and power structures. All aspects of human psychological func-





tioning, from the cognitive to the emotional, motivational, and behavioural, are affected by the mind–society interaction. Whatever the nature of the observation, they are all shaped by the socially defined self-process. This is a view of human psychology that is not limiting of what we can be and how humans can live. It acknowledges how people can redefine their social relationships and, in the process, their personhood.

In work on social identity these ideas have been developed in great detail, in particular in research on social influence and social norms, prejudice, the self-process, personality, and cognition. There are many who have shared in the enterprise to date and who have helped to make the leap forward. The story of social identity is that it generates a new distinctive vision that has fundamental implications for social psychology, other branches of psychology, and other disciplines. The scientific implications of a truly non-reductionist view of the mind will be socially radical, contradicting many current assumptions within science. In many ways the work has hardly begun.

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32 ■ Introduction: Part 2

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