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Contrasting Theoretical Approaches to Intergroup Relations

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The current forum is designed to assess the strengths and weaknesses of social identity, social dominance, and system justification as theoretical approaches to the study of intergroup relations. Each of these approaches tries to account for variation in the development of ingroup cohesion and outgroup antipathy among individual group members, across groups, and in different societies—three levels at which theorists have commonly sought explanations for variability in intergroup attitudes and behavior. Social dominance theory is the most ambitious of the theories but does not succeed in explaining intergroup relations equally well at all three levels. However, it has excelled in highlighting individual differences in the need and desire to dominate members of lower-status groups and in exploring the interaction between individuals and institutions. Social identity theory is primarily concerned with the attributes of groups that foster the development of ingroup bias and examines the conditions under which this occurs. It is more fully developed in this respect than the other approaches but ignores variation at the individual level and, to a lesser degree, the societal level. System justification theory considers a mix of individual- and societal-level factors, focusing on the role of support for the status quo in producing acceptance of status inequalities among members of low-status groups, even when it is against their own interest to do so. The theory highlights an important problem—the quiescence of low-status groups—but more work is needed to flesh out the theory and its central concepts.

KEY WORDS: social identity, intergroup relations, social dominance, group cohesion, group conflict

The study of intergroup relations has played a central role within political behavior research over the past 50 years, although the specific area of intergroup behavior under investigation has varied with prevailing social conditions. Early researchers of political behavior were interested in political cohesion—the extent to which members of the same religious, occupational, or racial group voted along

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similar lines and shared political beliefs (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944). This interest coincided with considerable political uniformity among members of traditional ethnic, religious, and occupational groups in the United States and elsewhere. The mass extermination of Jews and other groups in Nazi Germany pushed interest in group phenomena beyond ingroup solidarity to encompass the study of prejudice and intergroup conflict (Allport, 1954). The emergence of challenging social movements such as the civil rights, women's, and antiwar movements led to a resurgent interest in political cohesion and conflict in both political science and social psychology in the mid-1970s and early 1980s (Gurin, Miller, & Gurin, 1980; Miller, Gurin, Gurin, & Malanchuk, 1981; Tajfel, 1981). And the end of communism in Eastern Europe and the eruption of ethnic independence movements and breakaway nationalism has ensured the continuing relevance of research on intergroup relations over the past decade in both political science and social psychology (Brewer & Brown, 1998; Duckitt, 1994; Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994).

As interest in the political fallout of intergroup relations has shifted with changes in social and political reality, the central question motivating research on groups has also shifted quite radically. In the 1970s, researchers asked why some low-status groups did not engage in collective action to rectify their social standing (Miller et al., 1981). Beginning in the 1990s, this question was reversed to ask instead how groups could be prevented from engaging in collective action that might spark intergroup violence (see also Duckitt, 1994). The question motivating intergroup research also varies with the specific group under investigation, as Jackman (1994) showed. Inspired by Marxism and a belief in the necessity of class conflict, research on class and gender relations explored why members of lower-status groups did not rebel against social discrimination or patriarchy, while at the same time researchers of race relations wondered how they could minimize or eradicate racial conflict, not incite it.

This difference in focus is encapsulated in the current forum on differing theoretical approaches to intergroup relations. Social identity theory has uncovered ubiquitous ingroup bias and resultant intergroup conflict in studies based on the minimal-intergroup situation. Findings from these studies have led many researchers to equate the theory with the notion that ingroup loyalties and outgroup antipathies are readily aroused, widespread, and probably pernicious when practiced by members of a powerful group [despite Reicher's (2004) protestations that this is an overly simplistic interpretation of the theory]. In contrast, Jost and Banaji's (1994) system justification theory argues that intergroup conflict is markedly absent, especially among members of disadvantaged groups. From the perspective of system justification theory, members of subordinate groups do not readily succumb to ingroup bias but rather internalize beliefs that maintain the status quo, even though it is against their group interest. Social dominance theory lies somewhere in between. On one hand, Sidanius and colleagues adopt a similar position to system justification theory by positing that ideological hegemony underlies the various forms of discrimination and behaviors that maintain a given social hierarchy, preventing rebellion among members of lower-status groups (Sidanius, 1993). On the other hand, they also have developed the Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) scale to explain why some individuals and groups wish to dominate lower-status groups, maintain intergroup inequality, and engage in discriminatory behavior.[1]

But this debate over whether groups are a rife source of nascent political conflict or inert entities that are difficult to arouse misses the point. As Reicher (2004) notes, intergroup conflict and ingroup bias exist but they are also rare when one considers the vast array of groups to which humans belong. He notes that religious enmity between Catholics and Protestants is absent in contemporary France but pervasive in Northern Ireland. Violence between Christians and Muslims erupted in Lebanon in the 1980s but is absent in multi-ethnic Trinidad. This raises a more central—and perhaps more challenging—question of not whether, but under what circumstances, group membership is translated into ingroup political cohesion, divisive intergroup behavior, political conflict, and political action. That is the key question that must be addressed by theories of intergroup relations in order to successfully understand the dynamics of intergroup conflict, cooperation, and coexistence. A failure to directly tackle this issue prevents researchers, including participants in the current forum, from developing a common language and shared concepts from which to build a comprehensive theory of intergroup relations.

Social dominance theory and system justification theory add another central issue to the study of intergroup relations that goes beyond identifying the conditions under which groups coalesce politically. Sidanius, Jost, Banaji, and colleagues are not only concerned with the circumstances in which group members shun action on behalf of their group, but go further to identify the conditions under which group members actively support actions and beliefs that are contrary to their interests. This is a central concern of Jost and Banaji's system justification theory. In this review, I focus on explanations for the emergence or absence of outgroup antipathy and give less attention to the emergence of beliefs and behaviors at odds with a group's interests. But it is an important question that deserves consideration. Under what circumstances do group members behave in a way that violates their group interests? And how well do the three theories examined here explain this phenomenon, in addition to accounting for the presence and absence of intergroup conflict?

Taken together, the theorists in this forum view three levels of explanation as central to understanding intergroup relations—the individual, group, and society. This is a time-honored approach to intergroup relations (Allport, 1954; Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). And it is fair to ask how well each of the approaches in this forum explains natural variation in intergroup conflict and cohesion at these three levels. There are clear differences between individuals in their proclivity to internalize group membership and engage in ingroup bias that are independent of group membership or one's society (Altemeyer, 1988; Duckitt, 2003). There are differences between groups in the likelihood that their members will engage in ingroup bias and conflict (Huddy, 2003). And there are differences across societies in the likelihood that a potential conflict—between Catholics and Protestants or between blacks and whites, for example—will erupt into violence (Erikson, 1993). My goal is to evaluate how successfully each theoretical approach explains variation in the proclivity of individuals, groups, and societies to engage in ingroup cohesion, ingroup bias, and intergroup conflict. As will be seen, the three approaches differ in their success at explaining intergroup relations at each level.

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[1] This may explain the varied views of social dominance theory held by researchers participating in this forum. Jost et al. (2004) treat the theory as a fellow traveler, which they see as similarly explaining the absence of intergroup conflict. Reicher (2004), on the other hand, accuses Sidanius and Pratto (1999) of seeing intergroup conflict and violence everywhere.

Differences Between Individuals

Individuals differ in their willingness to internalize group membership or vilify outgroup members. There is clear evidence, for example, that whites vary in their support of racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986), men vary in their level of sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995), and non-Jews vary in their endorsement of anti-Semitism (Smith, 1993). Moreover, individuals who dislike one outgroup tend to dislike others as well. This has led to an emphasis on individual-level explanations, including research on the authoritarian personality, to explain why some people express antipathy to a broad array of outgroups while others do not (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 1988; Duckitt, 2003; Sanford, 1973).

Individual differences not only flavor reactions to outgroups, they are also central to the development of ingroup attachments. Identities based on religion, ethnicity, or class are increasingly a matter of choice in modern society (Baumeister, 1986; Giddens, 1991; Taylor, 1989). And identity choice holds even for quite fixed characteristics such as race and ethnicity. This is well documented by Nagel (1995), who provided evidence of a dramatic increase in the number of people who reported an American Indian race in the U.S. Census between 1960 and 1990. This cannot be explained solely by an increasing birth rate; it also reflects "ethnic switching," which is most pronounced among individuals living in urban areas or non-Indian states without reservations, who have intermarried, speak English exclusively, and do not assign their children an Indian race. The existence of chosen identities or variations in the development of outgroup antipathy among members of the same group poses a crucial challenge for theories of intergroup relations. I first consider how well each of the three theories under consideration is able to explain individual differences in the adoption of ingroup identity and outgroup antipathies.

Social Dominance

Social dominance theorists have devoted more attention to individual differences in the development of outgroup antipathy than either social identity or system justification theorists. As noted above, Sidanius, Pratto, and their colleagues have developed the SDO scale, which assesses differences between individuals in their social dominance orientation; the scale correlates strongly with beliefs that promote group-based inequalities, including racism. The authors have devoted less theoretical attention to the development of such differences, arguing that they derive from "socialization experiences, situational contingencies and temperament," a very broad array of influences (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 77). Sidanius, Pratto, and their colleagues emphasize that temperament (e.g., aggression, empathy) derives in part from group-based evolutionary selection factors such as the greater reproductive advantage conferred on dominant males (Sidanius & Kurzban, 2003). As a consequence, they expect and find that men and members of other dominant groups score more highly on the scale than do women and members of subordinate groups.

The centrality of the social dominance orientation concept to social dominance theory creates a tension, however, between the theory's emphasis on differing group-based interests (between men and women, or between members of "arbitrary-set" groups such as race and ethnicity) and the reality of pronounced individual differences even among members of the same group. Despite talk of group-based differences in social dominance orientation and evidence of statistical differences between groups, the research on social dominance theory focuses centrally on differences in SDO scores among individuals, regardless of their group membership. Thus, the theory suggests that all men should have a similar paternalistic and controlling orientation toward women and score highly on the SDO scale. Yet scores vary widely among men. This fits with other evidence that levels of sexism vary among both men and women (Glick & Fiske, 1996) and that, in the extreme, some nonsexist men adopt a feminist identity and join collective action efforts on behalf of women (Huddy, Neely, & LaFay, 2000).

A theoretical emphasis on group differences in social dominance orientation is further complicated by evidence of contextual variation in SDO scores, which suggests that SDO scores are also subject to the power of situations. Levin and Sidanius (1999) found that differences in the SDO scores of higher-status Ashkenazi and lower-status Sephardi Jews disappeared when Israeli subjects were primed to think about conflict between Jews and Palestinians. In contrast, group differences in SDO scores, with Ashkenazi Jews scoring higher on the scale, were more apparent when the context focused on relations between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews. Moreover, individuals employed as social workers, as public defenders, or in other "hierarchy-attenuating" roles score lower on SDO than do individuals employed in "hierarchy-accentuating" positions, such as police officers (Sidanius, Pratto, van Laar, & Levin, 2004; see also Pratto, 1999). Social dominance researchers note that such differences arise, in part, from self-selection: A police department searches for individuals able to exert power over lower-status individuals, whereas social workers need to understand and empathize with members of low-income households. But institutions also exert an independent influence on individuals once they enter a specific environment that cannot simply be explained on the basis of preexisting (and possibly hard-wired) group-based differences.

Such environmental influences are consistent with the pervasive finding that education promotes tolerance more generally (Bobo & Licari, 1989; for a summary, see Marcus, Sullivan, Theiss-Morse, & Wood, 1995). They also help to explain individual differences in SDO scores, because members of the same gender or broad racial or socioeconomic group can be employed in very different occupational settings and thus acquire different social dominance orientations. But they do not square as neatly with social dominance theory. The theory emphasizes broad group-based differences, particularly racial and gender differences, in social dominance orientation. But the contextual effects observed here for occupation result in differences within gender or racial category. Evolutionary thinking has played a key role in social dominance theory (Sidanius, 1993; Sidanius & Kurzban, 2003), yet it is difficult to see how long-term evolutionary forces could account for the rapid shift in SDO scores among Israeli Ashkenazi Jews in response to social context. Moreover, the studies on different occupations highlight the existence of "hierarchy attenuators" among dominant groups—a finding that requires deeper consideration. If higher-status groups act to preserve their social standing, why do some individuals who benefit from this privilege act against their own interests?

System Justification

System justification theory relies on a mix of individual- and societal-level factors to explain support for the status quo. The key difference among individuals is the extent to which they perceive the current economic and social system as legitimate. This sense of legitimacy is measured, in part, by political conservatism because, according to Jost, Banaji, and Nosek (2004), it provides "moral and intellectual support for the status quo."

There are several difficulties with this formulation, however. First, there is an essential contradiction in the theory between the existence of universal "social and psychological needs to imbue the status quo with legitimacy" and individual differences. Is this need really universal, as suggested by Jost et al. in their Hypotheses 1 to 5? How does that square with the existence of powerful individual differences in the perceived legitimacy of the system? And even if we accept that most people are not actively working to undermine the system, such acceptance may not derive from a basic psychological need. There are alternative explanations for societal quiescence and persistent inequalities—stemming from early socialization, prevailing methods of societal control, institutional barriers, and so on—that deserve consideration.

Second, the use of conservatism to explain support for the status quo is tautological from a political perspective, because preservation of the system is a defining characteristic of political conservatism (Van Dyke, 1995). This raises the question of why some people are conservative, others liberal, and still others moderate in political outlook, and provides no new insight into the origins of support for political policies designed to reduce group-based inequities.

Third, if the "system" is construed as the current social hierarchy (at odds with its typical usage in political science as political and economic norms, structures, and procedures), the link between political conservatism and support for group-based inequity is more difficult to understand. Political conservatism is typically equated with support for individualism and smaller government in the United States. But why would that necessarily translate into more positive feelings for whites and less positive feelings for blacks? Doesn't conservative animosity toward lower-status groups additionally depend on one's view of each group and their behavior? If African Americans are seen to violate the norm of individualism (as is often the case, and somewhat more so among conservatives than liberals; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996), the link between conservatism and animosity toward blacks is understandable. But would this necessarily hold true in another context or with different groups? What of conservative support for a group of new immigrants who are initially at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder but who diligently work their way up the economic system? Conservatives should be especially positive toward such groups for ideological reasons, even though group members are not of high status. The meaning and nature of political conservatism undercuts the existence of any automatic link between conservatism and outgroup animosity.

Fourth, African Americans are less likely than whites to be conservative, undercutting the argument that members of lower-status groups willingly participate in their own subjugation. Black liberalism translates into widespread policy differences between blacks and whites, especially on racial issues. Blacks and whites do not see eye-to-eye on a broad panoply of issues that range from affirmative action and the existence of racial discrimination to the reasons for contemporary racial inequalities. These differences are not minor; they are huge, especially when compared to other group-based differences in American public opinion (Jackman, 1994; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Kinder & Winter, 2001; Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, & Krysan, 1997; Tate, 1993). It is difficult to see how greater black liberalism on a range of issues is consistent with the claims of system justification theory. Jost et al. (2004) present evidence that blacks express higher levels of outgroup favoritism than whites, especially on implicit measures. But the interpretation of greater outgroup favoritism on implicit measures becomes ensnared with disputes over the meaning of implicit measures, rendering these findings ambiguous as a test of system justification theory. (For example, there is some evidence to suggest that implicit measures assess societal expectations and not personal beliefs; see Karpinski & Hilton, 2001.)

Social Identity

Social identity theory has devoted little or no attention to the origins of individual differences in intergroup behavior. A reliance on the experimental minimal-group situation, in which group membership is assigned but its internalization rarely measured, has made it very difficult for researchers to study individual differences in the adoption of group identity. In the minimal-group situation, there is typically no exploration of individual differences in the willingness to adopt an experimentally ascribed identity or to discriminate against outgroup members (for a similar criticism of the minimal-intergroup situation, see Perreault & Bourhis, 1999).

Social identity researchers have essentially ignored the role played by individual differences in the process of identity acquisition and the development of outgroup antipathy. This is a serious omission, as I have argued elsewhere (Huddy, 2001). Duckitt (1989) suggested, for example, that authoritarian behavior can be explained in part by the stronger tendency of some individuals to identify with dominant social groups, such as whites in the United States or Christians in Western Europe; this would imply a clear link between personality and the development of ingroup attachments. In one of the few studies to directly examine individual differences in identity acquisition, Perreault and Bourhis (1999) explored the effects of ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, and personal need for structure on the strength of ingroup identification in an experimentally created lab group. They found that all three personality measures are correlated with strength of group identification but that these relationships with identification appear to be driven by ethnocentrism. In other words, individuals who express antipathy toward outsiders are more likely to adopt an ingroup identity in the lab.

In some ways, Perreault and Bourhis' findings raise more questions than they answer. What are the origins of a general dislike of outsiders? Does this drive the desire for an ingroup identity? Or are there additional underlying personality attributes that explain both ethnocentrism and the adoption of ingroup identity? Possible individual differences that deserve consideration include motivational factors such as self-esteem, the need to belong, the need for uniqueness, and the need for certainty. The study by Perreault and Bourhis is an encouraging first step in this direction. It is extremely important for political psychologists to understand why some individuals in a given social and political context adopt a group identity and others in identical circumstances do not.

Summary

Attention to individual differences in the proclivity to belong to an ingroup or dislike an outgroup is a critical aspect of any theory of intergroup relations. It directly addresses the dilemma of whether an individual's behavior is determined by societal pressures and group memberships or is a product of free agency (for an extensive discussion of these issues, see Giddens, 1991). This is an important debate that cannot be ignored by theorists of intergroup relations. Of the three approaches under consideration here, social dominance theory offers the most complete assessment of such differences. The theory is not fully coherent on this point, as evidenced by a conflicting emphasis on individual differences in the SDO scale and the theory's central emphasis on group differences. Nonetheless, social psychologists have rapidly adopted the SDO scale as an individual-level measure of social dominance, and it has become a fixture of research on individual differences in the proclivity toward outgroup antipathy and racial prejudice. As an example, Duckitt (2001) argued that social dominance orientation is linked to one of two key personality dimensions that explain the development of prejudice. According to Duckitt, individuals differ in right-wing authoritarianism and their desire to dominate, which together culminate in antipathy toward outgroups.

Differences Between Groups

Social Identity

Social identity theory researchers have given the most detailed attention to the characteristics of groups that incline them toward or away from the development of group cohesion and intergroup conflict. One of the key insights of both social identity theory and its offshoot, self-categorization theory, is that category salience governs the categorization of people, including oneself, into social groupings (Tajfel, 1981; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Tajfel documented the astonishing effects of simple social categorization, which are quite well known by now. Blue eyes, a preference for the painter Kandinsky over Klee, or calling some people dot overestimators and others underestimators were sufficient to produce a preference for fellow group members and elicit discrimination against outsiders (Allen & Wilder, 1975; Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Brewer & Silver, 1978; Doise & Sinclair, 1973; Tajfel, Billig, & Bundy, 1971; for a summary, see Brewer, 1979). According to Tajfel, mere categorization is sufficient to explain the creation of social identity and intergroup discrimination.

There is supportive evidence that category salience shapes identity. For instance, McGuire and colleagues reported that children in an ethnic minority in their classroom (and whose ethnicity was therefore more salient) were more likely to describe themselves in terms of their ethnicity; children in families with more members of the opposite gender were more likely to mention their gender when describing themselves (McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976; McGuire et al., 1978). In a similar vein, Hogg and Turner (1985) found that increasing the salience of study participants' gender increased the likelihood that they thought of themselves in gender-stereotypic terms. These findings received confirmation in a metaanalysis conducted by Mullen, Brown, and Smith (1992) in which group salience was found to promote the development of ingroup bias across a large number of studies.

A second critical factor in the development of ingroup bias, according to social identity theory, is group status and the permeability of group boundaries. Tajfel suggested that a need for positive distinctiveness drives social identity. This means that group identity is likely to emerge among members of a high-status group because membership positively distinguishes group members from outsiders; in contrast, the development of group identity is less certain among members of low-status groups who need to additionally develop an identity around alternative, positively valued group attributes (social creativity) or fight to change the group's negative image (social change) before membership can enhance their status (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Several strands of research demonstrate the motivational underpinnings of social identity. Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggested that one option available to members of low-status groups, especially groups in which membership is permeable, is to deny one's group membership or identify with an alternative higher-status group. They referred to this strategy as social mobility, and several researchers have provided evidence of its existence among members of low-status groups (Jackson, Sullivan, Harnish, & Hodge, 1996; Taylor, Moghaddam, Gamble, & Zellerer, 1987; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). Members of low-status groups can also resort to the tactics of social creativity and social change to enhance their group's standing. Again, there is evidence to back this up. For instance, ingroup members tend to elevate the importance of positive ingroup characteristics that confer superiority over an outgroup in defining their group (Mummendey & Schrieber, 1984; van Knippenberg, 1978; van Knippenberg & van Oers, 1984). Lalonde (1992) observed this strategy in action among members of a losing hockey team who acknowledged that their competitors held superior skills but rated their opponents more negatively on other dimensions. Jackson et al. (1996) found that members of a negative group attempted to change their group's status by rating an undesirable attribute more positively or rating the group more favorably on other comparative dimensions.

These findings on positive distinctiveness have their parallel in research on ethnic identity in which identity is more strongly developed among members of higher-status groups. We find that national identity is more strongly developed among Cubans than among other Latinos because they believe their social status far exceeds that of Mexican Americans or Puerto Ricans (Huddy & Virtanen, 1995). Ethier and Deaux (1994) found that Hispanic students in their first year at an Ivy League university who found the university environment threatening to their Hispanic identity viewed their group as having lower status, which in turn weakened their identification as Hispanic. In a similar vein, Swan and Wyer (1997) found that men were more likely to think of themselves in gender-stereotypic terms—and thus identify with their gender—when in the minority, whereas women, members of a lower-status group, were not as likely to stereotype themselves when in the minority.

Social identity offers several key variables designed to explain the development of ingroup bias, but it also has attracted criticism. One major criticism of the theory concerns the absence of research on the adoption and development of group identities (Huddy, 2001). Reicher (2004) rectifies this imbalance, to some degree, by focusing on group members' beliefs about the meaning of group membership. This is a welcome addition that I have argued for elsewhere (Huddy, 2001, 2002). There is evidence that subjective meaning shapes the development of group identity. For example, Breakwell (1996) documented differences among Europeans in the extent to which they saw European identity as antithetical to an existing national identity. In Eurobarometer data from 1992, as few as 13% of Italians but as many as 32% of Irish and 38% of those in the United Kingdom felt they would lose their national identity if all European countries came together in a European union. Clearly, relative to people in other European nations, a greater proportion of individuals living in the British Isles saw European identity as incompatible with their existing national identity. Moreover, in the same data, the potential loss of national identity was one of the top three reasons for individual opposition to the development of a single European market economy. The differing meanings of European identity shaped reactions to policies designed to create a single community, affecting levels of national cohesion on this issue.

Hopkins and Reicher (1996) highlighted the role of meaning and politics in the process of national identity definition. They examined speeches from the 1992 Scottish elections and documented the salience and meaning given to the respective identities of Scottish and British. The Scottish National party, which favored independent statehood in 1992, emphasized during the election that Scottish identity was incompatible with English identity and denied the existence of a true British identity that spanned both groups. In contrast, the conservatives, who supported continued ties with Britain, emphasized Britishness and the commonalities between the Scots and English while downplaying the distinctiveness of the Scots. In the 1992 election, political leaders were in competition over the salience of British and Scottish identity; they were also involved in defining the meaning of these respective identities. Group leaders have a potentially influential role to play in the process of developing the collective meaning of an identity or conflict, especially in the formation of grievances (Reicher, 2004).

The meaning of national identity also affects the development of ingroup bias. Consider the respective meanings of Israeli and German nationalism. For obvious reasons, many Germans feel some lingering unease at the notion of strong German nationalism and resist a patriotic identity even when their German identity is made salient. As empirical evidence, Schwartz, Struch, and Bilsky (1990) found that German students did not expect other Germans to evince ingroup bias against Israelis in a resource allocation task, but Israeli students predicted the emergence of ingroup bias among Israelis against Germans. Quite clearly, such expectations arose from the history of relations between Germans and Jews and the meaning of German and Jewish nationalism.

Social Dominance and System Justification

Sidanius and colleagues take a different approach. Their goal is not to derive common characteristics of groups that determine the actions of their members, but rather to examine fundamental differences in the nature of age, gender, and arbitrary-set groups. Social dominance theory suggests that the nature of intergroup relations differs among these differing types of groups. Men attempt to control women in order to regulate their reproductive activities. In contrast, male relations between members of arbitrary-set groups are more likely to be characterized by conflict in an attempt to ensure that competing groups of males do not gain access to women belonging to their ingroup (Sidanius & Kurzban, 2003). Moreover, the experience of intergroup relations differs greatly for members of subordinate and dominant groups; members of dominant groups are motivated to subjugate groups lower down on the social ladder, whereas members of subordinate groups provide willing support for their own subjugation through support of the status quo. The same differences between higher- and lower-status groups are found in system justification theory.

As Reicher (2004) points out, however, it is difficult to view intergroup relations between any set of groups as static. Gender relations provide an excellent example, as he notes. Within social dominance theory, they are seen as invariant over time, across societies, and among individuals because they are based on biological forces that have shaped male-female relations over evolutionary time. Yet this is difficult to reconcile with the widespread changes in women's roles that have occurred in Western countries in the postwar period. Consider the following examples. Women have reached near-parity in Scandinavian elective legislative bodies and in some states of the United States (e.g., Washington and Oregon) (McGlen & O'Connor, 2001). Acceptance of women's public roles and responsibilities has expanded dramatically in developed countries over the past 40 years (Simon & Landis, 1989). The kinds of work considered suitable for women have broadened considerably in the United States and other developed countries. And there has been widespread support in the United States over the last several decades for the women's movement and its stated goal of gender equality (Huddy et al., 2000).

Social dominance and system justification also leave little or no room for change in relations between arbitrary-set groups. Dominant groups seek power over subordinate groups. There is no explanation for how or why such relations evolve. How does one account for the decline of anti-Semitism in the United States over the course of the 20th century? Or the gradual acceptance of immigrant groups to the United States such as the Italians or Irish as they were supplanted by more recently arrived immigrants? Social dominance theory and system justification theory offer a wholly static view of intergroup relations that is difficult to reconcile with social reality.

Finally, there is the vexing issue of high-status individuals who reject the status quo. There are men who support the women's movement, wealthy liberals who donate money to assist low-income families, and whites who work tirelessly in support of racial justice and equality. These anomalies require some explanation and are clearly incompatible with theories that rely on simple group status to explain the emergence of ingroup bias and acceptance of the status quo.

Summary

Social identity theory has a well-developed list of attributes to account for variation in the emergence of ingroup bias across groups and over time. One of the most powerful concepts to emerge from this research is the importance of the intergroup context, especially the salience of group membership. Context helps to explain why group membership can powerfully cue beliefs and action in one context and yet have no effect in another. Other aspects of a group that affect the development of ingroup bias include the group's status and the permeability of its boundaries. The theory also sets out conditions under which both rebellion and acceptance of the social status quo are possible among members of low-status groups. The theory is not without its problems, however. Research has ignored the role of culture and history in group development. Without this richness, it is difficult to examine the impact of group membership on ingroup bias and intergroup conflict in real-world groups. Sidanius et al. (2004) add an additional concern that positive distinctiveness (a key motive in social identity theory) may account for the development of some group attachments but is insufficiently powerful to serve as the root cause of genocide. Nonetheless, neither social dominance theory nor system justification theory is as well developed as social identity theory in accounting for group-based variations in the development of cohesion and bias, and both theoretical alternatives adhere to a more static view of intergroup relations that is difficult to reconcile with dynamic reality.

Differences Across Societies

System Justification

In addition to individual differences in support for the status quo, system justification theory also allows for variations in the development of intergroup relations as a function of societal factors. Social and economic inequality is one of the key societal factors that predict higher levels of system justification, according to Jost et al. (2004). In other words, they expect greater support of higher-status groups in countries with unevenly distributed resources. This is an interesting prediction. But the evidence they present in support of their hypothesis is relatively weak. They suggest that strong support for traditional gender roles in countries where women have made few economic and social advances indicates that women and men are more motivated to justify gender inequality in an unequal setting. But this is not a definitive test of the hypothesis. Unequal gender relations could be the cause of support for the gender status quo, but it could just as plausibly be a consequence of such beliefs. For example, if women and men support unequal gender roles, they are unlikely to agitate for any change in those roles. A better test involves an examination of the incidence of intergroup conflict in countries with more and less evenly distributed wealth, and existing data tend to contradict the predictions of system justification theory. If anything, economic and status-based grievances and discrimination tend to increase rather than dampen ingroup cohesion, mobilization, and ethnic rebellion, although other preconditions may be needed to translate inequality into a desire for social change (Gurr & Moore, 1997; Huddy, 2003).

Jost et al. (2004) imply that there is a need in every society to support the status quo and justify existing social inequalities. But there are interesting differences across societies in their nature and foundational beliefs that might further complicate the theory. What, for example, should be expected of a communist society in which social differences are or have been ideologically anathema? Should lower-status workers be more inclined to protest the privileges of party functionaries than in Western countries where inequality is linked to valued individualism? Or consider a Western European country such as France, in which economic individualism is not as highly valued as it is in the United States. Is system justification theory—and its central prediction of quiescence among low-status individuals—equally applicable in France and the United States? Greater attention to societal differences in the status quo would give the theory greater realism.

System justification theory, which is predicated on the notion of a basic need to justify the system, also has difficulty in explaining societal change over time. For example, research on black children's preference for white and black dolls underwent a dramatic shift in the 1970s. In research conducted before the 1970s, black children had consistently preferred to play with white dolls over black dolls. This finding was interpreted along lines similar to those advanced by Jost et al.—that the children had internalized a society-wide preference for white over black skin. However, when this research was replicated in the 1980s, the results were very different. In these studies, black children preferred to play with black dolls and white children favored white dolls (Brown, 1995).

Social Identity and Social Dominance

Social identity theory is relatively silent on the existence of societal similarities or differences in the development of intergroup conflict. Reicher's (2004) emphasis on meaning leaves open the possibility that members of the same group could hold a very different sense of group membership in different societies.

Erikson (1993) provided an interesting example of this possibility. East Asian Indians transported by the British in the 19th century to work on plantations throughout the empire developed an identity as good at politics but bad at business in Mauritius, whereas Indians in Trinidad came to see themselves in exactly opposite terms—bad at politics but good at business. Another possibility is that differences across societies in the perceived illegitimacy of group-based inequalities can account for differences in protest activities undertaken by members of the same group in one place but not another. But this is speculation. In general, the role of cultural and societal differences is generally underdeveloped within social identity theory.

Social dominance theory tackles the question of societal forces more directly. The theory addresses the very broad question of "why human societies tend to be organized as group-based hierarchies" and is based on the assumption that societies do not vary in this respect (Sidanius et al., 2004). The researchers have investigated this claim in diverse national settings, a difficult approach for which they deserve considerable credit. For example, Sidanius and Pratto (1999) collected data from a diverse array of countries including the United States, Russia, Taiwan, Israel, and Mexico and uncovered consistent evidence of stable gender differences in SDO scores, with men scoring higher than women.

Sidanius and colleagues attribute a key role to societal institutions in shaping the beliefs and behaviors of individuals. Some institutions (hierarchy accentuators) are intent on promoting racial intolerance and discrimination; others (hierarchy attenuators) attempt to decrease discriminatory beliefs and behaviors. Thus, the police force acts to promote discrimination while social welfare agencies attempt to minimize it. Sidanius and colleagues have frequently argued that institutions play an important role in maintaining the existing social hierarchy within a society. Sidanius et al. (2004) provide intriguing evidence of the ways in which institutions select and reward individuals who share the social dominance orientation level that characterizes the institution (e.g., hierarchy-attenuating institutions are equated with a low SDO score). This helps to explain both hierarchy-attenuating and hierarchy-enhancing organizations.

Legitimizing myths also play an important role at the societal level in promoting the development or absence of conflict. Sidanius and Pratto (1999) argued that the emergence of intergroup conflict depends on the degree to which groups differ in their support of key beliefs. This is obviously a critical variable; conflict is more likely in a divided society where dominant and subordinate groups contest beliefs than in societies where belief systems are unanimously endorsed. The only jarring aspect of this prediction is that contested beliefs can lead to action and social change at odds with the static and hierarchical nature of societies depicted by social dominance theory.

The idea of societal differences based on a varying balance of hierarchy-attenuating and hierarchy-accentuating institutions or contentious belief systems raises several critical questions. Why do some societal institutions enhance and others minimize social distinctions? And why are some societies characterized by dissensual and others consensual beliefs? Social dominance theory is remarkably silent on these issues. Is it possible to find societies characterized more by hierarchy-attenuating than by hierarchy-enhancing institutions, for example? More work is needed to flesh out such societal-level differences. There is little to illuminate these questions in social dominance theory, which touches briefly on societies characterized by consensual and dissensual belief systems but does not go further to examine the origins of these differences. The theory also contains no real analysis of whether group-based ideological differences actually create group conflict.

Summary

An investigation of intergroup relations across societies is a daunting task, although there are several excellent sources on this topic (Horowitz, 1985; Levine & Campbell, 1972). System justification theory points to societal inequality as a factor that promotes support for the status quo, although there is ample contradictory evidence that must be reconciled to advance the theory. It also holds intriguing implications for the impact of societal differences in central values on the desire for more and less hierarchical social relations, although this aspect of the theory remains unexplored at present. Unfortunately, neither of the other two approaches gives extensive attention to societal-level variables. There is little here to explain why some societies habitually confront bloody uprisings among their inhabitants while others are conflict-free; there is also little insight into why members of lower-status groups overthrow repressive regimes in some countries but not in others.

Conclusion

Social dominance theory is the most ambitious of the three theories under consideration in this forum because it explicitly addresses the role of individual-, group-, and societal-level factors. Sidanius et al. (2004) argue that their theory considers "similarities and differences across societies, interactions between psychological and social-contextual processes, and the subtle . . . differences between various types of group-based oppression." Yet the theory does not succeed equally well in explaining intergroup relations at all three levels. It has excelled in highlighting individual differences in the need and desire to dominate members of lower-status groups. The researchers should also be applauded for empirically documenting the complex interplay of institutions and individuals. This is an important contribution, especially at the individual level. But the theory also contains strong internal tensions between its focus on individual differences in social dominance orientation, its base in evolutionary psychology that is designed to account for group-based differences, and its desire to rest the emergence of hierarchies on a complex interplay of contextual and individual-level factors.

Social identity theory provides the greatest nuance in understanding the conditions under which group membership is likely to translate into ingroup bias and intergroup conflict. Its emphasis on context, group status, permeability, and meaning provides a rich theoretical and empirical view of intergroup relations. Yet it too suffers from clear deficiencies. One of the most glaring omissions is its failure to take seriously individual differences in the adoption of group identity or the development of outgroup antipathy, in defiance of a longstanding research tradition in the social sciences on prejudice, racial stereotypes, and authoritarianism.

System justification theory is the least well developed of the three theories considered here. The theory tackles an important phenomenon—the existence of quiescence among members of low-status societal groups—and Jost et al. (2004) are right to emphasize this as a valid problem for theories of intergroup relations. But the theory is underspecified even in this domain. The conflict between a universal psychological need to justify the system and stark individual differences in this need is jarring. A reliance on conservatism to explain why some individuals are more motivated than others to support the system undercuts the theory's central premise that lower-status individuals willingly accept the status quo, especially for groups such as African Americans who do not strongly endorse a conservative ideology. This discrepancy between the theory and reality is amplified by data indicating that blacks are much more supportive than whites of government policy designed to reduce racial inequality in the United States. And there is little evidence for the notion that societal inequality produces greater support for the status quo.

In general, the approaches considered here would benefit from fewer theoretical border disputes and more systematic attention to the data. Each approach clearly has its strengths but also weaknesses that deserve greater thought. Good theorizing is needed at the individual, group, and societal level, and greater attention should be given to the ways in which variables at all three levels interact. There may be value in a synthetic approach that examines variation in the emergence of ingroup bias and conflict at all of the levels considered here (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). This may not be the most elegant or parsimonious approach, but it may better capture the reality of intergroup relations over time and across diverse settings.

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