

Social Identity Theory

Tajfel: when people are assigned to a group, any group, they immediately, automatically, and almost reflexively think of that group, an in-group for them, as better than the alternative, an out-group for them, and do so basically because they are motivated to achieve and maintain a positive self-image.

A personal identity and many social identities

The theory of Social Identity assumes that an individual can make an effort to improve his or her self-image either by trying to enhance personal identity or by trying to enhance social identity, and the theory undertakes to explain when the one sort of effort will be made and when the other.

People who oppose group discrimination of any kind sometimes favor group assertion.

In equity theory, as long as a group believes that its assets or investments are less valuable than the assets of a group with which it compares outcomes, then lower outcomes or disadvantages will be perceived as equitable, fair, or just.

Leon Festinger: Theory of Social Comparison. Comparisons are not made between incomparables but only between fairly similar cases. A teacher does not compare his or her knowledge with that of a pupil to evaluate professional competence but with a peer.

Positive social identity; ISP team wins. Negative social identity: New Bedford gang rape case in 1984. All six were immigrants from Portugal. Members of the large Portuguese population of New Bedford felt the impact of the negative social identity and seemed to feel it very personally. When the guilty verdicts were brought in, Portuguese men out of the courtroom, expressing their frustrations.

Fans: your own self-esteem must rise and fall with the successes and failures of your object of admiration.

Axioms for the theory: Individuals strive to achieve and maintain a positive self-image. The self-image has two components: a personal and a social identity

Asked for ratings of in-group and out-group on traits such as likability always found that the out-group was rated as less likable but never actually disliked. In the entire body of work on the minimal group there is no evidence of hostility to the out-group but only mild derogation. Consequently, the minimal group experiment, standing alone, cannot explain even the little wars of the Eagles and the Rattlers. Something must be added, perceived injustice, to generate hostility.

From attribution theory, we know that a high social consensus defines social reality. As a result, ethnocentrism is often reversed. In-group derogation and out-group elevation. Clark and Clark (1947). Subjects were black and white children, three to seven years old, living in interracial neighborhoods in the USA. The children were shown two dolls, one black and one white, and were asked:

1. Give me the doll that you want to play with
2. Give me the doll that is a nice doll.
3. Give me the doll that looks bad.
4. Give me the doll that is a nice color.

The results

First results are from the 1947 research. Numbers in parenthesis are from 1970.

1. White 67% (30)	2. White 59% (46)
Black 32% (70)	Black 38% (58)
3. White 17% (61)	4. White 60% (31)
Black 59% (36)	Black 38% (69)

The historic change is dramatic in a replication of the 1947 doll preference study by Hrabá and Grant. Approximately 60 percent of the black children preferred black dolls. Results of Black is beautiful.

Positive social realities induce self-esteem.

A negative social identity can have any of three outcomes:

Exit: moving out of the group that creates a negative social identity for you and is most clearly manifest in improved social mobility, movement from the lower classes, that occurs in open societies. It is *real* movement.

Pass: It is to be thought a member of a higher group while privately thinking oneself a member of a lower group: to pass as Aryan in Nazi Germany while believe oneself to be Jewish; to pass as heterosexual while thinking oneself homosexual; to pass as white in the United States while perceiving oneself to be black.

Social Action (Voice): the elevation of the group and of its social identity.

Four variables are thought to determine positive reactions to negative social identity: the possibility or not of personal movement, the sharpness of boundary definition, the perceived legitimacy of the system, and the perceived security of the system.

The group memberships called race, nationality, gender, religion, and sexual orientation pretty much exclude the possibility of real movement and so voice, or social action to raise the value of the group, is a likely response if other conditions are realized.

A dominant group is secure when a subordinate group cannot imagine things otherwise arranged, when the subordinate group lacks “cognitive alternatives.” But real alternatives, things that *can* happen, are best created by the power of example. Importance of heroes.

Tajfel identified the factors that favored voice as a reaction to negative social identity: Personal movement is impossible, group definitions are sharp, the dominant power is perceived as illegitimate, and the dominant power is somewhat insecure.

A minority that is only numerical vs. a minority that is psychological. The creation of a psychological or self-conscious minority is the first task of voice. People look to the majority, especially a high-status majority, to define what is correct and true and strongly tend to conform to the standard. Serge Moscovici (Uni of Paris). Majority influence of the kind Asch used affects response at the public level, which we call compliance, but often leaves response at the private level, which is called conversion, unaffected. Asch found that while many subjects could be brought to make the same reports as a falsely reporting majority, their minds had not been changed by the majority, and they would so report afterward in private. No conversion had occurred.

Internal consistency: minority consistency is a prerequisite to the exertion of influence on out-groups. There are two kinds of outsiders to be concerned with: the dominant majority that denies the affirmative claims of the minority and all the comparatively unconcerned independents.

In attribution theory actions on which there is a high consensus and high consistency are likely to be attributed to a reality external to the actors. Numerous experiments have shown that an inconsistent minority is perceived as incompetent or inaccurate, whereas a consistent minority is perceived as confident.

Maass and Clark (1983) deals with the issue of gay rights and was inspired by the Trask-Bush Amendment in the state of Florida. The amendment mandated the withdrawal of all public funds from institutions that provide facilities for groups advocating extramarital sex.

Some hundreds of students answered a set of questions in the area of gay rights, including job protection, homosexual marriages, and the rights of child adoption. 400 subjects were chosen who scored moderately (close to 4/7) on the Likert scale questionnaire.

A subject read a purported summary of a sixty-minute group discussion of gay rights held by five undergrads like themselves. In all cases a majority of four members of the imaginary group favored one opinion and a minority of one consistently favored the opposite position. The independent variable was the position espoused by each; for some

subjects the majority was pro gay rights and the minority con; for others the situation was reversed. The dependent variable of interest was public expression, or compliance, versus private expression or conversion.

The results showed substantial public compliance with the majority view, whether pro or con, and that is a pure conformity effect. The results also showed that private confidential beliefs actually shifted away from the majority in the direction of the minority. Moscovici argues that majority opinion does not inspire much thought but simply a compliant response, whereas minority ideas, consistently put forward, cause people to think more deeply about the ideas involved.

Voice: the reevaluation in a positive direction of attributes the group undoubtedly has. A distinctive appearance and a distinctive language are the two attributes most central to social identities. Striking examples of good looks from within the group may help. A broader historical and geographic perspective on beauty can help. Propaganda. Direct competition. Individual competition in athletics, art, science, and beauty helps with social identity only if the individuals who compete successfully assert their solidarity with the group.

The minimal group experiment and the theory of social identity do not predict a state of worldwide pluralistic equality. Nothing in the theory says that efforts to enhance equality, and nothing in the theory says that groups already enjoying positive evaluation will fail to lust after more positive and indeed superior identities.

Elevating the identity of a subordinate group is the first step in creating real hostility.

1. Because social comparisons are never made between incomparables, between very unlike cases, a dominated group with a negative identity is likely to compare its outcomes either with other dominated groups or with itself at an earlier time. So long as downward comparisons are made, a dominated group will feel justly treated and not press for change. Raising the value of social identity changes the selection of comparison groups to a higher level.
2. So long as downward comparisons are made, there can be gross inequality of outcomes between dominant and superior groups and yet no sense whatsoever of injustice.

In the summer of 1964 race riots in the cities of New York, Detroit, and Los Angeles. Gary Marx, interviews with black Americans distinguished as militant blacks.

1. Militants perceived much more anti-black discrimination than did non-militants. Practically all blacks were aware of discrimination in jobs, housing, and schooling, but militants were more likely to see discrimination also in welfare administration, the Fire department, the Parks department, and

garbage collection. Militants also thought the city police guilty of much more anti-black malpractice than did non-militants.

2. Militants had more education, had more sophistication, and were of a higher social class than non-militants. Militants had a more positive image of their race, a higher social identity.

3. Militants more than non-militants compared themselves to whites and, in fact, to the more privileged whites. In the first place militants were in all ways more in contact with the non-black world. They read more newspapers and general magazines and had greater knowledge of world affairs.