

SELF AND SOCIAL IDENTITY*

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Key Words identity threat, group commitment, social context, identity functions, group distinctiveness

■ **Abstract** In this chapter, we examine the self and identity by considering the different conditions under which these are affected by the groups to which people belong. From a social identity perspective we argue that group commitment, on the one hand, and features of the social context, on the other hand, are crucial determinants of central identity concerns. We develop a taxonomy of situations to reflect the different concerns and motives that come into play as a result of threats to personal and group identity and degree of commitment to the group. We specify for each cell in this taxonomy how these issues of self and social identity impinge upon a broad variety of responses at the perceptual, affective, and behavioral level.

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*Author's note: The order in which the authors' names are listed does not reflect their relative input into this product. It has been a truly collective enterprise.

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INTRODUCTION

Issues of self and identity are usually conceptualized at the level of the personal self. Although this tradition emphasizes the importance of social roles and social interactions for the awareness of who one is (see Banaji & Prentice 1994, Baumeister 1998), these are mainly considered as interindividual processes, in terms of how reflected appraisals from others contribute to the definition of self (see Swann et al. 2000) or may help fulfill a generic need to belong (see Baumeister & Leary 1995, Leary & Baumeister 2000). In this chapter, using social identity theory (Tajfel 1978, Tajfel & Turner 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner 1987, 1999), we focus on the different conditions under which issues of selfhood and identity are affected by the groups to which people belong. For this purpose we develop a taxonomy of situations in which different identity concerns play a role, and accordingly, where the social self serves different functions and motives. We then proceed by specifying for each cell in this taxonomy how these issues of self and identity impinge upon a broad variety of perceptual, affective, and behavioral responses.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

Personal versus Collective Self

Concern with the personal self and issues of personal identity as an explanatory frame for understanding social behavior dominates theoretical accounts and empirical work even when group processes and intergroup relations are the object of investigation. For instance, group cohesion is often conceptualized as stemming from interpersonal ties between individual group members (see also Hogg 1992, Prentice et al. 1994), effects of the group on people's self-definitions are examined by assessing expectations of individual ingroup members about each other (Swann et al. 2000), or the tendency to either associate with or distance the self from particular groups is explained by considering how membership in the group can be beneficial for the individual in question (e.g., Luhtanen & Crocker 1991).

Western societies, in which most of this theorizing and research has been carried out, can be characterized as cultural contexts with a strong emphasis on personal identities and individual achievements (Hofstede 1980, Triandis 1989). As a result, the primary emphasis in social psychological theory and research is on the analysis of individual processes and interpersonal interaction. This concern with the individual self also permeates commonly used research paradigms, in which manipulations and measures expressly or inadvertently focus on the individual self or on interpersonal comparisons with other ingroup members. Furthermore, in

laboratory experimentation with the “minimal group paradigm,” categorizations are often arbitrary and temporary, resulting in groups with no history and no future (Doosje et al. 2001). This implies that overall levels of group commitment tend to remain relatively low in these studies, which is likely to diminish concerns with group-level outcomes. It is perhaps no wonder that the observed effects seem to confirm the notion that even in social situations personal identities tend to be primary (Gaertner et al. 1999, Simon 1997).

Nevertheless, there is a substantial body of research reporting on phenomena that illustrate the powerful impact of people’s social identities on their perceptions, emotions, and behavior. Examples include sports team members who personally take the blame for a team loss (Taylor & Doria 1981), research participants who stick together with an unsuccessful group, even when they have the opportunity to leave (Ellemers et al. 1997), or activists who may jeopardize their personal well-being for causes or principles that are unlikely to affect their own immediate outcomes (e.g., animal rights and environmental activists; e.g., Drury & Reicher 2000). The lengths that people sometimes go to in order to protect their group, and the collective self, also belie the notion that the collective self is necessarily subservient to the individual self (Gaertner et al. 1999). Perhaps the most extreme form of individual self-sacrifice in the collective cause is the case of kamikaze pilots and suicide bombers. Thus, there are numerous examples of impactful social behavior that cannot always easily be explained by referring to the personal self or individual identity maintenance concerns. Instead, such observations are more compatible with the notion that there are situations in which people’s collective selves and social identities may guide their perceptual, affective, and behavioral responses in important ways.

Rather than trying to decide whether the individual self or the collective self is more important, we think a more fruitful approach is to specify the conditions under which one is likely to take precedence over the other, and with what effect. An important contribution to our understanding of these issues is provided by the social identity approach, subsuming both social identity theory (Tajfel 1978, Tajfel & Turner 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner 1987). This theoretical framework emphasizes the interaction between social identity as a perceiver factor implicating different aspects of the self (or different social selves), and social contextual factors that either enhance or diminish the meaningfulness of personal as well as social identities. We consider each of these factors in turn.

Social Identity and Group Commitment

At first sight, it would seem that processes associated with the collective self are often similar to those that occur for the individual self, except that they occur at the group level instead of at an individual level (e.g., a concern with positive esteem). However, the inclusion of group-based aspects of self and identity also implies that additional issues and processes come into play, so that theoretical and empirical insights on topics such as self-perception, self-esteem, or self-presentation cannot

simply be transferred from the individual level to the group level (e.g., Schmitt et al. 2000, Schopler & Insko 1992). Moreover, the interaction and competition between the personal and collective levels of self add a further level of complexity (Spears 2001).

Whereas the personal self is defined as a unitary and continuous awareness of who one is (Baumeister 1998), it is less clear how we should conceive of the social self, which can be as varied as the groups to which we belong. Each of us has a range of different, cross-cutting, social identities, including those derived from highly meaningful and clearly delineated groups (e.g., psychology professors) as well as those referring to more abstract and perhaps ambiguous social categories (e.g., fellow Europeans). An important consequence is that differential perceptions of self and others may emerge, depending on which identity is most salient (Crisp & Hewstone 2001, Haslam & Turner 1992, Mussweiler et al. 2000, Spears 2001, Van Rijswijk & Ellemers 2001). Thus, the extent to which group characteristics and group processes affect the social self may differ from one group member to the next, depending on the extent to which they consider themselves in terms of that particular group membership (Ellemers et al. 1999c).

One source of confusion in the literature is that the term “social identification” has been used to refer to the content of the identity itself, as well as to indicate the strength of the association with a particular social category. These are essentially different components of the social identity, which although related, may operate relatively independently of each other (Ellemers et al. 1999b; see also Jackson, 2001, Smith Murphy & Coats 1999). To avoid confusion here, we reserve the term “social identity” to refer to the nature or content of a particular identity, whereas we use the term “commitment” to indicate the strength of people’s ties with that particular group.

This conceptual distinction makes it easier to understand that people may feel strongly committed to groups that confer a negative identity upon them. For example, the employees of Baan, an IT company in the Netherlands, were strongly tied together by the fact that they all came from a small, highly religious community. As a result, when profits plummeted, instead of leaving for a more financially sound company, employees started daily prayers in the hope that the firm might yet be saved from bankruptcy (Baltesen 2000). The strength of their commitment did not waver, even though the object of their identification was no longer attractive from an outsider’s perspective. We argue that when collective identities are concerned, the level of commitment to a particular group or category determines how group characteristics, norms, or outcomes will influence the perceptual, affective, and behavioral responses of individuals belonging to that group.

The Importance of Social Context

A central point of departure in the social identity approach is that the impact of social groups on the way people see themselves and others around them cannot be understood without taking into consideration the broader social context in which

they function. Early formulations of this theoretical position (Tajfel 1978, Tajfel & Turner 1979) focused on the proposition that social structures can be characterized by a number of key features (namely the permeability of group boundaries, the stability of group statuses, and the legitimacy of current status relations) that are also important determinants of the likelihood that people self-define either at the individual level or at the group level. Empirical work confirmed that people were more inclined to identify as group members when group status was unstable (promoting intergroup competition and social change), whereas the individual level of self-definition was more salient when group boundaries were permeable or inclusion in the group seemed illegitimate (see Ellemers 1993 for an overview).

Further developments in the self-categorization tradition have elaborated on more immediate social contextual factors that may influence self-definitions and identity concerns (Turner 1987). The basic assumption here is that the relevant social context determines which categorization seems most suitable to provide a meaningful organization of social stimuli, and hence which identity aspects become salient as guidelines for the perceptions and behavior of those who operate within that context (e.g., Oakes 1987; see also Deaux & Major 1987). Accordingly, research has demonstrated that people perceive their own and other groups in terms of different characteristics, depending on which comparison group or comparative domain provides the frame for their judgments (e.g., Doosje et al. 1998, Haslam & Turner 1992, Van Rijswijk & Ellemers 2001).

Taking this reasoning one step further, it has been argued that we should not conceive of certain social identities as inherently attractive or unattractive. Instead, the same group membership may be seen either as identity enhancing or as jeopardizing a positive sense of self, depending on whether it compares favorably or unfavorably to other groups that are relevant in that context. For instance, whereas psychology students could establish a positive identity when comparing their intelligence with arts students, or their creativity with physics students, they felt inferior when comparing themselves with physics students in terms of intelligence, or with arts students in terms of creativity (Spears et al. 1997a). Thus, it is the social context, rather than specific group features, that determines the evaluative flavor of any given group membership. An intriguing consequence is that the motivational implications of a particular social identity are shaped by these contextual features, which may include the nature of characteristics associated with other groups.

These more socio-structural and social comparative treatments of context in social identity and self-categorization theories point to two related but distinct features of context relevant to our analysis. First, the context provides feedback about one's social position (of the person in the group, of the group in relation to other groups) that can provide a sense of security (even superiority) or engender a source of threat to self (Ouwerkerk & Ellemers 2001). At the group level, social status and group distinctiveness are the main contextual factors that produce this threat. Second, the context also constitutes the social reality that facilitates or restricts attempts to cope with these potential threats. Stability, permeability, legitimacy and the validity of comparison information are all examples of contextual factors

that can be used to develop and choose feasible strategies designed to address self-relevant concerns such as identity threat (Doosje et al. 1999b, Ellemers & Van Rijswijk 1997).

To summarize, the social context is both a source of threat and source of potential resources to deal with threats. Commitment to the group is a crucial moderating factor that determines the responses to these circumstances and the use of the resources available. We now develop a theoretical taxonomy that further specifies the responses to combinations of identity threats and group commitment and elaborates the role of the personal and collective identities therein.

Identity Concerns and Self Motives: Towards a Taxonomy

In the previous section, we argued that different social situations may have specific implications for issues of self and identity. Of course, some group-based identities may be so central to the person that they become chronically salient. In a similar vein, some intergroup comparisons may be so pervasive that they dominate a variety of social contexts and overpower other social identities. More generally, commitment to identity and social contextual features interact, combining to form into a limited number of meaningful social situations (Spears et al. 1999, Turner 1999). To examine this more systematically, we have crossed commitment and context dimensions to form a taxonomy of situations in which different identity concerns arise, and hence, different perceptual, affective, and behavioral responses may be anticipated.

A central feature of this taxonomy is that it specifies particular identity concerns as well as the conditions under which they are most likely to play a role. Although the differences between the cells should be seen in gradual rather than absolute terms, the proposed organization of situations structures our discussion of which identity concerns are expected to emerge and the functional implications of self-related responses in the different classes of situations. An important property of social contexts for the self is their propensity to induce some form of threat to individuals or to the group, which calls for some (coping) response (see also Branscombe et al. 1999a). We propose that the consequences of such threat (or its absence) for the self, and hence the resulting responses, may be fundamentally different depending on the level of commitment to the group in question.

Our treatment is somewhat asymmetrical, reflecting the dominant concerns in the literature. We concentrate primarily on conditions of threat because these most often require and invoke responses, which also tend to vary according to level of self and group commitment. We therefore neglect situations in which the personal or group self actually benefits in some way. Although psychologically interesting, these contexts are beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it is important to observe that conditions of group advantage are receiving increasing attention, and the role of this factor in intergroup processes is increasingly being acknowledged and researched (see e.g., Branscombe 1998, Leach et al. 2001).

TABLE 1 Primary concerns and motives of the social self: a taxonomy

	Group Commitment	
	Low	High
No threat	1.	2.
Concern:	Accuracy/efficiency	Social meaning
Motive:	Noninvolvement	Identity expression
Individual-directed threat	3.	4.
Concern:	Categorization	Exclusion
Motive:	Self-affirmation	Acceptance
Group-directed threat	5.	6.
Concern:	Value	Distinctiveness, value
Motive:	Individual mobility	Group-affirmation

We first consider no-threat situations in which people are mainly concerned with forming accurate impressions efficiently or trying to make sense of their own group identity under different conditions of group commitment. We then move into situations in which a threat to the individual self may stem from the relationship between the individual and the group. For those with low commitment, inclusion in the group may be threatening, whereas the possibility of exclusion from the group or category can be a source of threat when commitment is high. Finally, we address contexts in which group identity is threatened, the terrain of much work in the social identity tradition. How people respond when either the value or the distinctiveness of their group is called into question is again crucially affected by commitment to the group. Along with the different identity concerns that may arise, we aim to specify the functions of self associated with each situation and specific concerns and resulting motives that arise (Table 1). We now address the six cells in turn and examine in greater detail the responses and strategies that are likely to emerge corresponding to the different identity concerns.

RESPONSES AND STRATEGIES

Cell 1: No Threat, Low Group Commitment: Noninvolvement

The first cell of our taxonomy does not implicate the self, at least in terms of commitment to a group self or through contextual threats to self. The predominant response to surrounding social stimuli is therefore one of noninvolvement. The characteristic response profile for this cell is that it will primarily have implications for perception, but less (if at all) for affect and behavior. The concern for social perception under these conditions is accuracy or sense-making on the one hand and efficiency on the other (often with a trade-off between these two).

There have been different theoretical approaches addressing this issue. Within social cognition, as a result of the information processor metaphor in the heuristics and biases tradition, categorization and stereotyping have come to be regarded as ways of managing the surfeit of social information efficiently, especially under conditions of limited personal involvement (e.g., Fiske et al. 1999). Because the group self is largely uninvolved, it will not bias perception, at least not in group-serving ways, although efficiency concerns may lead to other kinds of information processing biases associated with simplification (Fiske et al. 1999, Macrae & Bodenhausen 2000). These approaches often make a distinction between categorization and stereotype activation (which occur relatively automatically or effortlessly) on the one hand, and more effortful individuation on the other, and they therefore have a dual-process character (Brewer & Harasty Feinstein 1999, Fiske et al. 1999). However, other models have argued that knowledge activation and application processes underlying social perception can be understood without making such a clear division in processing terms (e.g., Kunda & Thagard 1996, McGarty 1999), suggesting that it may be less clear whether the function of categorization and stereotyping is to simplify or save energy, rather than to reflect learned associations of the social world in general.

Research in the tradition of self-categorization theory has focused on the contextual determinants of social perception, showing how stereotyping (and other related processes) shifts with the judgmental context (Haslam et al. 1992, Oakes et al. 1994). According to this approach, social perception is essentially context sensitive and comparative, and the emphasis is more on contextual relevance and sense making than on accuracy or efficiency concerns per se.

The self (individual or collective) might be implicated in cell 1 not through a threat to identity, but through more instrumental motives relating to relevant goals, outcomes, and relevant audiences. Under these conditions the noninvolved character clearly changes and the role of motivation and affect become more apparent. This issue has been approached from the perspective of the different traditions already described. For example, research by Fiske and her colleagues on the effects of interdependence and anticipated interaction shows that when people have a self-interested relation to others, attention becomes focused to better predict their behavior: The cognitive miser becomes the motivated tactician (Fiske et al. 1999). Within the self-categorization tradition, research has also shown how behavior can reflect strategic self-presentational concerns under conditions of accountability to others (e.g., Ellemers et al. 1999a, Reicher et al. 1995).

To summarize, in cell 1 of our taxonomy, relevant theories focus on social perception, rather than affective and behavioral responses, and generally they reflect noninvolvement unless the self is directly implicated. Approaches differ as to whether social perception for the uninvolved perceiver should be seen as biased by lack of motivation or processing resources (as the limited information processing metaphor implies), or not necessarily, as self-categorization theorists have argued. This may depend on whether perception in terms of individuals and individual characteristics is seen as more valid than perception in terms of group identities

and attributes, which is itself arguably a question of level of self-definition and social context (Reynolds & Oakes 2000, Spears et al. 1997b).

Cell 2: No Threat, High Commitment: Identity Expression

In this cell of our taxonomy, commitment to the group identity is increased. The main implication is that social perception now acquires a self-relevant and self-relative character at the group level. As a consequence, responses are no longer restricted to the perceptual realm but also involve affect and behavior. However, behavior in this cell still lacks the urgency that it can be given by threats to identity. The importance of group identity means the primary concern here will be to express and affirm this identity. We now consider ways in which this identity-expressive function manifests itself in the domains of perception, affective response, and behavior.

When group identity is not yet clear, but there is a commitment to the incipient identity, there is likely to be an attempt to create a distinctive identity by distinguishing and differentiating the group from outgroups in the comparative context. This process is similar to the sense-making process described in the previous section, but here the aim is not simply to make sense of the external world, but to define the group-self as distinct from other groups. Spears et al. (2001b) have referred to this process of gaining a distinctive self as “creative distinctiveness,” and evidence indicates that indistinct groups such as minimal groups can be more likely to differentiate themselves than more meaningful groups as a way of creating a distinctive group identity. Along similar lines, Hogg and colleagues have pointed to the experience of uncertainty in relation to group membership (e.g., Mullin & Hogg 1998), arguing that this may motivate people to define the situation and their relation in it, by displaying group-affirming responses.

If group identity is already formed and clear-cut, social perception and attempts at intergroup differentiation are predicted to follow principles set out in social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner 1987). Following the meta-contrast principle, groups tend to endorse group norms and conform to the prototypical ingroup position (maximizing intergroup differences and intragroup similarities) while also perceiving the outgroup in stereotypic terms (Turner 1987). A key difference from the influence of social context on perception described in the previous cell is that commitment to the group introduces the motivation to differentiate the ingroup (a distinctiveness motive) in positive ways (an enhancement motive) (Tajfel & Turner 1979). Because the group is not threatened in this context, satisfaction of group distinctiveness may often be sufficient, however (Spears et al. 2001b). For example, research shows that for groups that are compared on different dimensions, it may be possible to concede superiority to the outgroup on their dimension as a way of maintaining distinctiveness, as long as there are alternative dimensions available to derive some positive character for the ingroup (Doosje et al. 1998, Ellemers et al. 1999a, Mummendey & Schreiber 1983, Van Knippenberg 1984).

Turning to the affective processes, there is empirical support for the theoretical position that positive differentiation can enhance group esteem, although the evidence is mixed (see Hogg & Abrams 1988, Long & Spears 1997, Rubin & Hewstone 1998 for reviews). However, one of the problems with the so-called self-esteem hypothesis is that when group identity is not threatened, it is not clear that differentiation should function to enhance self-esteem, especially if group distinctiveness is satisfied. The interpretation of research findings is further obscured by conceptualization and measurement issues, with early tests focusing on personal rather than collective measures of esteem, and measures defined in trait rather than state terms (e.g., Luhtanen & Crocker 1991; see Long & Spears 1997, Rubin & Hewstone 1998).

At the behavioral level, group commitment is usually associated with prosocial behavior, such as volunteering to support group members who suffer from illness (e.g., Simon et al. 2000) or helping colleagues at work (Ellemers et al. 1998). However, the motive here is to differentiate between the ingroup and outgroup, which implies that commitment may also have negative effects, such as outgroup derogation (see Hinkle & Brown 1988). Thus, the general pattern is that commitment will enhance conformity to group norms (e.g., Doosje et al. 1999a, Terry & Hogg 1996), which may just as easily result in behavior that may be considered antisocial or deviant from the outside (e.g., Postmes & Spears 1998, Reicher et al. 1995) as prescribe fair behavior towards outgroup members (Jetten et al. 1999). One paradoxical consequence of such self-categorization effects is that strong commitment can also result in individual behavior where this is normative for the group (Ellemers et al. 1999a, Jetten et al. 2001c). Thus, group commitment is crucial in distinguishing group behavior from truly individual behavior (Spears 2001).

To summarize, the characteristic concern in cell 2 is the presence of a clear meaningful group identity coupled to commitment to this identity. The main function is therefore to create a distinctive identity when it is not yet established, or to express it on meaningful dimensions of differentiation when it is. In addition to shifting social perception to group attributes, group commitment is likely to implicate collective esteem and motivate behavioral differentiation.

Cell 3: Self-Directed Threat, Low Commitment: Self-Affirmation

"I don't want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member."

Groucho Marx

For someone with a low degree of commitment to the group to be categorized as a member of this group may threaten the individual self. Even those who can technically be considered as category members may experience the particular group as a (psychological) outgroup. Such resistance to categorization may stem from a variety of motives, including (a) the desire to establish individual uniqueness, (b) a conviction that the categorization is not relevant to the situation at hand, (c) the view that other additional categorizations should also be taken into account, or

(*d*) resentment of losing personal control when a particular categorization is imposed by others. These responses have implications for self-perception, as well as affect and behavior.

In optimal distinctiveness theory, Brewer (1991, Pickett & Brewer 2001) argues that people find it aversive to be assimilated into large groups and should therefore prefer inclusion in relatively smaller groups (see also Frable 1993, Snyder & Fromkin 1980). Here we propose that especially under conditions of low group commitment (which may also occur in minority groups) people prefer to be seen as separate individuals rather than being lumped together as a group. A consequence at the perceptual level is that those who think they are inappropriately categorized should tend to emphasize intragroup differences. Spears et al. (1999) report evidence that under conditions of category salience, less committed group members try to individuate the ingroup. In a similar vein, when the categorization seems inappropriate to the situation at hand, group members are likely to perceive themselves in terms of individually distinctive attributes, which may be nonprototypical for their group. For instance, there is evidence that high ranking women in organizations make a point of emphasizing self-descriptive traits that are relevant to their position at work (e.g., competitive, ambitious) but set them apart from their gender category (see Ellemers 2001 for an overview).

Whereas they may not be able to deny belonging to a particular group, people may often resist being viewed in terms of that category exclusively. Attempts to convey some personal uniqueness may take the form of creating a richer picture of the self, by emphasizing additional identities. For instance, a study of Portuguese immigrants in the Netherlands revealed that when it was likely that they would be categorized as minority group members (given that they were judged by the Dutch host group) they emphasized their dual identity, by decreasing identification with the native (Portuguese) group while emphasizing their identity as members of the host society (Ellemers et al. 1999a).

In terms of affective reactions, Lemyre & Smith (1985) have argued that in minimal groups, the very act of being categorized can be threatening. This is probably because of the low group commitment that is generally associated with such minimal contexts. Indeed, there is empirical evidence that people are generally less willing to be considered in terms of categorizations that are ascribed to them or imposed upon them by others than to being included in groups whose membership they have earned or chosen (Ellemers et al. 1999b). Barreto & Ellemers (2001) showed that resistance against an imposed categorization occurs when people's preferred self-categorizations are neglected (see also Hornsey & Hogg 2000). There is also evidence that categorization can be physiologically arousing for low group identifiers, regardless of the value associated with the ingroup (Branscombe et al. 1999a). Such aversion to categorization does not have to be general but may be context specific, as when gender or ethnic group membership is applied in a work setting where it should be irrelevant.

Although the general aim in this cell may be to counter the effects of categorization, sometimes the behavioral consequences of unsolicited categorization are

beyond one's control, as in the case of stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson 1995, Crocker et al. 1998, Steele 1997). This refers to the phenomenon that members of stigmatized groups typically underperform on dimensions on which their group stereotypically under-achieves (e.g., African Americans in intellectual domains, women in mathematics). Recent empirical evidence indicates that similar undermining effects of stereotypic expectations for the performance of individual group members can be observed for nonstigmatized groups (e.g., Leyens et al. 2000, Marx et al. 1999, Stone et al. 1999). Indeed, even an awareness of positive stereotypic expectations (i.e., with respect to the mathematical skills of Asian-American women) impaired participants' math performance (Cheryan & Bodenhausen 2000; Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambadi 1999).

It seems that these are all instances of the general phenomenon that people tend to underperform when they are subjected to category-based expectations in situations in which they might prefer to be judged in terms of individual merit (or not at all). There is some evidence that concern with an unwanted categorization takes up cognitive resources (Smart & Wegner 1999) and diminishes concentration on the task at hand (Cheryan & Bodenhausen 2000). Indeed, a study in which ethnicity salience was manipulated in a more subtle way resulted in enhanced performance, indicating behavioral affirmation of the category stereotype (Cheryan & Bodenhausen 2000), in line with cell 2 of our taxonomy.

A somewhat paradoxical behavioral result of category threat can be to display ingroup bias. Although those who possess attractive individual characteristics (e.g., high individual ability) are more likely than others to resist categorization, as evidenced by decreased group identification (Ellemers 1993), when such unwanted categorization seems inevitable, uncommitted group members may resort to ingroup bias to salvage their personal identity. Similarly, Long & Spears (1997) found that, in a group context, people high in personal self-esteem tended to show more ingroup bias than those low in personal self-esteem. Thus, what is characteristically seen as group-serving behavior can also come about as an attempt to compensate for more individual concerns when categorization seems inevitable.

To summarize, there is some evidence that threat to the individual self resulting from category inclusion can prompt perceptual, affective, and behavioral responses designed to affirm individual identity or alternative identities and/or to use other compensation strategies. An unwillingness to be categorized in one particular category does not necessarily mean an aversion to being categorized in general. Groucho Marx was happy enough to be a Marx brother—he just did not want to be a member of a “club.”

Cell 4: Self-Directed Threat, High Commitment: Acceptance

When the person is committed to the group, the individual self is not threatened by categorization, but rather by lack of acceptance in the valued group or even exclusion. Accordingly, responses in this cell are in many respects opposite to those considered in the previous section. Perceived exclusion or rejection by the

valued group will result in negative affect and attempts to gain acceptance. Even if the threat to self does not derive from potential exclusion, highly committed group members may seek refuge in the group as a way of compensating for their individual shortcomings. Baumeister & Leary (1995) refer to similar considerations, although they propose a generic need to belong, whereas we propose that this need only emerges in particular contexts and in relation to groups to which one feels highly committed.

Whereas one perceptual consequence of such threat from the perspective of the self would be to recognize one's peripheral status, paradoxically, the concern with acceptance may repress acknowledgment of possible rejection from the group. For instance, a study by Jetten et al. (2001b) revealed that under the threat of future rejection, highly committed group members perceived greater ingroup homogeneity, which could be seen as an attempt to feel more included (see also Pickett & Brewer 2001). In this case perception may reflect a motivated defensive response. The primary observable responses to this form of threat are therefore likely to be affective and behavioral, reflecting and designed to cope with this threat.

In terms of the affective reactions, evidence shows that new members of groups tend to be more anxious and lack confidence reflecting acceptance concerns (e.g., Moreland 1985). Jetten et al. (2001b) showed that highly committed peripheral group members who anticipated future acceptance showed more positive and fewer negative emotions than those who were less committed. Jetten et al. (2001a) investigated the affective consequences of having an insecure peripheral position in the group (versus secure and prototypical) and examined how shifts in position over time affected personal and collective self-esteem. Shifts to more prototypical positions enhanced collective self-esteem, whereas shifts to more peripheral positions enhanced personal self-esteem—presumably reflecting reduced commitment to the group.

A further affective consequence of marginal status is that people will likely value prototypical group members more but may be especially critical of others also perceived to be marginal. Ironically, black sheep (Marques & Paez 1995), at least those who are committed to the group, may be the severest critics of fellow black sheep. Schmitt & Branscombe (2001) showed that highly identified males who received feedback that they were atypical of their gender (unmasculine) tended to value prototypical males even more, but liked peripheral males (like themselves) even less, than when not so threatened (see also Jetten et al. 2001b). In sum, acceptance motives and identity concerns can even outweigh similarity-attraction principles.

A marginal status within the group, and the motivation to improve this, is also reflected in behavioral strategies. One such strategy is to display group prototypical behavior, particularly when visible to ingroup members. Although ingroup helping clearly qualifies as behavior that may earn approval of other ingroup members, displays of allegiance to the group may also result in individualistic (Barreto & Ellemers 2000) or even antisocial behavior, depending on the relevant group norms.

For example, Noel et al. (1995) showed that peripheral group members were more likely than core members to derogate outgroups, especially when identifiable to the ingroup.

To summarize, those who are committed to the group but threatened by exclusion may try to emphasize their inclusion in perceptual ways (e.g., homogeneity). They are likely to experience negative affect at the prospect of exclusion and respond by behavioral conformity to the group, of which ingroup bias is just one form.

Cell 5: Group-Directed Threat, Low Commitment: Individual Mobility

In this cell we consider how people respond to a threat to their group's value when they are not particularly committed to the group. Here the dominant motive is to avoid the negative group identity that has been imposed and possibly align with preferable ones, such as those instrumental to the individual self. First, however, we should resolve the seeming contradiction that a negative evaluation of one's group should be perceived as threatening to the individual self for those low in group commitment. To the extent that a nonvalued identity is called into question, it would seem that this need not necessarily be perceived as threatening to the self. Indeed, some have proposed that self-affirmation strategies may not be necessary if the individual self is primary or stronger than the group self (Gaertner et al. 1999), which may be particularly true for those with low commitment to the group.

Others have argued that explaining negative reactions of others to the self by referring to the category (as in attributions to prejudice) may actually form a way of protecting the individual self (Crocker et al. 1998). However, the generality of this strategy has been disputed (e.g., Schmitt & Branscombe 2001); unless they can hide their group membership, members of stigmatized groups are likely to be chronically treated in terms of their devalued group membership, regardless of their group commitment. Thus, it would be misleading to assume that low group commitment is always sufficient to protect the individual self from negative group identities.

An example of a perceptual coping response is provided by evidence that group members who learn their group has a negative value tend to emphasize the heterogeneity within the group (especially when the social reality allows for this), which may help convey that unfavorable group features do not necessarily apply to the individual self (see Doosje et al. 1999b). Although emphasizing heterogeneity within groups could also be interpreted as a group level way of undermining the implications of overall differences between groups, further research confirmed that only people with low commitment to the group used this variability strategy (Doosje et al. 1995). Accordingly, in addition to these instrumental perceptions of the group, in the face of group-value threat uncommitted members reported relatively low levels of self-stereotyping (Ellemers 2001, Spears et al. 1997a). Similarly, Mussweiler et al. (2000) found that when their group is depicted

negatively, people shift their self-definition to another identity, provided that they have high self-esteem (see Tajfel and Turner 1979 for further “social creativity” strategies).

Turning to the affective realm, there is considerable empirical support for the view that receiving negative feedback about one’s group can lead to negative mood (e.g., McFarland & Buehler 1995) and reduced personal self-esteem (see Ellemers & Barreto 2000 for an overview). Furthermore, under minimal group conditions (when group commitment is typically low), a threat to the value of the group often results in reduced ingroup identification (Ellemers 1993). Once this has happened, identification is likely to stay low even while the group develops over time, as long as the group-level feedback remains negative. Indeed, under these circumstances, people are only prepared to build affective ties with their group when it is certain that their status will improve in the near future. This reflects an individually instrumental attitude, where the less committed try to distance themselves from the group affiliation in a threatened situation (Doosje et al. 2001).

Perhaps the most straightforward behavioral response to group-value threat for those with low commitment is to try to leave the group and gain access to another, more attractive group. This behavioral strategy has been denoted with different terms in different theoretical and research traditions, including exit, passing, or individual mobility (Tajfel 1978, Tajfel & Turner 1979). The process of mobility can involve dissatisfaction with membership of the threatened group (Ellemers 1993) and resistance of the identification of self as an ingroup member (Cialdini et al. 1976). As a result, individually mobile group members decline opportunities to improve the standing of their group (Wright et al. 1990) or to help other group members (Ellemers 2001) while showing anticipatory identification with a more attractive group (Ellemers 1993, Ellemers et al. 1997). However, when group boundaries are impermeable, this cuts off the mobility route, leading to other social creativity strategies (associated with the perceptual realm), or in more chronic and extreme circumstances leading to internalization of inferiority (e.g., Jost & Banaji 1994).

Threat comes not just from the relative status or performance of the group, but also reflects the moral value associated with its treatment of others (Branscombe et al. 1999a), and this can have distinctive affective consequences. When a group’s moral integrity is threatened, for example when a national history of exploiting another nation is made salient, those who are less committed tend to suffer most from negative affective reactions such as guilt (e.g., Doosje et al. 1998). Such collective guilt in turn can have distinctive behavioral reactions resulting in some sort of restitution on behalf of the victimized group (Branscombe et al. 2001, Swim & Miller 1999). Thus, members who care least for their group are most likely to experience negative affective reactions as a result of their group membership. As a result, the least committed group members are most inclined to show prosocial behavior, in this case towards the harmed group, again underlining that there is no simple relation between group commitment and behavior.

To summarize, group-level threat combined with low group commitment can have a number of perceptual, affective, and behavioral consequences designed to protect the individual self or seek out a preferred social identity, although low commitment can also increase the chances of prosocial responses, as in the case of the morality threat implied by collective guilt.

Cell 6: Group-Directed Threat, High Commitment: Group Affirmation

In this last cell of our taxonomy, we focus on the situation in which the threat is directed at the group level and members feel highly committed to their group. Two important sources of group threat can be distinguished in this context: threat in terms of value (in terms of status or morality) and threats to group distinctiveness.

In terms of threat to group value qua status, social identity theory proposes that perceptual, affective, and behavioral responses are instrumentally aimed at differentiation and group affirmation. Thus, at the perceptual level, highly committed group members may stress the homogeneity of the ingroup (Doosje et al. 1995), differentiate between groups (Spears et al. 1999), display relatively high levels of self-stereotyping (Spears et al. 1997a), or affirm the collective self in other ways (see also Steele 1987). These variables can be interpreted as indicators of a state of mind that is conducive to collective group behavior aimed at challenging the source of threat and changing the present status configuration insofar as it is unfavorable for the ingroup (Doosje et al. 1999a), although these need to take into account the social reality constraints of intergroup differences (Ellemers et al. 1999a).

In terms of affective responses, although threats to value are likely to impact negatively on esteem (as for those with low commitment), a more collective coping response among those who are committed to the group will lead them to display even stronger group affiliation, expressing their loyalty to the devalued group. Indeed, it has been observed that people have a tendency to emphasize group cohesiveness when the value of the group is threatened (Branscombe et al. 1999b, Turner et al. 1984). Subsequent research has shown that these affective reactions in terms of expressing one's loyalty to the group are most prominent for those who were already committed to the group. Thus, highly committed members are most likely to stick together with their group in terms of identification, even when there is no realistic chance of improving its status position (Doosje et al. 2001).

Threats to group value may take different forms depending on contextual factors (social structure and comparison groups) and will result in different affective reactions. For example, when their group's values are threatened, members of powerful groups are more likely to express anger and contempt towards an outgroup than members of weak or submissive groups. In addition, the inclination to move against the outgroup, which is stronger among powerful groups than among weak groups, is mediated by anger but not by contempt (Dijker 1987, Fiske et al. 2001, Mackie et al. 2000, Smith 1993).

At the behavioral level, high commitment in combination with group threat is likely to give rise to intergroup differentiation tendencies aimed at improving the ingroup's status position. This suggestion is in line with social identity theory, which predicts competitive behavior among highly committed members when the group's status is threatened by comparison with a higher status outgroup (Tajfel & Turner 1979). Such competitiveness might be expressed in a number of different ways. For example, people may derogate outgroup members when the value of the ingroup is threatened (e.g., Branscombe & Wann 1994). Alternatively, when highly committed group members are faced with low group status, they are likely to engage in attempts to redress the situation by means of collective action (Kelly & Breinlinger 1996), as has been observed for a variety of social groups, ranging from workers (e.g., Veenstra & Haslam 2000) to gay people (Simon et al. 1998).

When the moral value of a group is threatened, in contrast to less committed group members those who feel highly committed to their group are unlikely to express high levels of guilt (Doosje et al. 1998). Instead, they are more inclined to display defensive reactions when their group's moral value is challenged (e.g., by downplaying the credibility of the presented negative image of their group). In behavioral terms, it accordingly seems that highly committed members are generally not in favor of acknowledging their group's culpability by official apologies to the harmed group, but prefer to deal with the situation by offering financial reparation (Branscombe et al. 2001).

Another fundamental source of threat is when the distinctiveness of the group is undermined by comparison to similar outgroups. A central principle within social identity theory is the motivation to seek or maintain group distinctiveness (Tajfel 1978, Tajfel & Turner 1979; see also Brewer 1991, Spears et al. 2001b). This speaks to the very existence and *raison d'être* of the group as an entity and thus addresses the identity expression function. Distinctiveness threat is less of an issue for those with low group commitment because it further undermines the sense of group identity and promotes recategorization at the superordinate level (Jetten et al. 1999). Those who are highly committed, however, are clear about their group identity and motivated to preserve its distinctiveness.

In terms of perceptions, threats to group distinctiveness combined with a high level of commitment are likely to result in a high degree of self-stereotyping (Spears et al. 1997a) and greater differentiation on stereotypic dimensions (Jetten et al. 2001d). In terms of affective reactions, for highly committed group members a threat to group distinctiveness is expected to give rise to reactions that induce conflict between the ingroup and the outgroup and the motivation to restore distinctiveness (Spears et al. 2001b). In the behavioral realm, distinctiveness threat elicits the desire to clearly differentiate the ingroup from other groups, which may take the form of overt discrimination (Jetten et al. 1999), especially for those central or most committed to the group (Jetten et al. 2001d). Group distinctiveness threat combined with high commitment may even lead to displays of hatred and disgust towards the outgroup as a result of the motivation to sharpen group boundaries

(Keltner & Haidt 1999). Moreover, intergroup similarity only provides a basis for contact so long as differentiation is possible (Roccas & Schwartz 1993). However, similarities perceived as aversive in one intergroup context may form the basis for common categorization if distinctiveness concerns are addressed (Hornsey & Hogg 2000).

Although generally speaking, group members prefer their group to be positively distinct from other groups (Mummendey & Schreiber 1983), for committed group members it may be of paramount importance to establish a distinctive group identity *per se* (Spears et al. 2001b). In such situations the distinctiveness motive takes precedence over a desire for ingroup superiority, so that highly committed group members may settle for a negative identity rather than being regarded positively at the expense of group distinctiveness. For example, Polish students who were strongly committed to their national identity claimed to have an array of clearly negative but group-defining characteristics (Mlicki & Ellemers 1996).

To summarize, group-level threat combined with high group commitment is associated with perceptual, affective, and behavioral reactions aimed at the group reasserting itself in terms of either value or distinctiveness. This may lead to a high degree of self-stereotyping, expressions of strong ingroup loyalty, and a readiness for collective action. The quest for clear intergroup differentiation may paradoxically lead highly committed group members to cultivate negative traits and/or behaviors, insofar as they seem to underline the group's distinct identity.

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

With this chapter we have integrated theoretical insights and empirical research in the area of self and social identity in terms of a taxonomy of situations defined by the level of group commitment and social contextual characteristics. We reviewed representative research relevant for each of the cells in the resulting matrix. We have shown that whereas strength of commitment to the group indicates the likelihood that a particular (social) identity will be relevant to the individual in question, the nature of the resulting perceptual, affective, or behavioral responses depends on interaction with the relevant social context and which aspects of the self are secure or threatened. We now try to derive some more general conclusions from our review in terms of this analytical framework.

First, from the literature it is evident that the bulk of research is most relevant to two of the situations that we distinguish. Most social-cognitive work on self and social identity has examined situations in which the self remains uninvolved, as group commitment is low, and no threat is present (cell 1 of our taxonomy). Conversely, research in the social identity tradition has primarily tried to uncover how highly committed group members respond to group level threats (as in cell 6 of our

taxonomy). As a result, it should be clear that some cells of our taxonomy deserve further research attention. In a similar vein, whereas we have examined research on perceptual, affective, and behavioral responses, some modes are overrepresented in some cells and underrepresented in others (e.g., perceptual responses mainly occur in cell 1, whereas research in cell 6 focuses more on behavioral responses), and other forms of response (e.g., affective responses) are less researched. As well as reflecting the focus in the literature, this informs us of the relevance of affect and action under conditions in which the self is threatened.

Another consequence of this exercise is that this has forced us to indicate the differences between conditions that at first sight may seem quite similar and have previously been confounded. For example, instances of self-affirmation (as in cell 3) are often considered in conjunction with attempts at individual mobility (in cell 5). At first sight these may indeed seem to represent similar motives, but our analysis proposes that there is a fundamental difference between them. Responses to categorization threat (cell 3) involve resisting the very idea that individuals are treated as category members (even though such resistance may not be generic but can be highly context-specific). By contrast, threat to the value of the group (cell 5) may elicit individual mobility attempts, which imply that the category system may be accepted, and only one's position within that system is disputed. To complicate matters further, the psychological and strategic processes that take place when group members aim at individual mobility (in cell 5) may involve temporary distancing of self from group, resembling the processes that occur when people reject categorization altogether (as in cell 3), as a step toward achieving inclusion in another more attractive group. As such, perceptions (e.g., distancing oneself from the group) and affective reactions (e.g., decreased level of ingroup identification) may be a first step necessary to prepare for other behavior (e.g., leaving the group).

By organizing our review according to a limited number of cells, we have tried to show that a range of observable responses may stem from a distinct pattern of underlying motives and regulatory mechanisms, due to credibility considerations relating to social reality constraints (Ellemers et al. 1999a, Spears et al. 2001a) and the feasibility of different response strategies derived from socio-structural conditions (Ouwkerk et al. 1999). Thus, identical forms of behavior (i.e., ingroup favoritism) may either constitute an attempt to improve the standing of the group (as when highly committed group members are confronted by group-value threat, cell 6), or result from the desire to salvage one's individual identity when it is inevitably submerged in the group (i.e., under low commitment and categorization threat, cell 3).

One important conclusion of this is that responses should not be considered in isolation or taken at face value as necessarily reflecting privately held views. Responses may often be strategic, addressing identity-expressive concerns and instrumental concerns directed by goals attuned to the dominant level of self, which take into account the constraints and possibilities present in context (Ellemers & Barreto 2000, Ellemers et al. 1999a, Spears et al. 2001a). Consideration of the different underlying goals and motives associated with combinations of self and

contextual conditions is essential to explain why superficially similar as well as different response patterns emerge. The joint examination of perceptual, affective, and behavioral consequences and the moderating role of group commitment provides insight into these patterns, as it helps to predict where essential differences are likely to occur.

Another theoretical point that can be derived from the discussion of our taxonomy is that identical conditions may have positive as well as negative consequences, both for the individual and from the perspective of the social system as a whole. For instance, whereas it has been argued that inclusion in a group may serve important self-protective functions (e.g., Leary & Baumeister 2000), we have seen that people may suffer from being categorized against their will, for instance by showing performance impairment due to stereotype threat. In our view, whether or not people feel committed to the group in question is an important determinant of how they respond to the relevant social context and its implications.

Similar interactive effects also imply that the role of group commitment can differ substantially as a function of group context as well as identity content. It is often assumed that high commitment leads to prosocial behavior, and that this is beneficial from a societal perspective. However, this is not necessarily the case. Group commitment only predicts prosocial behavior towards the ingroup, but can also cause outgroup derogation. Indeed, compliance with group norms may just as easily elicit individualistic, antisocial, or “deviant” behavior. Thus, even when focusing on a particular cell of our taxonomy, it is important to distinguish between different sorts of group contexts, and to specify the content of identity and norms prescribing behavior.

One important issue we have touched on only incidentally in this review is how precisely to explain the emergence of group commitment, or commitment to any level of self for that matter. This question has not been a high priority in social psychological research in which commitment is often been treated as an independent variable. Commitment to particular identities is likely to emerge over time according to the same process of interaction between identity and context that we have used to guide our analysis (Spears et al. 1999, Turner 1999). For example, chronic threats to group identity, especially where the social identity is difficult to escape, may turn the disinterested into the committed over time (Condor 1996, Doosje et al. 2001). Indeed, the strategic functions of the responses we have been discussing only make sense in a temporal context in which there is hope and scope to change an unfavorable status quo (Ellemers 1993, Spears et al. 2001a, Tajfel & Turner 1979).

To conclude, we have focused on social identity in different group contexts and have analyzed how both the individual and the collective self are implicated in a range of different group situations. In order to specify the different concerns and motivations that may play a role, we developed a taxonomy with which to analyze the perceptual, affective, and behavioral consequences of the different combinations of group commitment and identity threat. We think this provides a useful analytic tool with which to interpret the current literature on the social self

(both collective and personal) in group contexts, as well as serving as a framework for understanding future research in this area.

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