

Chapter 3

An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to present an outline of a theory of intergroup conflict and some preliminary data relating to the theory. First, however, this approach to intergroup behavior and intergroup conflict must be set in context, in relation to other approaches to the same problems.

Much of the work on the social psychology of intergroup relations has focused on patterns of individual prejudice and discrimination and on the motivational sequences of interpersonal interaction. Outstanding examples of these approaches can be found, respectively, in the theory of authoritarian personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) and in the various versions and modifications of the theory of frustration, aggression, and displacement (such as Berkowitz, 1962, 1969, 1974). The common denominator of most of this work has been the stress on the intraindividual or interpersonal psychological processes leading to prejudiced attitudes or discriminatory behavior. The complex interweaving of individual or interpersonal behavior with the contextual social processes of intergroup conflict and their psychological effects has not been in the focus of the social psychologists' preoccupations. (For a more detailed discussion, see Tajfel, 1972a, 1975.)

The alternative to these approaches is represented in the work of Muzafer Sherif and his associates (see Chapter 1), and has been referred to by

D. T. Campbell (1965) as the "realistic group conflict theory" (R.C.T.). Its point of departure for the explanation of intergroup behavior is in what Sherif (1966) has called the functional relations between social groups. Its central hypothesis—"real conflict of group interests causes intergroup conflict" (Campbell, 1965, p.287)—is deceptively simple, intuitively convincing, and has received strong empirical support (including Sherif & Sherif, 1953; Avigdor, 1953; Harvey, 1956; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961; Blake & Mouton, 1961a, 1962c; Bass & Duntzman, 1963; D. W. Johnson, 1967; Diab, 1970).

R.C.T. was pioneered in social psychology by the Sherifs, who provided both an etiology of intergroup hostility and a theory of competition as realistic and instrumental in character, motivated by rewards which, in principle, are extrinsic to the intergroup situation (see Deutsch, 1949b; Julian, 1968). Opposed group interests in obtaining scarce resources promote competition, and positively interdependent (superordinate) goals facilitate cooperation. Conflicting interests develop through competition into overt social conflict. It appears, too, that intergroup competition enhances intragroup morale, cohesiveness, and cooperation (see Vinacke, 1964; Fiedler, 1967; Kalin & Marlowe, 1968). Thus, the real conflicts of group interests not only create antagonistic intergroup relations but also heighten identification with, and positive attachment to, the in-group.

This identification with the in-group, however, has been given relatively little prominence in the

R.C.T. as a theoretical problem in its own right. The development of in-group identifications is seen in the R.C.T. almost as an epiphenomenon of intergroup conflict. As treated by the R.C.T., these identifications are *associated* with certain patterns of intergroup relations, but the theory does not focus either upon the processes underlying the development and maintenance of group identity nor upon the possibly autonomous effects upon the in-group and intergroup behavior of these "subjective" aspects of group membership. It is our contention that the relative neglect of these processes in the R.C.T. is responsible for some inconsistencies between the empirical data and the theory in its "classical" form. In this sense, the theoretical orientation to be outlined here is intended not to replace the R.C.T., but to supplement it in some respects that seem to us essential for an adequate social psychology of intergroup conflict—particularly as the understanding of the psychological aspects of social change cannot be achieved without an appropriate analysis of the social psychology of social conflict.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF INTERGROUP BEHAVIOR

Our point of departure for the discussion to follow will be an *a priori* distinction between two extremes of social behavior, corresponding to what we shall call *interpersonal* versus *intergroup* behavior. At one extreme (which most probably cannot be found in its "pure" form in "real life") is the interaction between two or more individuals that is *fully* determined by their interpersonal relationships and individual characteristics, and not at all affected by various social groups or categories to which they respectively belong. The other extreme consists of interactions between two or more individuals (or groups of individuals) which are *fully* determined by their respective memberships in various social groups or categories, and not at all affected by the interindividual personal relationships between the people involved. Here again, it is unlikely that "pure" forms of this extreme can be found in "real" social situations. Examples nearing the interpersonal extreme would be the relations between wife and husband or between old friends. Examples near the intergroup

extreme are provided by the behavior of soldiers from opposing armies during a battle, or by the behavior at a negotiating table of members representing two parties in an intense intergroup conflict.

The main empirical questions concern the conditions that determine the adoption of forms of social behavior nearing one or the other extreme. The first—and obvious—answer concerns intergroup conflict. It can be assumed, in accordance with our common experience, that the more intense is an intergroup conflict, the more likely it is that the individuals who are members of the opposing groups will behave toward each other as a function of their respective group memberships, rather than in terms of their individual characteristics or interindividual relationships. This was precisely why Sherif (1966, for example) was able to *abolish* so easily the interindividual friendships formed in the preliminary stages of some of his field studies when, subsequently, the individuals who had become friends were assigned to opposing groups.

An institutionalized or explicit conflict of "objective" interests between groups, however, does not provide a fully adequate basis, either theoretically or empirically, to account for many situations in which the social behavior of individuals belonging to distinct groups can be observed to approach the "group" extreme of our continuum. The conflict in Sherif's studies was "institutionalized," in that it was officially arranged by the holiday camp authorities; it was "explicit" in that it dominated the life of the groups; and it was "objective" in the sense that, by the terms of the competition, one of the groups *had* to be the winner and the other group the loser. And yet, there is evidence from Sherif's own studies and from other research (to which we shall return later) that the institutionalization, explicitness, and "objectivity" of an intergroup conflict are not *necessary* conditions for behavior in terms of the "group" extreme, although they will often prove to be *sufficient* conditions. One clear example is provided by our earlier experiments (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971), which we shall discuss briefly below, in which it was found that intergroup discrimination existed in conditions of minimal in-group affiliation, anonymity of group membership, absence of conflicts of interest, and absence of previous hostility between the groups.

Other social and behavioral continua are associated with the interpersonal–intergroup continuum. One of them may be considered as having a causal function in relation to the interpersonal–intergroup continuum. We shall characterize it again by its two extremes, to which we shall refer as “social mobility” and “social change.” These terms are not used here in their sociological sense. They refer instead to the individuals’ belief systems about the nature and the structure of the relations between social groups in their society. The belief system of “social mobility” is based on the general assumption that the society in which the individuals live is a flexible and permeable one, so that if they are not satisfied, for whatever reason, with the conditions imposed upon their lives by membership in social groups or social categories to which they belong, it is *possible* for them (be it through talent, hard work, good luck, or whatever other means) to move individually into another group which suits them better. A good example of this system of beliefs, built into the explicit cultural and ideological traditions of a society, is provided in the following passage from Hirschman (1970):

The traditional American idea of success confirms the hold which exit has had on the national imagination. Success—or, what amounts to the same thing, upward social mobility—has long been conceived in terms of evolutionary individualism. The successful individual who starts out at a low rung of the social ladder, necessarily leaves his own group as he rises; he “passes” into, or is “accepted” by, the next higher group. He takes his immediate family along, but hardly anyone else [pp. 108–109].

At the other extreme, the belief system of “social change” implies that the nature and structure of the relations between social groups in the society is perceived as characterized by marked stratification, making it impossible or very difficult for individuals, as individuals, to invest themselves of an unsatisfactory, underprivileged, or stigmatized group membership. A caste system, based on race or any other criteria perceived as immutable, is an obvious example, but it need not be the main example. The economic or social realities of a society may be such (as, for example, in the case of the millions of unem-

ployed during the depression of the 1930s) that the impossibility of “getting out” on one’s own, as an individual, becomes an everyday reality that determines many forms of intergroup social behavior. But even this example is still relatively extreme. Many social intergroup situations that contain, for whatever reasons, strong elements of stratification *perceived as such* will move social behavior away from the pole of interpersonal patterns toward the pole of intergroup patterns. This is as true of groups that are “superior” in a social system as of those that are “inferior” in it. The major characteristic of social behavior related to this belief system is that, in the *relevant* intergroup situations, individuals will not interact *as* individuals, on the basis of their individual characteristics or interpersonal relationships, but as members of their groups standing in certain defined relationships to members of other groups.

Obviously, one must expect a marked correlation between the degree of objective stratification in a social system (however measured) and the social diffusion and intensity of the belief system of “social change.” This, however, cannot be a one-to-one relationship for a number of reasons, some of which will be discussed below, although we cannot in this chapter go into the details of the many social-psychological conditions that may determine the transition in certain social groups from an acceptance of stratification to behavior characteristic of the intergroup pole of our first continuum—that is, to the creation of social movements aiming to change (or to preserve) the status quo (Tajfel, in press). It may be interesting, however, to point to the close relationship that exists between an explicit intergroup conflict of interests, on the one hand, and the “social change” system of beliefs on the other. One of the main features of this belief system is the perception by the individuals concerned that it is impossible or extremely difficult to move individually from their own group to another group. This is precisely the situation in an intense intergroup conflict of interests, in which it is extremely difficult for an individual to conceive of the possibility of “betraying” his or her own group by moving to the opposing group. Although this does happen on occasion, sanctions for such a move are, on the whole, powerful, and the value systems (at least in

our cultures) are in flagrant opposition to it. To use an example from social-psychological research, it seems hardly possible that one of the boys in Sherif's holiday camps would decide to change sides, even though some of his previously contracted friendships overlapped group boundaries.

The intensity of explicit intergroup conflicts of interests is closely related in our cultures to the degree of opprobrium attached to the notion of "renegade" or "traitor." This is why the belief systems corresponding to the "social change" extreme of our continuum are associated with intense intergroup conflicts. These conflicts can be conceived, therefore, as creating a subclass or a subcategory of the subjective intergroup dichotomization characteristic of that extreme of the belief continuum. They share the basic feature of the "social change" system of beliefs, in the sense that the multigroup structure is perceived as characterized by the extreme difficulty or impossibility of an individual's moving from one group to another.

The continuum of systems of beliefs discussed so far has been seen to have a causal function in shifting social behavior toward members of out-groups between the poles of "interpersonal" and "intergroup" behavior. To conclude this part of our preliminary discussion, we must characterize briefly two further and overlapping continua, which can be considered as encompassing the major *consequences* of social behavior that approaches one or the other end of the interpersonal-intergroup continuum. They both have to do with the variability or uniformity within a group of behavior and attitudes concerning the relevant out-groups. The first may be described as follows: the nearer are members of a group to the "social change" extreme of the belief-systems continuum and the intergroup extreme of the behavioral continuum, the more uniformity they will show in their behavior toward members of the relevant out-group; an approach toward the opposite extremes of both these continua will be correspondingly associated with greater in-group variability of behavior toward members of the out-group. The second statement is closely related to the first: the nearer are members of a group to the "social change" and the "intergroup" extremes, the more they will tend to treat members of the

out-group as undifferentiated items in a unified social category, rather than in terms of their individual characteristics. The vast literature in social psychology on the functioning of group stereotypes in situations of intense intergroup tensions is no more than an example of this general statement.

Thus, this preliminary conceptualization represents an approach to the social psychology of intergroup relations that takes into account social realities as well as their reflection in social behavior through the mediation of *socially shared* systems of beliefs. This convergence occurs at both ends of the sequence just discussed: at the beginning, because it can be assumed without much difficulty that the "social change" belief system is likely to reflect either an existing and marked social stratification or an intense intergroup conflict of interests, or both; at the end, because the consequences of the systems of beliefs arising from the social situations just mentioned are likely to appear in the form of unified group actions—that is, in the form of social movements aiming either to create social change or to preserve the status quo. We shall return later to an elaboration of the kinds of hypotheses that can be put forward concerning the creation of change versus the preservation of status quo. But before this is done, the realistic group conflict theory must be considered against this general background.

The implications of this conceptualization for intergroup relations in stratified societies and institutions are both evident and direct. Whenever social stratification is based upon an unequal division of scarce resources—such as power, prestige, or wealth—between social groups, the social situation should be characterized by pervasive ethnocentrism and out-group antagonism between the over- and underprivileged groups (Oberschall, 1973, p. 33; see also Chapters 5 and 12). However, decades of research into ethnic-group relations suggest that ethnocentrism among stratified groups is, or at least it has been, very much a one-way street. Two recent books (Milner, 1975; Giles & Powesland, 1976) summarize a great deal of evidence that minority or subordinate group members—such as the American Blacks, the French Canadians, the New Zealand Maoris, or the South African Bantus—frequently tend to derogate

the in-group and display positive attitudes toward the dominant out-group. In other words, deprived groups are not always ethnocentric in the simple meaning of the term; they may, in fact, be positively oriented toward the depriving out-group. Data of this kind are not consistent with a simple application of the R.C.T.

Some writers (including Gregor & McPherson, 1966; Morland, 1969; Milner, 1975, p. 93) have argued that the status relations between dominant and subordinate groups determine the latter's identity problems. (By *social status* we mean a ranking or hierarchy of perceived prestige.) Subordinate groups often seem to internalize a wider social evaluation of themselves as "inferior" or "second class," and this consensual inferiority is reproduced as relative self-derogation on a number of indices that have been used in the various studies. Consensual status itself—where subjective and accorded prestige are identical—is problematic for the R.C.T., which conceptualizes prestige as a scarce resource, like wealth or power. Status differences between groups, like other inequalities, should tend to accentuate the intergroup conflicts of interests. Therefore, according to the R.C.T., the impact of low status upon a subordinate group should be to intensify its antagonism toward the high-status group (Thibaut, 1950). Yet, under some conditions at least, low social status seems to be correlated with an enhancement, rather than a lessening, of positive out-group attitudes.

It could be argued that only conflicts of interest perceived as such create hostility. This requires that groups must compare their respective situations. And, according to some views, it is only relatively similar groups that engage in mutual comparisons; therefore, many forms of status differences will reduce perceived similarity (see Festinger, 1954; Kidder & Stewart, 1975). It follows that status systems may reduce social conflict by restricting the range of meaningful comparisons available to any given group. This hypothesis may be a useful tool to account for some of the determinants of social stability; but if it is taken to its logical conclusion, it can account for no more than that. It fails to account for social change (in the sense of changes in the mutual relations, behavior, and attitudes of large-scale human groups that have been distinctly different in status in the past), particularly

when the processes of change become very rapid. Status differences between groups often do not *remain* unilaterally associated with low levels of intergroup conflicts. For example, the generalization made above—that certain forms of political, economic, and social subordination of a social group tend to eliminate or even reverse its ethnocentrism—is already dated. Research conducted in the last decade or so reveals a changing pattern in intergroup relations. American Blacks (see N. Friedman, 1969; Hraba & Grant, 1970; Paige, 1970; Brigham, 1971; Harris & Braun, 1971), French Canadians (Berry, Kalin, & Taylor, 1976), New Zealand Maoris (Vaughan, in press), and the Welsh (Bourhis, Giles, & Tajfel, 1973; Giles & Powesland, 1976), for instance, now seem to be rejecting their previously negative in-group evaluations and developing a positive ethnocentric group identity. This construction of positive in-group attitudes is often accompanied by a new militancy over political and economic objectives (see Tomlinson, 1970).

But these developments do not rescue the R.C.T. in its original form. The very suddenness with which the scene has changed effectively rules out objective deprivation and therefore *new* conflicting group interests as sufficient conditions for the "subordinate" group ethnocentrism. On the contrary, there is often less "objective" deprivation than there has been in the past. An active and new search for a positive group identity seems to be one of the critical factors responsible for the reawakening of these groups' claims to scarce resources (Dizard, 1970).

In summary, the R.C.T. states that opposing claims to scarce resources, such as power, prestige, or wealth, generate ethnocentrism and antagonism between groups. Therefore, low status should tend to intensify out-group hostility in groups that are politically, economically, or socially subordinate. The evidence suggests, however, that where social-structural differences in the distribution of resources have been institutionalized, legitimized, and justified through a consensually accepted status system (or at least a status system that is sufficiently firm and pervasive to prevent the creation of cognitive alternatives to it), the result has been less and not more ethnocentrism in the different status groups. The price of this has

been the subordinate groups' self-esteem. On the other hand, whenever a subordinate group begins, for whatever reasons, to question or deny its presumed characteristics associated with its low status, this seems to facilitate the reawakening of a previously dormant conflict over objective resources. At the same time, it is likely that one of the counterreactions from the dominant groups in such situations will be to work for the preservation of the previously existing "subjective" and "objective" differentiations.

A tentative hypothesis about intergroup conflict in stratified societies can now be offered: An unequal distribution of objective resources promotes antagonism between dominant and subordinate groups, provided that the latter group rejects its previously accepted and consensually negative self-image, and with it the status quo, and starts working toward the development of a positive group identity. The dominant group may react to these developments either by doing everything possible to maintain and justify the status quo or by attempting to find and create new differentiations in its own favor, or both (see Chapter 12). A more detailed specification of some of the strategies and "solutions" that can be adopted in this situation can be found in Tajfel (in press); we shall return later to a discussion of some of them. For the present, it will be sufficient to state that, whether valid or not, the hypothesis raises some important theoretical problems that need to be considered. The first question is: what social-psychological processes are involved in the development of positive group identity? The second question concerns the conditions under which the status differences between social groups are likely to enhance or to reduce intergroup conflict. In order to continue the discussion of these questions, we must now abandon speculation and consider some relevant data.

SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION AND INTERGROUP DISCRIMINATION

The initial stimulus for the theorizing presented here was provided by certain experimental investigations of intergroup behavior. The laboratory analog of real-world ethnocentrism is in-group bias—that is, the tendency to favor the in-group over the out-group in

evaluations and behavior. Not only are incompatible group interests not always sufficient to generate conflict (as concluded in the last section), but there is a good deal of experimental evidence that these conditions are not always *necessary* for the development of competition and discrimination between groups (for example, Ferguson & Kelley, 1964; Rabbie & Wilkens, 1971; Doise & Sinclair, 1973; Doise & Weinberger, 1973). This does not mean, of course, that in-group bias is not influenced by the goal relations between the groups (see Harvey, 1956).

All this evidence implies that in-group bias is a remarkably omnipresent feature of intergroup relations. The phenomenon in its extreme form has been investigated by Tajfel and his associates. There have been a number of studies (Tajfel et al., 1971; Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel & Billig, 1974; Doise, Csepeli, Dann, Gouge, Larsen, & Ostell, 1972; Turner, 1975), all showing that the mere perception of belonging to two distinct groups—that is, social categorization per se—is sufficient to trigger intergroup discrimination favoring the in-group. In other words, the mere awareness of the presence of an out-group is sufficient to provoke intergroup competitive or discriminatory responses on the part of the in-group.

In the initial experimental paradigm (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel et al., 1971), the subjects (both children and adults) have acted as subjects in the various studies) are randomly classified as members of two nonoverlapping groups—ostensibly on the basis of some trivial performance criterion. They then make "decisions," awarding amounts of money to pairs of *other* subjects (excluding self) in specially designed booklets. The recipients are anonymous, except for their individual code numbers and their group membership (for example, member number 51 of the X group and member number 33 of the Y group). The subjects, who know their own group membership, award the amounts individually and anonymously. The response format of the booklets does not force the subjects to act in terms of group membership.

In this situation, there is neither a conflict of interests nor previously existing hostility between the "groups." No social interaction takes place between the subjects, nor is there any rational link between economic self-interest and the strategy of in-group

favoritism. Thus, these groups are purely cognitive, and can be referred to as *minimal*.

The basic and highly reliable finding is that the trivial, ad hoc intergroup categorization leads to in-group favoritism and discrimination against the out-group. Fairness is also an influential strategy. There is also a good deal of evidence that, within the pattern of responding in terms of in-group favoritism, maximum difference (M.D.) is more important to the subjects than maximum in-group profit (M.I.P.). Thus, they seem to be competing with the out-group, rather than following a strategy of simple economic gain for members of the in-group. Other data from several experiments also show that the subjects' decisions were significantly nearer to the maximum joint payoff (M.J.P.) point when these decisions applied to the division of money between two anonymous members of the in-group than when they applied to two members of the out-group; that is, relatively less was given to the out-group, even when giving more would not have affected the amounts for the in-group. Billig & Tajfel (1973) have found the same results even when the assignment to groups was made explicitly random. This eliminated the similarity on the performance criterion within the in-group as an alternative explanation of the results (see Byrne, 1971). An explicitly random classification into groups proved in this study to be a more potent determinant of discrimination than perceived interpersonal similarities and dissimilarities not associated with categorization into groups.

The question that arises is whether in-group bias in these "minimal" situations is produced by some form of the experimenter effect or of the demand characteristics of the experimental situation—in other words, whether explicit references to group membership communicate to the subjects that they are expected to, or ought to, discriminate. The first point to be made about this interpretation of the results is that explicit references to group membership are logically necessary for operationalizing in these minimal situations the major independent variable—that is, social categorization per se. This requires not merely that the subjects perceive themselves as similar to or different from others as *individuals*, but that they are members of discrete and discontinuous categories—that is, "groups." Second, a detailed analysis of the

subjects' postsession reports (Billig, 1972; Turner, 1975) shows that they do not share any common conception of the "appropriate" or "obvious" way to behave, that only a tiny minority have some idea of the hypothesis, and that this minority does not always conform to it.

The more general theoretical problem has been referred to elsewhere by one of us as follows:

Simply and briefly stated, the argument (e.g., Gerard & Hoyt, 1974) amounts to the following: the subjects acted in terms of the intergroup categorization provided or imposed by the experimenters not necessarily because this has been successful in inducing any genuine awareness of membership in separate and distinct groups, but probably because they felt that this kind of behavior was expected of them by the experimenters, and therefore they conformed to this expectation. The first question to ask is why should the subjects be expecting the experimenters to expect of them this kind of behavior? The Gerard and Hoyt answer to this is that the experimental situation was rigged to cause this kind of expectation in the subjects. This answer retains its plausibility only if we assume that what was no more than a hint from the experimenters about the notion of "groups" being relevant to the subjects' behavior had been sufficient to determine, powerfully and consistently, a *particular form* of intergroup behavior. In turn, if we assume this—and the assumption is by no means unreasonable—we must also assume that this particular form of intergroup behavior is one which is capable of being induced by the experimenters much more easily than other forms (such as cooperation between the groups in extorting the maximum total amount of money from the experimenters, or a fair division of the spoils between the groups, or simply random responding). And this last assumption must be backed up in its turn by another presupposition: namely, that for some reasons (whatever they may be) competitive behavior between groups, at least in our culture, is extraordinarily easy to trigger off—at which point we are back where we started from. The problem then must be restated in terms of the need to specify why a certain *kind* of intergroup behavior can be elicited so much more easily than other kinds; and this specification is certainly not made if we rest content with the explanation that the behavior occurred because it was very easy for the experimenters to make it occur [Tajfel, in press].

Two points stand out: first, minimal intergroup discrimination is not based on incompatible group

interests; second, the baseline conditions for intergroup competition seem indeed so minimal as to cause the suspicion that we are dealing here with some factor or process inherent in the intergroup situation itself. Our theoretical orientation was developed initially in response to these clues from our earlier experiments. We shall not trace the history of its development, however, but shall describe its present form.

SOCIAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL COMPARISON

Many orthodox definitions of "social groups" are unduly restrictive when applied to the context of intergroup relations. For example, when members of two national or ethnic categories interact on the basis of their reciprocal beliefs about their respective categories and of the general relations between them, this is clearly intergroup behavior in the everyday sense of the term. The "groups" to which the interactants belong *need not* depend upon the frequency of intermember interaction, systems of role relationships, or interdependent goals. From the social-psychological perspective, the essential criteria for group membership, as they apply to large-scale social categories, are that the individuals concerned define themselves and are defined by others as members of a group.

We can conceptualize a group, in this sense, as a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and of their membership of it. Following from this, our definition of intergroup behavior is basically identical to that of Sherif (1966, p. 62): any behavior displayed by one or more actors toward one or more others that is based on the actors' identification of themselves and the others as belonging to different social categories.

Social categorizations are conceived here as cognitive tools that segment, classify, and order the social environment, and thus enable the individual to undertake many forms of social action. But they do not merely systematize the social world; they also provide a system of orientation for *self-reference*: they create and define the individual's place in society.

Social groups, understood in this sense, provide their members with an identification of themselves in social terms. These identifications are to a very large extent relational and comparative: they define the individual as similar to or different from, as "better" or "worse" than, members of other groups. (For a more detailed discussion, see Tajfel, 1972b.) It is in a strictly limited sense, arising from these considerations, that we use the term *social identity*. It consists, for the purposes of the present discussion, of those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging. With this limited concept of social identity in mind, our argument is based on the following general assumptions:

1. Individuals strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem: they strive for a positive self-concept.
2. Social groups or categories and the membership of them are associated with positive or negative value connotations. Hence, social identity may be positive or negative according to the evaluations (which tend to be socially consensual, either within or across groups) of those groups that contribute to an individual's social identity.
3. The evaluation of one's own group is determined with reference to specific other groups through social comparisons in terms of value-laden attributes and characteristics. Positively discrepant comparisons between in-group and out-group produce high prestige; negatively discrepant comparisons between in-group and out-group result in low prestige.

From these assumptions, some related theoretical principles can be derived:

1. Individuals strive to achieve or to maintain positive social identity.
2. Positive social identity is based to a large extent on favorable comparisons that can be made between the in-group and some relevant out-groups: the in-group must be perceived as positively differentiated or distinct from the relevant out-groups.
3. When social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive either to leave their existing group and join some more positively distinct group and/or to make their existing group more positively distinct.

The basic hypothesis, then, is that pressures

to evaluate one's own group positively through in-group/out-group comparisons lead social groups to attempt to differentiate themselves from each other (see Tajfel, 1974a, 1974b; Turner, 1975). There are at least three classes of variables that should influence intergroup differentiation in concrete social situations. First, individuals must have internalized their group membership as an aspect of their self-concept: they must be subjectively identified with the relevant in-group. It is not enough that the others define them as a group, although consensual definitions by others can become, in the long run, one of the powerful causal factors for a group's self-definition. Second, the social situation must be such as to allow for intergroup comparisons that enable the selection and evaluation of the relevant relational attributes. Not all between-group differences have evaluative significance (Tajfel, 1959), and those that do vary from group to group. Skin color, for instance, is apparently a more salient attribute in the United States than in Hong Kong (Morland, 1969); whereas language seems to be an especially salient dimension of separate identity in French Canada, Wales, and Belgium (see Giles & Powesland, 1976; Fishman & Giles, in press). Third, in-groups do not compare themselves with every cognitively available out-group: the out-group must be perceived as a relevant comparison group. Similarity, proximity, and situational salience are among the variables that determine out-group comparability, and pressures toward in-group distinctiveness should increase as a function of this comparability. It is important to state at this point that, in many social situations, comparability reaches a much wider range than a simply conceived "similarity" between the groups.

The aim of differentiation is to maintain or achieve superiority over an out-group on some dimensions. Any such act, therefore, is essentially competitive. This competition requires a situation of mutual comparison and differentiation on a shared value dimension. In these conditions, intergroup competition, which may be unrelated to the "objective" goal relations between the groups, can be predicted to occur. Turner (1975) has distinguished between social and instrumental, or "realistic," competition. The former is motivated by self-evaluation and takes place

through social comparison, whereas the latter is based on "realistic" self-interest and represents embryonic conflict. Incompatible group goals are necessary for realistic competition, but mutual intergroup comparisons are necessary, and often sufficient, for social competition. The latter point is consistent with the data from "minimal" group experiments that mere awareness of an out-group is sufficient to stimulate in-group favoritism, and the observations (Ferguson & Kelley, 1964; Rabbie & Wilkens, 1971; Doise & Weinberger, 1973) that the possibility of social comparison generates "spontaneous" intergroup competition.

Social and realistic competition also differ in the predictions that can be made about the consequences for subsequent intergroup behavior of winning or losing. After realistic competition, the losing groups should be hostile to the out-group victors, both because they have been deprived of a reward and because their interaction has been exclusively conflictual. However, when winning and losing establish shared group evaluations concerning comparative superiority and inferiority, then, so long as the terms of the competition are perceived as legitimate and the competition itself as fair according to these legitimate terms, the losing group *may* acquiesce in the superiority of the winning out-group. This acquiescence by a group considering itself as legitimately "inferior" has been shown in a recent study by Caddick (1974). Several other studies report findings that are in line with this interpretation: losing in-groups do not always derogate, but sometimes upgrade, their evaluations of the winning out-groups (for example, Wilson & Miller, 1961; Bass & Duntzman, 1963).

Retrospectively, at least, the social-identity/social-comparison theory is consistent with many of the studies mentioned in the preceding section of this chapter. In particular, in the paradigm of the "minimal group" experiments (such as Tajfel et al., 1971), the intergroup discrimination can be conceived as being due not to conflict over monetary gains, but to differentiations based on comparisons made in terms of monetary rewards. Money functioned as a dimension of comparison (the only one available within the experimental design), and the data suggest that larger absolute gains that did not establish a difference in

favor of the in-group were sacrificed for smaller comparative gains, when the two kinds of gains were made to conflict.

There is further evidence (Turner, in press-a) that the social-competitive pattern of intergroup behavior holds even when it conflicts with obvious self-interest. In this study, the distribution of either monetary rewards or "points" was made, within the "minimal" intergroup paradigm, between self and an anonymous "other," who was either in the in-group or in the out-group. As long as minimal conditions existed for in-group identification, the subjects were prepared to give relatively less to themselves when the award (either in points or in money) was to be divided between self and an anonymous member of the in-group, as compared with dividing with an anonymous member of the out-group. These results seem particularly important, since the category of "self," which is by no means "minimal" or ad hoc, was set here against a truly minimal in-group category, identical to those used in the earlier experiments. Despite this stark asymmetry, the minimal group affiliation affected the responses.

The theoretical predictions were taken outside of the minimal categorization paradigm in a further study by Turner (in press-b). He used face-to-face groups working on a discussion task. In each session, two three-person groups discussed an identical issue, supposedly to gain an assessment of their verbal intelligence, and then briefly compared their respective performance. The subjects were 144 male undergraduates. The criterion for intergroup differentiation was the magnitude of in-group bias shown in the ratings of the groups' work. Half the triads, composed of Arts students, believed that verbal intelligence was important for them (High Importance, or H.I.); half, composed of Science students, did not (Low Importance, or L.I.). Half the sessions involved two Arts or two Science groups (Similar Outgroup), and half involved one Arts and one Science group (Dissimilar Outgroup). Finally, in the Stable Difference condition, subjects were instructed that Arts students were definitely superior and Science students definitely inferior in verbal intelligence; in the Unstable Difference condition, there was no explicit statement that one category was better than the other. These variables were manipulated in a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial design.

The results showed that the Arts groups (H.I.) were more biased than the Science groups (L.I.); that similar groups differentiated more than dissimilar groups in the Stable condition, but that they were no more biased (and sometimes even less so) in the Unstable condition; and that, on some of the measures, there was a significant main effect for out-group similarity: in-group bias increased against a similar out-group. Although these data are relatively complex, they do support some of our theoretical expectations and provide an illustration that variations in in-group bias can be systematically predicted from the social-identity/social-comparison theory.

We have argued that social and realistic competition are conceptually distinct, although most often they are empirically associated in "real life." In an experiment by Turner and Brown (1976), an attempt was made to isolate the effects on intergroup behavior of the postulated autonomous processes attributed to a search for positive social identity. Children were used as subjects, and the manipulations involved decisions by the subjects about the distribution of payments for participation in the experiment, to be shared equally by the in-group, between the in-group and out-groups that were made relevant or irrelevant to comparisons with the in-group's performance. Monetary self-interest (of a magnitude previously ascertained to be of genuine significance to the subjects) would have produced no difference in the distribution decisions involving the two kinds of out-group; it would also have led to decisions tending toward maximum in-group profit (M.I.P.) rather than toward maximum difference (M.D.).

M.D. was the most influential strategy in the choices. Furthermore, when the subjects could choose in-group favoritism (M.D. + M.I.P.) and/or a fairness strategy, they were both more discriminatory and less fair toward the relevant than the irrelevant comparison group. Other measures of in-group favoritism produced an interaction between reward level and type of out-group: more discrimination against the relevant than the irrelevant group with high rewards, and less with low rewards. Whatever may be other explanations for this interaction, we can at least conclude that when reward levels are more meaningful, in-group favoritism is enhanced against a more comparable out-group, independently of the group members' eco-

nomie interests. Indeed, insofar as the subjects used the M.D. strategy, they sacrificed "objective" personal and group gain for the sake of positive in-group distinctiveness.

On the whole, these studies provide some confirmation for the basic social-identity/social-comparison hypotheses. We shall now attempt to apply this analysis to some of the problems raised in the earlier sections of this chapter.

STATUS HIERARCHIES AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The reconceptualization of social status attempted earlier in this chapter needs now to be made more explicit. Status is not considered here as a scarce resource or commodity, such as power or wealth; it is the *outcome* of intergroup comparison. It reflects a group's relative position on some evaluative dimensions of comparison. Low subjective status does not promote intergroup competition directly; its effects on intergroup behavior are mediated by social identity processes. The lower is a group's subjective status position in relation to relevant comparison groups, the less is the contribution it can make to positive social identity. The variety of reactions to negative or threatened social identity to be discussed below are an elaboration of the principles outlined earlier in this chapter.

1. *Individual Mobility.* The more an individual approaches the structure of beliefs (most often socially shared) described in the Introduction to this chapter as that of "social mobility," the more it is likely that he will try to leave, or dissociate himself from, his erstwhile group. This usually implies attempts, on an individual basis, to achieve upward social mobility, to pass from a lower- to a higher-status group. In a four-group hierarchy, G. F. Ross (1975) found a direct linear relationship between low status and the desire to pass upwards into another group. Many earlier studies report the existence of strong forces for upward social movement in status hierarchies. Tendencies to dissociate oneself psychologically from fellow members of low-prestige categories are known to many of us from everyday experience; they have been noted more systematically by Jahoda (1961) and Klineberg and Zavalloni (1969), among others, and

indirectly by the whole literature on racial identification and preference. The most important feature of individual mobility is that the low status of one's own group is not thereby changed: it is an individualist approach designed, at least in the short run, to achieve a personal, not a group, solution. Thus, individual mobility implies a disidentification with the erstwhile in-group.

2. *Social Creativity.* The group members may seek positive distinctiveness for the in-group by redefining or altering the elements of the comparative situation. This need not involve any change in the group's actual social position or access to objective resources in relation to the out-group. It is a group rather than an individualistic strategy that may focus upon:

(a) *Comparing the in-group to the out-group on some new dimension.* Lemaine (1966) found, for example, that children's groups which could not compare themselves favorably with others in terms of constructing a hut—because they had been assigned poorer building materials than the out-group—tended to seek out other dimensions of comparison involving new constructions in the hut's surroundings. The problems that obviously arise here are those of legitimizing the value assigned to the new social products—first in the in-group and then in the other groups involved. To the extent that this legitimization may threaten the out-group's superior distinctiveness, an increase in intergroup tension can be predicted.

(b) *Changing the values assigned to the attributes of the group, so that comparisons which were previously negative are now perceived as positive.* The classic example is "Black is beautiful." The salient dimension—skin color—remains the same, but the prevailing value system concerning it is rejected and reversed. The same process may underlie Peabody's (1968) finding that even when various groups agree about their respective characteristics, the trait is evaluated more positively by the group that possesses it.

(c) *Changing the out-group (or selecting the out-group) with which the in-group is compared—in particular, ceasing or avoiding to use the high-status out-group as a comparative frame of reference.* Where comparisons are not made with the high-status

out-group, the relevant inferiority should decrease in salience, and self-esteem should recover. Hyman's (1942) classic paper on the psychology of status suggested that discontent among low-status-group members is lessened to the degree that intraclass rather than intergroup comparisons are made. More recently, Rosenberg and Simmons (1972) found that self-esteem was higher among Blacks who made self-comparisons with other Blacks rather than Whites. Other work also suggests (see I. Katz, 1964; Lefcourt & Ladwig, 1965) that, in certain circumstances, Black performance was adversely affected by the low self-esteem induced by the presence of the members of the dominant out-group. It follows that self-esteem can be enhanced by comparing with other lower-status groups rather than with those of higher status. This is consistent with the fact that competition between subordinate groups is sometimes more intense than between subordinate and dominant groups—hence, for example, lower-class or “poor white” racism.

3. *Social Competition.* The group members may seek positive distinctiveness through direct competition with the out-group. They may try to reverse the relative positions of the in-group and the out-group on salient dimensions. To the degree that this may involve comparisons related to the social structure, it implies changes in the groups' objective social locations. We can hypothesize, therefore, following the R.C.T., that this strategy will generate conflict and antagonism between subordinate and dominant groups insofar as it focuses on the distribution of scarce resources. Data relevant to this strategy have been referred to earlier in this chapter.

Let us assume as an ideal case some stratification of social groups in which the social hierarchy is reasonably correlated with an unequal division of objective resources and a corresponding status system (based on the outcomes of comparisons in terms of those resources). Under what conditions will this *not* lead to intergroup conflict—or, more precisely, to the development of competitive ethnocentrism on the part of the subordinate group?

First, to the extent that the objective and the subjective prohibitions to “passing” are weak (see our earlier discussion of the “social mobility” structure of beliefs), low status may tend, in conditions of

unsatisfactory social identity, to promote the widespread adoption of individual mobility strategies, or at least initial attempts to make use of these strategies. Insofar as individual mobility implies disidentification, it will tend to loosen the cohesiveness of the subordinate group. This weakening of subjective attachment to the in-group among its members will tend: (a) to blur the perception of distinct group interests corresponding to the distinct group identity; and (b) to create obstacles to mobilizing group members for collective action over their common interests. Thus, the low morale that follows from negative social identity can set in motion disintegrative processes that, in the long run, may hinder a change in the group status.

Second, assuming that the barriers (objective, moral, and ideological prohibitions) to leaving one's group are strong, unsatisfactory social identity may stimulate social creativity that tends to reduce the salience of the subordinate/dominant group conflict of interest. Strategy 2(c) mentioned above is likely to be crucial here since, in general, access to resources such as housing, jobs, income, or education is sufficiently central to the fate of any group that the relevant comparisons are not easily changed or devalued. Few underprivileged groups would accept poverty as a virtue, but it may appear more tolerable to the degree that comparisons are made with even poorer groups rather than with those that are better off (see Runciman, 1966).

As noted above, some writers (Festinger, 1954; Kidder & Stewart, 1975) imply that strategy 2(c) is a dominant response to status differences between groups. The assumption is that intergroup comparability decreases as a direct function of perceived dissimilarity. If this were the whole story, then, somewhat paradoxically, the creation of a consensual status system would protect social identity from invidious comparisons. The causal sequence would be as follows: similar groups compare with each other; the outcome determines their relative prestige; the perceived status difference reduces their similarity and hence comparability; intergroup comparisons cease to be made; subjective superiority and inferiority decrease in salience; correspondingly, the groups' respective self-esteems return to their original point. There may be occasions when this social-psychological recipe for the maintenance of the status quo can be observed in

something like its pure form. However, we shall argue presently that there are many status differences that do not reduce comparability.

For the moment, we can note that both individual mobility and some forms of social creativity can work to reduce intergroup conflict over scarce resources—though with different implications. The former is destructive of subordinate-group solidarity and provides no antidote to negative social identity at group level. The latter may restore or create a positive self-image but, it can be surmised, at the price either of a collective repression of objective deprivation or, perhaps, of spurious rivalry with some other deprived group. It is interesting in this context that the French Canadians, having recently gained a more assertive identity, are now apparently more disparaging of other minority groups than are the English Canadians (see Berry et al., 1976).

By reversing the conditions under which social stratification does not produce intergroup conflict, we can hypothesize that negative social identity promotes subordinate-group competitiveness toward the dominant group to the degree that: (a) subjective identification with the subordinate group is maintained; and (b) the dominant group continues or begins to be perceived as a relevant comparison group. As a great deal of work has been done in social psychology on the determinants of cohesiveness and loyalty within groups, we shall concentrate on the second condition. Let us consider a comparison between two football teams that have come first and second in their league, respectively. There is no argument about which has the higher status, but alternative comparative outcomes were and, in the future, still will be possible. When the new season begins, the teams will be as comparable and competitive as they had been before. In this instance, the status difference does not reduce the meaningfulness of comparisons because *it can be changed*.

This example illustrates Tajfel's (1974a) distinction between *secure* and *insecure* intergroup comparisons. The crucial factor in this distinction is whether *cognitive alternatives* to the actual outcome are available—whether other outcomes are conceivable. Status differences between social groups in social systems showing various degrees of stratification can be distinguished in the same way. Where status rela-

tions are perceived as immutable, a part of the fixed order of things, then social identity is secure. It becomes insecure when the existing state of affairs begins to be questioned. An important corollary to this argument is that the dominant or high-status groups, too, can experience insecure social identity. Any threat to the distinctively superior position of a group implies a potential loss of positive comparisons and possible negative comparisons, which must be guarded against. Such a threat may derive from the activity of the low-status group or from a conflict within the high-status group's own value system (for example, the sociopolitical morality) and the actual foundations of its superiority. Like low-status groups, the high-status groups will react to insecure social identity by searching for enhanced group distinctiveness.

In brief, then, it is true that clear-cut status differences may lead to a quiescent social system in which neither the "inferior" nor the "superior" groups will show much ethnocentrism. But this "ideal type" situation must be considered in relation to the perceived stability and legitimacy of the system. Perceived illegitimacy and/or instability provide new dimensions of comparability that are directly relevant to the attitudes and behavior of the social groups involved, whatever their position in the system. This is the social-psychological counterpart to what is widely known today as "the revolution of rising expectations." Providing that individual mobility is unavailable or undesirable, consensual inferiority will be rejected most rapidly when the situation is perceived as both unstable and illegitimate. This is probably the set of conditions underlying the development of ethnocentrism among Black Americans, French Canadians, and New Zealand Maoris, for instance. Vaughan (in press) reports that the perceived feasibility of social change (probably including, in this instance, the perceived illegitimacy of the present situation) is an important predictor of the developing Maori ethnocentrism; N. Friedman (1969) argues that what we may term the "cognitive alternative" of Black nationalism in the developing countries was influential in enhancing Black American social identity.

On the other hand, when the dominant group or sections of it perceive their superiority as legitimate,

they will probably react in an intensely discriminatory fashion to any attempt by the subordinate group to change the intergroup situation. Such perhaps was the post-bellum situation in the Southern United States: the Whites, threatened by those who had been their slaves, rapidly abandoned their paternalistic stereotypes of the Blacks as "childlike" in favor of openly hostile and derogatory ones (see Van der Berghe, 1967). The reactions of illegitimately superior groups are more complex (Turner & Brown, 1976). It seems that conflicts of values are reduced by greater discrimination when superiority is assured, but by less discrimination when it is unstable. This calls to mind some Prisoner Dilemma studies in which White discrimination against Black opponents increased the more cooperative was the opponent, but decreased the more competitive he was (Baxter, 1973; Cederblom & Diers, 1970). Baxter suggested in the title of his article ("Prejudiced Liberals?") that a conflict of values may underlie his data.

Many of the points and hypotheses we have advanced in this chapter are not, in themselves, new (see, for instance, M. Sherif, 1966; Runciman, 1966; Milner, 1975; Billig, 1976). What is new, we think, is the integration of the three processes of social categorization, self-evaluation through social identity, and intergroup social comparison, into a coherent and testable framework for contributing to the explanation of various forms of intergroup behavior, social conflict, and social change. This framework contains possibilities of further development, and, to this extent, we hope that it may stimulate theoretically directed research in areas that have not been considered here.

But some cautionary points should be made. The equation of social competition and intergroup conflict made above rests on the assumptions concerning an "ideal type" of social stratification in which the salient dimensions of intergroup differentiation are those involving scarce resources. In this respect, we have simply borrowed the central tenet of the R.C.T. There is no reason, in fact, to assume that intergroup differentiation is inherently conflictual. Some of the experimental work that is proceeding at present at the University of Bristol points to the conclusion that evaluative derogation of an out-group is conceptually

and empirically distinct from out-group hostility. On the other hand, social-identity processes may provide a source of intergroup conflict (in addition to the cases outlined above) to the degree that the groups develop conflicting interests with respect to the maintenance of the comparative situation as a whole. It seems plausible to hypothesize that, when a group's action for positive distinctiveness is frustrated, impeded, or in any way actively prevented by an out-group, this will promote overt conflict and hostility between the groups. This prediction, like many others, still remains to be tested.

"OBJECTIVE" AND "SUBJECTIVE" CONFLICTS

None of the arguments outlined in this chapter must be understood as implying that the social-psychological or "subjective" type of conflict is being considered here as having priority or a more important causal function in social reality than the "objective" determinants of social conflict of which the basic analysis must be sought in the social, economic, political, and historical structures of a society. The major aim of the present discussion has been to determine what are the points of insertion of social-psychological variables into the causal spiral; and its argument has been that, just as the effects of these variables are powerfully determined by the previous social, economic, and political processes, so they may also acquire, in turn, an *autonomous* function that enables them to deflect in one direction or another the subsequent functioning of these processes.

It is nearly impossible in most natural social situations to distinguish between discriminatory intergroup behavior based on real or perceived conflict of "objective" interests between the groups and discrimination based on attempts to establish a positively-valued distinctiveness for one's own group. However, as we have argued, the two can be distinguished theoretically, since the goals of actions aimed at the achievement of positively-valued intergroup distinctiveness often retain no value outside of the context of intergroup comparisons. An example would be a group that does not necessarily wish to increase the level of its own salaries but acts to prevent other groups from getting nearer to this level so that

differentials are not eroded. But the difficulty with this example—as with many other similar examples—is that, in this case, the preservation of salary differentials is probably associated with all kinds of “objective” advantages that cannot be defined in terms of money alone. In turn, *some* of these advantages will again make sense only in the comparative framework of intergroup competition. Despite this confusing network of mutual feedbacks and interactions, the distinctions made here are important because they help us to understand some aspects of intergroup behavior which have often been neglected in the past.

A further distinction must be made between “explicit” and “implicit” conflicts—a distinction that has to do with objectivity in a different way. A conflict can be “objective” despite the fact that the goals the groups are aiming for have no value outside of the context of intergroup comparison. This is so when the conflict is institutionalized and legitimized by rules and norms, whatever their origin, that are accepted by the groups involved. This was the case in Sherif’s studies in their phase of competition between the groups; and it also is the case in any football match and in countless other social activities. The behavior toward out-groups in this kind of conflict can be classified, in turn, into two categories, one of which can be referred to as *instrumental* and the other as *noninstrumental*. The instrumental category consists of all those actions whose explicit aim can be directly related to causing the group to win the competition. The noninstrumental category, which could be referred to as “gratuitous” discrimination against the out-group, includes the creation of negative stereo-

types and all other aspects of the “irrelevant” in-group/out-group differentiations so well described, for example, in Sherif’s studies. The first category of actions is both commonsensically and theoretically accounted for by assuming nothing more than the group’s desire to win the competition—although this poses all the theoretical “comparison” problems discussed in this chapter; the second category of actions can be directly and parsimoniously accounted for in terms of the social-comparison-social-identity-positive-ingroup-distinctiveness sequence described here.

The “implicit” conflicts are those that can be shown to exist despite the absence of explicit institutionalization or even an informal normative acceptance of their existence by the groups involved. The proof of their existence is to be found in the large number of studies (and also everyday occurrences in “real life”) in which differentiations of all kinds are made between groups by their members although, on the face of it, there are no “reasons” for these differentiations to occur. Clear examples of this have been provided in several studies mentioned in this chapter in which the introduction by the subjects of various intergroup differentiations directly *decreased* the “objective” rewards that could otherwise have been gained by the in-group, or even directly by the individual. Findings of this kind, which can be generalized widely to many natural social situations, provide a clear example of the need to introduce into the complex spiral of social causation the social-psychological variables of the “relational” and “comparative” kind discussed in this chapter.