

# Emeritus Prof John Charles Turner



## JOHN C. TURNER DIGITAL ARCHIVE

**John C. Turner (1947-2011)** made an immense contribution to Psychology and Science at the ANU and to his chosen field of social psychology (see Obituary below).

A Commemoration Colloquium was held for John at University House in April 2013. Invited guests included John's PhD students, post-doctoral fellows, main colleagues with whom he published, and those who have been influenced directly by his ideas and have contributed to widening their impact in and outside the field.

As part of the Commemoration a Digital Archive was established to highlight the importance of John's contribution and his ideas, which now serve as his legacy, and to focus on carrying these ideas forward in new and impactful ways. The plan is to grow the written material and video recordings in the coming months as the new Research School of Psychology web page progresses.

At present this archive includes a selection of the following;

### **Early research proposals related to social identity and self-categorization theories**

[Research Proposals 2 Tajfel Social Identity, Social Categorization and Social Comparison in Intergroup Behaviour 1973](#)

[Research Proposals 3 Turner Social Identification and Intergroup Behaviour 1978](#)

### **Conference presentations and abstracts**

[Abstracts & Presentations 1- Personal and Social Identity- Self and Social Context, Princeton, 1992](#)

[Abstracts & Presentations 2-Various](#)

### **Hand-written notes on core topics of social psychology**

[Turner Hand Written Notes 1 The Social Sources of the Self](#)

[Turner Hand Written Notes 2 A Social Cognitive Theory of Group Behaviour](#)

[Turner Hand Written Notes 3 A Self-Categorization Theory of Social Influence](#)

[Turner Hand Written Notes 4 How do Individuals Form a Group](#)

[Turner Hand Written Notes 5 The Individual and the Group in Social Psychology- A Social Cognitive Analysis](#)

[Turner Hand Written Notes 6- The Psychological Conceptualization of the Social Group](#)

[Turner Hand Written Notes 7 Introduction](#)

[Turner Hand Written Notes 8 A Social Cognitive Theory of Group Behaviour](#)

## **Manuscripts**

[Manuscripts 1 Tajfel- From the economics of expendable products to the social psychology of intergroup relations](#)

[Manuscripts 2 Turner & Brown Social Identity and Social Conflict](#)

[Manuscripts 3 Social identity, social categorization and social comparison in intergroup behaviour](#)

[Manuscripts 4 Self and Collective-Cognition and Social Context](#)

## **Photographic material**

[Photos from across the years](#)

## **Freilich Foundation Eminent Lecturer Series 2001**

"Nature of Prejudice: From psychological distortion to socially structured meaning"

<http://freilich.anu.edu.au/events/eminent-lecturer-series-2001>

- Please contact Kate Reynolds ([Katherine.Reynolds@anu.edu.au](mailto:Katherine.Reynolds@anu.edu.au)) if you have other material that could be relevant to the archive.

## **Obituary - John Charles Turner 1947-2011**

Social science has lost a brilliant scholar who transformed our understanding of mind and behaviour. Emeritus Professor John Charles Turner passed away at age 63. He was Professor of Psychology at Australian National University (ANU) since 1990 retiring with Emeritus status in 2008. He served two terms as Head of Department (1991-1994 & 1997-1999) and also was Dean of Science (1994-1996).

Over a 30-year period from the mid-1970s onwards, Turner made an immense contribution to the field of psychology. He is one of very few individuals who have shaped the character of the modern field.

Turner applied his brilliance, energy and passion to the intellectual challenge that sits at the heart of social psychology: how do individual minds make possible groups and society, and how does society change individual minds? In these times of intergroup conflict it is easy to appreciate the role groups and group beliefs play in shaping the world around us. Social psychology and the social sciences more broadly, though, have struggled to develop a detailed and robust account of how our psychology makes group behaviour possible and the way in which society, culture and groups come to affect the way we think, feel and behave. Over the last century the answers have been largely unsatisfactory - pointing to the role of early passive socialization, faulty psychology, simple conformity and peer pressure, or even suggesting that in the group we lose our rationality and are driven by animal instincts and emotion.

Turner's legacy is that he has given us elaborated theories (social identity theory and self-categorization theory) to explain and investigate the processes that underpin group life. These theories have wide appeal and are utilised extensively by scholars across a range of disciplines such as politics, economics, and management. His book *Rediscovering the Social Group* on which he collaborated with his PhD students Michael Hogg, Penny Oakes, Steve Reicher and Margaret Wetherell is the most highly cited in the field.

Born in South London on September 7th 1947 John was the eldest of eight children, all raised in a small council flat. At the age of 11, he received a scholarship to Wilson's School in Camberwell, UK (founded in 1615), but at school he was always conscious of the fact that his working-class

background set him apart other students. Nevertheless, he excelled at Latin and English and went on to study Psychology at the University of Sussex (1965-1971). Again, though, he had difficulty fitting in and dropped out several times, taking on intermittent work sometimes with his father who was a window fixer installing frames in high-rise buildings. On one of these occasions he got a job in a Fleet Street printing factory, and there his experiences as a trade union organiser played a formative role in shaping his thinking about groups, power and collective behaviour. He saw that groups and group psychology imbued members with a sense of purpose, pride and solidarity. These were the themes that reawakened his academic interests.

He returned to University to finish his undergraduate degree and PhD (1971-1974) at the University of Bristol where he worked with the late Henri Tajfel to develop social identity theory. Their question was when do members of negatively valued categories - women in a sexist society, black people in a racist society - adapt to oppression and when do they act collectively to challenge it? They saw the answer in the ways that people represent social structure: it is when people see inequality as unavoidable, as illegitimate and as unstable that they will join together to challenge it. These ideas have generated a whole new psychology of intergroup relations and collective action.

In the early 1980s Turner left Britain (as he often remarked, a refugee of Thatcherism) to work for a year at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Princeton, before moving to Australia in 1983. He worked at Macquarie University in Sydney and then moved to become Head of the School of Psychology at the ANU in Canberra.

In Canberra, John lived for the longest time in Griffith with his then wife Penny and their two girls, Jane and Isobel, both of whom survive him and have an interest in psychology. John loved Canberra and the Australian landscape. A favourite past time was gardening and he enjoyed visiting and strolling through the Australian National Botanic Gardens. His Latin skills came to the fore in learning the full botanical name for many native species.

During the latter phase of his career in Australia Turner worked intensively on the development of self-categorization theory, his analysis of the social mind. A critical insight is that people can define themselves as individuals who are unique and different from others ("I" and "me") or as a group member ("we" and "us"). Those that are similar to 'us' - ingroup members - are important in clarifying the relevant social norms and influencing our own views. As our definition of ourselves as an ingroup member (group identity) shifts so too can our views about what is appropriate and acceptable (social norms).

The fact that we can include some, or all others, in our own self-concepts reveals we truly are social animals with minds designed for sociality. A large body of research now has demonstrated that this ability to form a sense of "we" is critical for group behavior such as empathy, helping, trust, cohesion, influence, and leadership. In fact the route to sustainable social and behavioural change (in health, in dysfunctional communities, in the planet's survival) is through the group, the crafting of relevant identities and associated norms. As John explained in one of his last major papers, *Explaining the nature of power: A three-process theory*, it is through working together in shared identity that we create our own fate.

Across a number of projects with various students and colleagues John radically reshaped our understanding of the nature of the psychological group, the self, social influence, intergroup relations and prejudice, social categorization, and stereotyping. There are certainly other individuals who have made exceptional contributions in one or more major areas, but there is not any other researcher who has had such a dramatic impact across so many core areas. It is this range and the character of the impact which makes him one of the leaders of the science.

John was charismatic, passionate and charming. But it's also true that for some John could be difficult to deal with. He believed in getting it right and cared enough to consider and argue his case forcefully. For John, academia was not meant to be a genteel pursuit governed by norms of politeness. It involved a battle of ideas that have real social and political consequences.

But perhaps the person who suffered most from this intellectual intensity was John himself. He had a troubled personal life. He found people a source of great joy but also of great pain. In all he was married and divorced three times.

John's brilliant energy lit up social psychology for nearly 40 years. Although he will be sadly missed by those that knew him and have been inspired by his ideas, there is cause for celebration as he has illuminated the path forward well into the future.

Writers: Alex Haslam, Penny Oakes, Steve Reicher and Kate Reynolds  
John Charles Turner, Emeritus Professor of Psychology  
Born September 7th, 1947. Died July 24th, 2011

The material for this obituary was prepared for publication in the *The Canberra Times* and *The Guardian*. It has been modified to provide further information.

[**Note:** We retain the information below for visitors who wish to learn more about Professor Turner's work.]

## Australian Professorial Fellowship 2003-2007

I am currently in a full-time research position as an Australian Professorial Fellow funded by the Australian Research Council. This fellowship is attached to the five-year grant above entitled "From the inevitability of prejudice to the origins of social change: The emergence of perceived illegitimacy in intergroup relations". My co-investigator on the project is Dr Kate Reynolds. The general aim is to understand the conditions under which subordinate groups in some social hierarchy come to perceive their position as illegitimate where once they perceived it as legitimate. There is a great deal of data in social psychology showing that perceived illegitimacy affects ingroup and/or system identification, ingroup biases, intergroup conflict, social stability and compliance with established authorities. For example, people are much more willing to pay their taxes when the tax authority represents a system of government perceived as legitimate. The project is relevant to social justice, prejudice, social conflict, social change, power and authority, all areas of significant research in social psychology. Our work has already helped to produce a new theory of power and generated new insights into the links between social identity, (il)legitimacy and power.

## Brief Academic History

I did my undergraduate BA Honours in Social Psychology at the University of Sussex and my PhD in social psychology at the University of Bristol, both in the UK. After my PhD I worked in the Research School of Psychology at the University of Bristol, first as a research associate with Henri Tajfel and Howard Giles and then as a lecturer in social psychology and personality. In 1982/1983 I spent a year at the Institute For Advanced Study, Princeton, USA, in the School of Social Sciences, and then moved to Australia, to Macquarie University in Sydney. After some years I moved in 1990 to the ANU in Canberra as Professor of Psychology. I was Head of Department for two terms and Dean of the Faculty of Science for one during the 1990s. I was awarded the Henri Tajfel Memorial Medal by the European Association of Experimental Social Psychology in 1999 and was the Freilich Foundation Eminent Lecturer for 2001. I have supervised PhD and honours students at Bristol and Macquarie Universities and ANU, on topics including leadership, group cohesion, crowd behaviour, group polarization, the salience of social categorizations, minority influence, self-categorization and stereotyping, categorization and social judgement, the self-concept and the formation of stereotype content.