

SELF AND COLLECTIVE: COGNITION AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

John C. Turner, Penelope J. Oakes, S. Alexander Haslam  
and Craig McGarty

Department of Psychology  
Australian National University

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Professor J. C. Turner

Department of Psychology

GPO Box 4, ANU

Canberra, ACT 2601

Australia

Tel: 06 249 3094

Fax: 06 249 0499

Email: JCT655@CSCGPO.ANU.EDU.AU

### Abstract

This paper discusses the relationship between the self and the collective from the perspective of self-categorization theory. Self-categorization theory makes a basic distinction between personal and social identity as different levels of self-categorization. It shows how the emergent properties of group processes can be explained in terms of a shift in self-perception from personal to social identity. It also elucidates how self-categorization varies with the social context. It argues that self-categorizing is inherently variable, fluid and context-dependent, since self-categories are social comparative and always relative to a frame of reference. This notion has major implications for accepted ways of thinking about the self. The variability of self-categorizing provides the perceiver with behavioral and cognitive flexibility and ensures that cognition is always shaped by the social context within which it takes place.

The aim of this paper is to make use of self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987) to discuss the relationship between the self and the collective. The theory explains the emergence of group-level processes in terms of the functioning of the self-concept and at the same time assumes that group processes reciprocally mediate self-categorization and cognition. The focus here will be on explaining how our normal picture of the self and its role in cognition and social interaction changes if we take into account these relationships to collective phenomena.

Theoretical background: Personal and social identity

We can start by asking the question: is there a collective self? We do not mean simply a public self in the sense of one perceived by others, nor just some kind of self with social aspects derived from or perceived by social collectivities, but is there a collective self from a subjective, even private, point of view, as opposed to something which is inherently personal, unique and individual? Self-categorization theory argues that there is, that we need to distinguish between personal and social identity as two different levels of self-categorization, which are equally valid and authentic expressions of the psychological process of self.

Self-categories are cognitive groupings of self and some class of stimuli as identical and different from some other class. Personal identity refers to self-categories which define the individual as a unique person in terms of their individual differences from other (ingroup) persons. Social identity refers to social categorizations of self and others, self-categories which define the individual in terms of his or her shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other social categories. Social identity, therefore, refers to the shared social categorical self ("us" versus "them", ingroup versus outgroup, us women, men, whites, blacks, etc.).

The theory says that when we think of and perceive ourselves as "we" and "us" (social identity) as opposed to "I" and "me" (personal identity), this is ordinary and normal self-experience in which the self is defined in terms of others who exist outside of the individual person doing the experiencing and therefore cannot be reduced to personal identity. At certain times the self is defined

and experienced as identical, equivalent or similar to a social class of people in contrast to some other class. The self can be defined and experienced subjectively as a social collectivity.

The difference between personal and social identity is not a matter of the attributes which define the categories nor of the abstract level of inclusiveness of the categories used to define self. For example, a woman may define herself as intelligent both as an individual compared to other women and as a woman compared to men. As the only female psychologist amongst a group of male psychologists, she may, depending on circumstances, make intergroup comparisons between females and males and define self as "us" (women) in contrast to "them" (men), or she may use her sex-category membership to differentiate herself as an individual psychologist ("me") compared to the other psychologists present (i.e., to enhance her individuality within the group). What matters is how ~~the~~ the self is actually being defined in a specific instance, the level of comparison and self-categorization that is actually taking place and the subjective sense of self that results. Is the perceiver being defined as an individual person or as a social group, or indeed at even higher or lower levels of self-categorization?

The theory was developed initially as an analysis of group behavior. It proposes that as shared social identity becomes salient, individual self-perception tends to become depersonalized. That is, individuals tend to define and see themselves less as differing individual persons and more as the interchangeable representatives of some shared social category membership. For example, when an individual man tends to categorize himself as a man in contrast to women, then he (subjectively "we") tends to accentuate perceptually his similarities to other men (and reduce his idiosyncratic personal differences from other men) and enhance perceptually his stereotypical differences from women (Hogg & Tumer, 1987). His self changes in level and content and his self-perception and behavior become depersonalized.

Most research on the theory during the 1980s was directed at showing how depersonalization could be used to explain the major group phenomena. Research along these lines has taken place on

group formation and cohesiveness, cooperation and competition, social influence, social stereotyping and crowd behavior (e.g., Hogg, 1992; Oakes, Haslam & Turner, in press; Turner, 1991; Turner & Oakes, 1989; Turner et al., 1987). A key point was that since group behavior reflected a more inclusive level of self-identity than interpersonal behavior, it was characterized by higher-order, emergent processes and products. A social norm, for example, was not the sum or average of the views of individual group members, but the position which best defined the group as a whole in contrast to other groups. The aim at this time was to show that the hypothesis of the social categorical or collective self was necessary to provide a satisfactory explanation of the major group phenomena and that traditional theories assuming a dominant role for personal self-interest had reached the end of their useful life.

In order to predict when people would define themselves in terms of social or personal identity, an analysis of the general principles governing the use of self-categories was developed. We argue that variation in how people categorize themselves is the rule rather than the exception and that the collective self arises as part of this normal variation. Following Bruner, the theory explains variation as a function of an interaction between the "readiness" of a perceiver to use a particular self-category (its relative accessibility) and the "fit" between category specifications and the stimulus reality to be represented (Oakes, 1987).

Relative accessibility reflects a person's past experience, present expectations and current motives, values, goals and needs. It reflects the active selectivity of the perceiver in being ready to use categories which are central, relevant, useful or likely to be confirmed by the evidence of reality (e.g., Gurin & Markus, 1988).

Fit has two aspects: comparative fit and normative fit. Comparative fit is defined by the principle of meta-contrast (Turner et al., 1987), which states that a collection of stimuli is more likely to be categorized as an entity to the degree that the average differences perceived between them are less than the average differences perceived between them and the remaining stimuli which comprise

the frame of reference. Stated in this form, the principle defines fit in terms of the emergence of a focal category against a contrasting background. It can also be used to define fit for the salience of a dichotomous classification. For example, any collection of people will tend to be categorized into distinct groups to the degree that intragroup differences are perceived as smaller on average than intergroup differences within the relevant comparative context.

Nomative fit refers to the content aspect of the match between category specifications and the instances being represented. For example, to categorize a group of people as Catholics as opposed to Protestants, they must not only differ (in attitudes, actions, etc.) from Protestants more than from each other (comparative fit), but must also do so in the right direction on specific content dimensions of comparison. Their similarities and differences must be consistent with our normative beliefs and theories about the substantive social meaning of the social category.

To test the fit idea, Oakes, Turner and Haslam (1991) had subjects watch a video of a group discussion between six students, three of whom were Arts and three Science students. In the "conflict" conditions, the Arts and Science students disagreed with each other but agreed within each of these categories. In other conditions either all six students agreed with each other ("consensus") or one Arts student disagreed with the other five students ("deviance"). In half of all these conditions, a target Arts student (and agreeing others) expressed views that were consistent with subjects' stereotypes of Arts students; in the other half, the same target expressed views expected to come from Science students. The students' social identities as Arts or Science students became most salient in the consistent conflict condition where there was both comparative and normative fit. Here, subjects perceptually enhanced intra-category similarities and inter-category differences and attributed students' attitudes to their Faculty membership. There must be a systematic and meaningful correlation (Tajfel, 1969) between the perceived intragroup and intergroup differences and the relevant social categorization before individuals will be perceived in terms of that social categorization and their category identity accentuated. A definite implication, consistent with the evidence (Oakes, 1987), is

that collective conflict (where behavior is characterized by sharp intergroup discontinuities and strong within-group uniformities) should be a powerful determinant of social categorization.

The interaction between perceiver readiness and fit is assumed to be a general process at work in categorization, not merely one that applies to social and self-categorization. Broadly similar ideas about the determinants of categorization can be found in cognitive psychology (Neisser, 1987). Our work has been primarily concerned with the role of fit, but there is no implication that comparative or normative fit can function as sufficient explanations of the salience of self-categories. They are part of the explanation but not the complete account. Self-categorizing always reflects an interaction both between comparative and normative fit and between fit and accessibility (the latter in turn reflecting cognitive, affective and motivational factors). Empirically, a whole variety of variables can come into play and a whole variety of more or less complex outcomes is possible, depending on circumstances. Most of the time there are probably psychological and objective factors making for the salience of more than one self-category, which may reinforce or conflict with each other. The theory proposes that there is a continual competition between self-categorization at the personal and group level and that self-perception varies along a continuum defined by the conflict between the two and their shifting relative strengths (Turner & Oakes, 1989). In a sense, what becomes salient is probably rarely a single category or level of self-category. This is simply a convenient way of talking about the dominant self-category where self-perception reflects the conflicts and compromises between several competing, alternative ways of categorizing self in a situation.

#### The context-dependence of self-categorization

Our recent research testing the fit hypothesis has identified several important ways in which self-categories vary with the social context of comparison. The meta-contrast principle is explicit that categorizing is inherently comparative and hence is intrinsically variable, fluid and relative to a frame of reference. It is always context-dependent. Self-categories do not represent fixed, absolute properties of the perceiver, but relative, varying, context-dependent properties. Four important forms of this

variation can be derived from the fit hypothesis.

1. A critical form of variation already noted is the salient level of self-categorization. When do people define themselves and others at the group or the individual level, or at more or less inclusive levels (e.g., as part of the human group or as the "real me")? One prediction is that self-categorization tends to become more inclusive as the comparative context is extended to include others who are different from the self and prior others. As the context is extended, self and prior others will be re-categorized as "us" in contrast to "them", where previously the self was defined as "me" in contrast to "you" (e.g., Gaertner, Mann, Murrell & Dovidio, 1989; Haslam and Turner, 1992a; Wilder and Thompson, 1988).

A related idea is that social identity tends to become more salient in intergroup contexts and personal identity in intragroup contexts. Hogg and Turner (1987), for example, carefully stage-managed in vivo discussions between subjects so that either two members of the same sex disagreed with each other (intragroup comparison) or two males disagreed with two females (intergroup comparison). Under intergroup comparison, the perceived differences in attitudes between men and women are larger than the perceived differences within these categories. Under intragroup comparison, the perceived differences within sex categories and between persons are larger than within-person differences in attitudes. There is a salient meta-contrast between sex categories in the former condition and between individual persons in the latter condition. As predicted, males and females defined themselves more strongly as typical members of their own sex and stereotyped themselves more as males or females under intergroup than intragroup comparison.

The outgroup homogeneity effect (e.g., Simon, 1992) also illustrates the general prediction. We suggest that the tendency to perceive outgroups as more homogeneous than ingroups reflects the fact that judgments of outgroup members tend to be made on the basis of intergroup comparisons, whereas judgments of ingroup members can also be made on the basis of intragroup comparisons. Thus social identity will often tend to be more salient in judgments of outgroup members than ingroup

members, leading to a greater perceptual accentuation of intragroup similarities in the former case. Confirming this analysis, we have shown that relative ingroup homogeneity can be obtained where intergroup (rather than intragroup) comparisons are made in relation to ingroup members on appropriate ingroup-defining dimensions (Haslam, Oakes, Turner & McGarty, 1992a).

Another derivation of meta-contrast is the effect of the relative position of self and others within a context. Self and others who are extreme rather than moderate within a social context are more likely to be categorized themselves as members of the same ingroup, since, compared to moderates, they differ more from the majority of others in the context (Haslam & Turner, 1992a). Haslam and Turner (1992b) have been able to duplicate (both theoretically and empirically) the classic judgmental differences between extremists and moderates in these terms (see Sherif & Hovland, 1961). The comparative differences between own and others' positions which exist for extremists predict that they will tend to categorize people into us and them more sharply and polarize in their judgments more than moderates (seeing the world as more black and white than grey, and more black than white). Haslam and Turner (1992b) were also able to reverse the classic pattern under certain conditions - getting extremists to assimilate more than moderates and moderates to polarize and contrast more than extremists - by varying their relationship to the majority of others within the context as prescribed by the meta-contrast principle.

The meta-contrast principle can predict inter alia the effects of (a) extent of comparative context, (b) intergroup versus intragroup comparison, and (c) relative extremity of own and others' position on the level of inclusiveness of self-categorization. As the level increases, others categorized as different and contrasted away from self at a lower level are re-categorized as self and assimilated towards self at the more inclusive level (Gaertner et al., 1989). Fundamentally, it is where intergroup differences tend to be perceived as larger than intragroup differences that we tend to categorize self as "we" instead of "I" and see the included other(s) as similar instead of different.

2. Which specific self-category tends to become salient at any given level? Self-categories

must match the relations between self and others in terms of normative fit, content (e.g., Oakes et al., 1991). We know what particular social categories are like or are supposed to be like and we employ social categorizations that are consistent with our background knowledge and implicit theories (Murphy & Medin, 1985).

3. But it is not only that categorizations must match in terms of the specific content dimensions of comparison; it is also true that the meaning of the salient social categorization will vary to reflect the content of the diagnostic differences between groups in specific contexts. The content of categories is selectively varied to match what is being represented in terms of our background theories and knowledge. Directional differences are observed on specific content dimensions, and we selectively construct a meaningfully matching category. It is therefore not a fixed category content being applied: the category content is being selectively defined by what it best represents. Our research suggests that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the long-term knowledge we have about what different kinds of people are like and the actual social category which is constructed to represent them in a given setting.

Examples are provided by our studies of stereotyping and outgroup homogeneity. The "Iraq" study (Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty & Hayes, 1992b) showed that the content of the stereotype of Americans (what Americans are like) varied significantly from the beginning to the end of the Gulf War and with the groups comprising the frame of reference. For example, compared to the Soviet Union during the war, Americans were seen as aggressive; compared to Iraq, they were seen as less aggressive. At the beginning of the war, Americans were seen as more ambitious compared to the UK and Australia than when compared to Iraq; at the end of the war, this pattern was completely reversed. At one time, compared to one group, being American meant one thing; at another time or compared to another group, being American meant something else. In the homogeneity study (Haslam et al., 1992a), Australians judged on their own (by Australians) are seen as happy-go-lucky, straightforward and sportsmanlike; judged in the context of Americans (where perceived ingroup homogeneity

increases), they are seen as even more sportsmanlike but less happy-go-lucky, and a new trait also makes its appearance, pleasure-loving.

Comparative and normative fit are inseparable. A fitting category must optimize meta-contrast on the right dimensions and the differences which optimize such contrast selectively define category content. Self-categories are selected and constructed to represent meaningfully the observed relations between self and others on specific content dimensions in terms of people's background knowledge and theories and also vary in content as a function of these represented relations. The content of a self-category is not a fixed set of attributes applied in an all-or-none manner, but is shaped selectively by the context of its application.

4. The internal structure of self-categories (i.e., the relative prototypicality of members) varies with the context within which the category is defined. Categories are not defined by a fixed prototype (nor a fixed set of exemplars), but vary in the relative prototypicality of their members as a function of context (cf. Barsalou, 1987). This follows from and can be easily demonstrated by means of the meta-contrast principle (Tumer & Oakes, 1989; McGarty, Tumer, Hogg, David & Wetherell, 1992). What the typical "psychologist" is like will vary with the ingroup and outgroup members compared in any setting. Change the outgroup and the most prototypical psychologist (defined in terms of the meta-contrast between his or her average difference from outgroup members divided by his or her average difference from ingroup members) will change. We have shown in our research on group polarization, for example, that as a group becomes more extreme in an intergroup context, its more extreme members will gain in relative prototypicality over more moderate members (Tumer, 1991).

One reason the meaning of a self-category varies with context is that changes in context affect the relative representativeness of members. As more extreme members become more representative, so the judgment of the category as a whole will change. Self-categories and ingroups can be defined in diametrically opposite ways on different occasions (Hogg, Tumer & Davidson, 1990). They can have opposite meanings depending on context. This is not superficial, inauthentic change, but reflects

the fact that category identity is derived from the context within which it is defined and hence varies with context.

In this section, we have tried to make the point that the level, kind, content and internal structure of self-categories all vary with the relationship between self (and included others) and social context. What I and another may think may be the same and not change and yet the other may be seen as self or not-self, similar or different, solely as a function of changes in our relationships to background others. Self-categorization is inherently variable in order to represent our changing relationships to others.

#### The social variability of the self

These examples of context-dependence make several points about the self:

1. The variability in self-categorization is not arbitrary or chaotic but is systematic and lawfully related to variation in social contexts. There is a method, a general principle at work, which we suggest is the fit hypothesis (there are other social judgment theories which can explain some of the findings above, but there seem to be none which can comfortably explain the whole range of findings; see Haslam & Turner, 1992a, 1992b).

2. Self-categories are social definitions of the individual. They represent the perceiver in social terms, in terms of social relationships of similarities and differences to others in relation to a social context. We can say that self-categories are social representations of the individual-in-context in that they change with the context, not just with attributes of the individual. They are not representations of enduring individual attributes somehow adjusted for or displaced by context. In fact, it is more accurate to say that they are social contextual definitions of the perceiver, definitions of the individual in terms of his or her contextual properties. The meaning and form of the self-category derives from the relationship of the perceiver to the social context. The perceiver gains identity from being placed in context.

3. Self-categories are veridical in that their variation is systematically related to changes in

social reality. The variability of self-categorization is not a sign of the true identity of the person being distorted by external circumstances. On the contrary, variability is necessary if self-perception is to be veridical, accurate and useful, if it is to get right the changing contextual properties of people. Identity varies in order to represent the perceiver's changing relationship to reality (see Oakes et al., in press, for a discussion of the implications of this argument for the problem of the validity of stereotyping).

Putting these points together, a different view of self emerges from that currently dominant in social psychology. If self-categorization is comparative, inherently variable, fluid and context-dependent, then the inference is that the self is not a relatively fixed mental structure, but the expression of a dynamic process of social judgment. The particular self-categories that emerge in different contexts are the variable products of this judgmental process. We can speculate that self-categories are reflexive judgments in which the perceiver is defined in terms of his or her changing relationships to others within the frame of reference, presumably to enable the individual to regulate him- or herself in relation to an ever-changing social reality. They are selective in reflecting perceiver readiness as well as matching stimulus characteristics and embody long-term knowledge, beliefs and theories about category meanings. They are veridical in the sense that they are selected and constructed to match reality. We should not think of self-perception or self-definition as the activation of pre-formed, already stored self-concepts (whose meaning is defined prior to their activation), but as a flexible, constructive process of judgment and meaningful inference in which varying self-categories are created to fit the perceiver's relationship to social reality. The varying self-concepts represent the individual in terms of his or her changing social contextual properties.

We doubt whether the idea of self as a relatively fixed mental structure is meaningful or necessary. If self-categories are contextual definitions of the individual, how can they be stored prior to their use? How can they be stored as pre-formed givens independent of the context in which they are used? Social contexts are infinitely variable, as are our relationships to them, yet we are never at

a loss for an appropriate self-definition. If a stored set of self-concepts is adjusted in some way for new contexts, then theoretically what is needed is an explanation of how the adjustment occurs, a principle of the generation of the concepts used, and once we have one (as in the fit hypothesis, for example), it is not clear that the notion of prior-concepts-waiting-to-be-activated plays any further useful explanatory role.

The concept of self as a separate mental structure does not seem necessary since we can assume that any and all cognitive resources, including long-term knowledge, implicit theories, cultural beliefs, social representations etc., are recruited, used, and deployed as and when necessary to create the needed self-category. Rather than a distinction between the activated self and the stored, inactive self, it is possible to think of the self as the product of the cognitive system at work, as a functional property of the cognitive system as a whole. What defines a self-concept as a self-concept may not be the way it is stored or organized in mental structure, but the use to which it is put, the function it is serving, the object it is defining (i.e., that it is being used reflexively to define the perceiver). It is not that cognitive structures are not involved but that what defines a structure as self-defining may not be where it is stored or how it is organized. We can suppose we deploy cognitive resources flexibly to categorize self as and when appropriate. When and if a concept is used to define the individual who is doing the defining, i.e., reflexively, it is a self-concept; if not, then it is not a self-concept. The notion of a separate, bounded, relatively enduring system of interrelated self-concepts in a particular "place" in the cognitive system may not be needed to distinguish between self- and not-self-concepts - it can probably be done functionally.

The argument that self-categories are not stored structures is similar to that made by Barsalou (1987) about categories in general. He argues that categories are not stored in memory as fixed, invariant structures, but are generated on the spot as a function of an interaction between long-term, higher-order, "continuous" knowledge and the specific set of instances being represented. No specific instantiation of a category, he argues from his research on variable prototypicality ratings, is ever

completely identical to any other. They vary with goals, current context and recent experience. Our analysis is also compatible with Murphy and Medin's (1985) analysis of categories as "cohering" in terms of complex, causal theories of the interrelatedness of members rather than in terms of the fixed similarities of instances. They describe categories as arising from an interplay between the world and theoretical knowledge, created by "the whole cognitive system" (p. 314). Barsalou, Medin and others (see Neisser, 1987) are grappling with the problem of how to conceptualize long-term, organized, "theoretical" knowledge as something which is stored in memory other than in the form of category structures but which nevertheless functions as an essential cognitive resource for categorizing. Their ideas relate closely to the process we have called normative fit.

The idea that self-perception varies with the social situation is hardly a new one in social psychology (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Stryker & Statham, 1985). Social cognition researchers who conceptualize the self as a fixed, organized system of interrelated self-concepts nevertheless assume that self-perception varies with the specific subset of self-representations activated in any given situation (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Symbolic interactionism (Stryker & Statham, 1985) sees the self as arising in social interaction from processes of "reflected appraisal" and "taking the role of the other". The self is socially defined in interaction and varies with the social roles that one plays and the expectations, judgments and reactions of others. Some symbolic interactionist theories appear compatible with the social cognitive perspective - Stryker's identity theory, for example, conceptualizes the self as a hierarchy of differentially accessible, internalized role definitions. Others merge with social constructionism, stressing that the self is actively constructed and negotiated through social interaction, playing down the contribution of internal psychological structures and processes.

There are similarities between the present analysis and aspects of these models, but there are also real and substantial differences, which in the space available can be no more than alluded to. The suggestion here is not simply that self-perception changes with the social situation, nor is it only that different self-categories are activated as a function of social circumstances and perceiver motives.

A more precise argument is being made that self-categories are reflexive, flexible representations of the social contextual properties of the perceiver. Therefore the notion of self-concepts as stored, invariant structures and the associated model of category use as a process of activating an already existing representation (or some subset of such representations) are both being rejected. Instead of a cognitive-structural model of self-concept activation we are proposing an analysis of how self-categories are generated from an interaction between psychological principles of categorization, perceiver readiness, background knowledge and the social context of the perceiver.

Our argument is also not that the self is purely a social construction, that there is no psychologically based stability, continuity or unity in the self from situation to situation. The concepts of perceiver readiness and normative fit - reflecting an individual's motives, desires, memories, knowledge, habits etc. - provide definite internal psychological constraints on self-category variation. We are not putting an empirical view of continual flux in the self-concept but a theoretical one: that where there is stability and continuity in self-definition these are produced by the same processes which make possible fluidity and change. Stability in self-categorization is likely to arise from (a) the stability of the social reality that provides contexts for self-definition, (b) the higher-order knowledge frameworks used to give coherence to varying instances of behavior, (c) the social groups, subcultures and social institutions which provide perceivers with stable norms, values, and motives, and (d) social influence and communication processes which translate particular conceptions of self and others into social norms and validate the broader elaborative ideologies used in their construction. Another basic difference from social constructionist views is the emphasis on variability as reality-based rather than essentially arbitrary (cf. Gergen, 1977).

Unlike symbolic interactionism, the present analysis does not see the self as emerging from reflected appraisals in social interaction (the reactions and expectations of others), but from cognitive processes of social comparison and categorization in which the perceiver appraises self in relation to others, not from the perspective of others. We do not believe that the self is primarily created through

taking the role of the other (the problem is not so much that this may or may not be true, but that the psychological aspects of the process are vaguely specified and its explanatory power is unclear). Nor do we see self-concepts as primarily reflections of normative social structure and the perceiver's social roles. Again, in some sense these things must have an influence, but the social identity tradition of which self-categorization theory is a part looks at society from a different perspective. The structural-functionalist conception of society as an organized institution characterized by normative consensus is rejected for a conflict model in which the social group, not the social role, is the basic unit. From this perspective, conformity to roles and norms is an aspect of psychological group membership (Turner, 1991). It is assumed that people define themselves in terms of their social group memberships and that they enact roles as part of their acceptance of the normative expectations of ingroup members. The concept of role is therefore subsumed under the concept of group rather than vice versa as in symbolic interactionist theories.

#### Self, cognition and the collective

So far, we have made two points about the relationship of the self to the collective. First, the collective self reflects group and collective realities. It arises because group relationships exist socially and psychologically and therefore it is necessary and reasonable to define oneself in terms of them. We are defined by both intergroup and intragroup relations and in some contexts intergroup relations are more important. The personal self is not more real, basic or authentic than the collective self. They both arise from the same general processes and are aspects of the normal variation of the self, a variation built into its function.

Second, the transformation of the self embodied in depersonalization not only reflects group relationships but is, we argue, the psychological process underlying group behavior. There is a mutual interdependence between the psychological processes of self-categorization and the social realities of collective life. Self-categorization theory argues that shared social identity gives rise to the emergent, psychologically distinctive processes of group life and tries to explain how this emergence occurs.

That is, how human individuals are able to act as other than and more than just individual persons: how group loyalties can override personal relationships, how cooperation for collective self-interest can replace competition for personal self-interest, and how social influence within groups depends upon the shared identity of self and ingroup others.

Drawing these two points together, we can suggest that the self functions as the conduit by which collective processes and social relationships mediate the cognitive functioning of the individual. One aspect of this is the idea that the use of categories and their meanings are governed by social norms and therefore anchored in group memberships. This aspect is a stepping stone towards a more general idea that variable self-categorizing is a mechanism for translating the perceiver's place in the social world into a specific and selective cognitive perspective.

In his recent review of social influence research, Turner (1991) argues that it is the shared social identity of group members which makes it possible for them to produce socially validated knowledge, shared beliefs about ways of perceiving, thinking and doing which we assume to be appropriate in terms of the demands of objective reality. He further suggests that physical reality testing (which is really direct individual perceptual, cognitive and behavioral testing) and social reality testing (consensual validation, seeking the agreement of ingroup others) are not alternatives, but are interdependent aspects of achieving valid social cognition. Individual perception and cognition rest upon socially validated knowledge, theories, methods and categories, just as the power of social consensus to define reality for group members only makes sense if the individual views which make up the consensus have been independently tested. Social reality testing is a basic extension of human cognitive activity and competence. It is not true that human information processing is purely individual, private, asocial and non-normative. This is a superficially convenient but misleading fiction of modern psychology. The facts of social influence as studied by social psychologists for 70 or more years are witness to how individual cognitive activity is qualitatively transformed into an emergent group process by the functioning of the collective self. The knowledge, theories,

understandings embodied in the meanings of categories, schemata, cognitive structures (including self-categories and self-schemata) are collectively produced and validated. Categories are not only cognitive structures, they are also implicit social norms (McGarty & Tumer, 1992).

We suggest that the way we think about people and things, the way we categorize them, and the meaning of the categories we employ, vary with judgments from others that we accept or reject, and that acceptance or rejection, agreement or disagreement, is a function of context-dependent self-categorization. The same information may be accepted or rejected by the same kind of people in different social contexts depending on how they categorize self and others at the time. We have shown this in group polarization studies where the same information that is accepted when it comes from an ingroup is rejected when it comes from an outgroup (Tumer et al., 1987) or where groups may define opposite directions as normative in different intergroup contexts, agreeing, for example, to be "risky" in the context of a cautious outgroup and "cautious" in the context of a risky outgroup. The group norm, which specifies the correct judgment, will vary, moving towards either "risk" or "caution" (Hogg et al., 1990) or becoming more or less extreme in the same direction (McGarty et al., 1992), as a function of the social context within which the ingroup and therefore its prototypical position is defined.

Similarly, in minority conversion studies, where subjects may be influenced by a minority to extend their private category "green" to include degrees of "blue", David and Tumer (1992) have shown in a series of experiments that this kind of latent influence from a minority to change one's private categories depends on the minority being categorized as ingroup rather than outgroup. They also show that the same minority may be categorized as ingroup or outgroup, producing more or less influence, depending on the social context. Intergroup comparisons define the minority as ingroup in contrast to "them". Intragroup comparisons define the minority as outgroup in contrast to "us" (i.e., the majority). Minorities, David and Tumer argue, tend to have latent (private, long-term, indirect) influence rather than manifest (public, temporary, direct) influence, because they are categorized as

different from self in the immediate intragroup context of disagreement (i.e., in contrast to the majority of "us"), but as similar to self in the wider context of societal outgroups (i.e., in contrast to "them"). In the party room we reject the factional minority's views as wrong, but outside, later, facing our common enemies, we begin to embrace them.

What we call "private acceptance" or "conversion" or "informational influence" in the influence literature can easily be called private category change. It has been known since Sherif and Hovland (1961) that categorization-accentuation effects, reflecting the functioning of a cognitive process of categorizing (Tajfel 1969) vary with own position and self-categorization. The group polarization and minority influence studies demonstrate that own position and ingroup-outgroup categorization vary with the context within which self is defined. Categorical judgments are norms implicit in social identity and therefore, we suggest, subject to the same variability as self-categorization. How self is defined (as "Catholic", "feminist", "liberal", "progressive" etc.) directly affects the normative categories employed to represent the world.

As noted above, variability of self-categorization allows adaptive self-regulation in terms of one's changing relationship to social reality. It provides people with behavioral and psychological flexibility in that we are able to act both as individual persons and collectively and as different kinds of persons and collectivities on different occasions. It also implies cognitive flexibility. We hypothesize that the variable self functions as the mechanism whereby social realities are translated into "cognitive choice". We mean by "cognitive choice" the selective representation of phenomena from the vantage point of the perceiver. As the socially defined self varies, then so will the vantage point of the perceiver and the constraints upon and resources available for categorization. The accessing, co-ordination and deployment of relevant, normatively appropriate knowledge to categorize and perceive the stimulus situation will be selectively shaped not only by the stimulus reality but also by the varying self of the perceiver.

First, the variability of self affects directly the relevance of stimuli to the perceiver; it affects

the dominant goals, motives, beliefs, expectations, values and so on in the situation. It therefore controls perceiver readiness to use certain categories, employ certain knowledge or entertain certain expectations.

Second, the variable self specifies the normative background of knowledge, theories and beliefs about the social and physical world that it is appropriate for perceivers to share and apply in different situations. That is, as the group self varies, so do the norms which control the content aspect of category creation. It is worth repeating: the theories and knowledge that one will draw on to make sense of a situation vary with self-categorization and hence are context-dependent. This is not superficiality or hypocrisy or compliance; it is a function of how the self works and of the well-researched fact that the perceived validity of knowledge is a function of one's subjectively defined own position (Turner, 1991).

Third, the collective self functions to constrain the similarities and differences perceived between stimulus entities. It affects directly whether relational stimulus properties are seen as similarities or differences, and therefore are to be grouped or separated, through defining the judgments of others as agreement or disagreement. It tells the perceiver that the judgment of an ingroup other about an object is an agreement and that therefore the object is to be defined in terms of this "similarity" of attributes. Or, the opposite, that the judgment of a contrasting outgroup other is a disagreement and defines a "difference", to be resolved by some other kind of categorizing. Social influence from others categorized as similar or different from self is a pervasive constraint on the perception of the category identity of objects.

Thus the readiness to create particular categories, the background knowledge used to give them form and meaning and the tendency to construe certain stimulus properties as sharing identity or not on the basis of agreement or disagreement, all vary with the context-dependent self. Perception reflects the cognitive structures employed to represent the stimulus world. These structures are actively and selectively created through processes anchored in the varying self and the variable self

expresses the relationship of the individual to the social context. The collective self is therefore a mechanism for the social determination of cognition, for translating variation in one's "social place" into relevant "cognitive choice". Cognition not only reflects the stimulus array to be represented but also always the social context within which it takes place.

### Conclusion

In this paper we have tried to make three related points about the self and the collective: (1) There is a collective self which emerges as part of the normal variation in self-definition. (2) The collective self not only reflects but reciprocally makes possible the emergent collective processes and products of social life. (3) The self functions as the conduit by which these collective processes, relations and products mediate human cognition. The social categorical self underlies social influence processes which in turn shape cognition. The socially based variability of self generates reality-oriented, reflexive, flexible cognition. The information-processing system can modify the categories it creates to interpret the world in light of a social representation of self that derives the identity of the perceiver from varying social relationships. Reality is always interpreted from the perspective of a socially defined perceiver. The fact of self, therefore, makes the study of cognition necessarily social psychology. All cognition is social cognition from the perspective of the mechanisms of cognition, whether or not it is people or objects that are perceived.

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