Araştırma Makalesi   *Research Article*

THE CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

Ahmet Demirden*

Abstract: The Social Identity Theory (SIT) is a very influential theory in social psychology that has been utilized in various areas, including examining individual differences in task performance, leadership styles, and refining intergroup relations. This paper is a critical examination of SIT, discussing its achievements (strengths), limitations (weaknesses) along with responses to its critics (SIT defences). To provide the readers with a focused perspective, the discussion will be limited to intergroup relations, excluding other applicable research areas. In this framework, the original assumptions of SIT as postulated by Tajfel and the subsequent interpretations and contemporary applications is discussed. While acknowledging the significant contributions of SIT, I argue that it can still be further advanced in several ways. First, incorporating enhancement and positive distinctiveness motives at the group level and addressing personal motivational and affective processes at the individual level can further refine SIT. Second, there have been many studies on SIT conducted in experiments with artificially created social groups whereas only few studies investigated the theory in real life settings with existing social groups. This type of research can particularly be significant in applied fields (e.g., political psychology). Third, SIT could also benefit by considering of cross-cultural differences, (e.g., individualistic versus collectivist cultures), in relation to social identity formation and maintenance.

Keywords: social identity theory, inter-group relationships, social identity formation, political psychology, and social identity maintenance.

SOSYAL KİMLİK TEORİSİNİN ELEŞTİREL İNCELENMESİ

Öz: Sosyal Kimlik Teorisi (SIT), sosyal psikolojide, görev performansındaki bireysel farklılıkları, liderlik tarzlarını incelemek ve gruplararası ilişkileri geliştirmek de dahil olmak üzere çeşitli alanlarda kullanılan çok etkili bir teoridir. Bu makale, SIT'in başarılarını (güçlü yönlerini), sınırlamalarını (zayıf yönlerini)

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* Assistant Professor | Turkish National Police Academy: Department of Criminalistics | ahmet.demirden@pa.edu.tr | ORCID: 0000-0003-2864-3692.

ve eleştirmenlerine verilen yanıtları (SIT savunmalarını) tartışan eleştirel bir incelemedir. Okuyuculara odaklanmış bir bakış açısı sağlamak için tartışma, uygulanabilir diğer araştırma alanları dışında, gruplararası ilişkilerle sınırlandırılacaktır. Bu çerçevede, Tajfel tarafından öne sürülen SIT'nin orijinal varsayımları ve sonraki yorumları ve çağdaş uygulamaları tartışılmaktadır. SIT'in önemli katkılarını kabul etmekle birlikte, çeşitli şekillerde daha da geliştirilebileceğini savunuyorum. İlk olarak, grup düzeyinde geliştirme ve olumlu ayırt edicilik güdülerini birleştirmek ve bireysel düzeyde kişisel motivasyonel ve duygusal süreçleri ele almak SIT'i daha iddialı yapmaktadır. İkincisi, yapay olarak oluşturulmuş sosyal gruplarla deneylerde yürütülen SIT hakkında birçok çalışma varken, teoriyi mevcut sosyal gruplarla gerçek yaşam ortamlarında inceleyen sadece birkaç çalışma bulunmaktadır. Bu tür araştırmalar, uygulamalı alanlarda (örneğin, politik psikoloji) özellikle önemli olabilir. Üçüncüsü, SIT, sosyal kimlik oluşumu ve sürdürülmesi ile ilgili olarak kültürler arası farklılıkları (örneğin, bireyci ve kolektivist kültürler) dikkate alarak fayda sağlayabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Sosyal kimlik teorisi, gruplararası ilişkiler, sosyal kimlik formasyonu, politik psikoloji ve sosyal kimlik korunumu.*

INTRODUCTION

Social Identity Theory (SIT) has provided an instrumental conceptual framework in social psychology (Brown, 2000). This influence can be easily observed by looking into the number of references to SIT and related topics in major journals that have been substantially increased over the years (Abrams & Hogg, 1998; Brown & Capozza, 2000). Furthermore, SIT has attracted attention not only in Europe but also around the World (Brown, 2000). The influence of SIT can also be seen in various research interests such as attitudes and behaviour, performance, leadership, and intergroup relations. Some argue that SIT's period of conception in 1970s was a historical timing, at which time SIT offered the possibility of resolving some theoretical and meta-theoretical problems that social psychologists have tackled for years (Brown & Capozza, 2000). When Tajfel started to study intergroup behaviours, the most influential work in the field was Sherif's (1967) famous summer camp studies. In this quasi-experiment, the participants (camp boys) were placed in a competitive environment, which was followed by introducing complex real-life settings with cooperative aspects. Tajfel wanted to examine the findings of these experiments that negative interdependence was a must condition for intergroup conflict by bringing down the intergroup context to its complete essentials, then steadily adding related variables and observe their isolated and interactive effects (Oakes, 2002). For this purpose, Tajfel designed an experiment in which the participants were assigned into two *anonymous*, *non-interacting*, and *meaningless* groups. In this experiment, following a distribution task, the participants displayed behaviours that

significantly favour their in-groups and discriminated against out-groups (Tajfel, 1970). According to Oaks (2002) this startling finding is both *the most famous* in social identity theories and *the most misunderstood* one. The basic interpretations of the findings which went viral was that basically telling people that there are two distinct groups, and they are in one of them, would provoke out-group discrimination and in-group preference (Oaks, 2002). The consequences of this interpretations are discussed in the following section, which was one of the most influential impacts of SIT. This theory offered an opportunity of dealing with a classic social psychological problem of the relationship of the individual to the group. (Brown, 2000). On the negative side, many researchers subsequently jumped on the minimal group findings and the "simple categorization" to explain seemingly irrational intergroup conflicts. This interpretation fitted in very well with the perspective that intergroup conflicts are irrational that involve limited cognitive capacity (Oakes & Turner, 1990). However, some also argued that Tajfel did not intend to reduce social identity to "simple categorization", but he rather aimed at explaining prejudice, discrimination, and intergroup hostility without resorting to personality or individual differences or by shrinking a large-group occurrence to a collection of individual or interpersonal processes (Hogg, 2004). It is interesting that many supporters of SIT still put a strong emphasis on simple social categorization regarding in-group and out-group relationships in contrast to the earlier conclusion of Tajfel that social categorization per se is not enough for in-group favouritism but the identification with these categories must be tightly made (Oakes, 2002).

Despite a growing interest in the concept of identity in both social sciences and humanities, the theories of identity, including SIT, have not had significant impact on the applied fields, for instance on the study of political behaviour or political psychology (Huddy, 2001). However, SIT has been one of the most promising theories of identity to be applicable to applied fields. Even though SIT deals with the types of problems that political psychologists are greatly interested in, it has had very limited influence on political psychology, partly because SIT has been examining the sources of social identity not in real world settings, but in laboratory settings with artificial groups (Huddy, 2001). Another limitation is that SIT studies do not examine the formation of social identities and the participants are often assigned to arbitrary groups. Also, SIT does not touch on the potential cross-cultural differences, for instance, the differences between individualistic versus collectivist cultures in relation to social identity formation and maintenance. In what follows, first the assumptions of SIT are outlined, followed by its limitations along with responses to its critics.

I. THE ASSUMPTIONS OF SIT

The main assumptions and findings of SIT are so well known that they do not require a detailed account. Therefore, only several significant points are discussed in this section. In general, there are two divisions of SIT; one is put forward by Tajfel and Turner (1979), known as SIT and the other division developed by Turner et al. (1987), known as Self-Categorization theory. These two theories see the origins of social identity in cognitive and motivational factors: however, with different degree of focus on them (Hogg, 1996). As indicated earlier, to provide a comprehensive review, the discussions on the present paper are limited to SIT. Tajfel & Turner (1986) hypothesized that there is a significant difference between interpersonal situations (i.e., where one's behaviour is mainly determined by personological variables) and group situations (i.e., where one's behaviour is mainly under the control of category-based processes). SIT has been interested in the latter and postulated that social identity is derived mostly from group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It further assumes that people try hard to accomplish or maintain a positive social identity, thereby increasing their self-esteem, and that this positive identity develops mainly from favourable evaluations that can be made between the in-group and applicable out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to SIT, in the case of an "unsatisfactory" identity, one may seek to leave his group, *social movement* or find means of achieving more positive distinctiveness for it (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, social movement may not always be a practical option and cannot be easily utilized by individuals in real life settings. In other words, in-group or out-group factors may not allow individuals to leave their groups with easy. For instance, individuals may be identified as a member of a group due to their accent or physical characteristics by out-groups, which may in turn make leaving their social group very challenging. Also, in the case of an "unsatisfactory" identity responses may be different in individualistic societies than collectivist societies. These differences are discussed in more details in the following part; however, at this point it may be suffered to state that functions of social identity are not necessarily the same in every culture, thus, maintenance strategies may differ between cultures. Nevertheless, SIT placed its focus on the fundamental assumptions in relation to variables affecting social identity process and intergroup differentiation without paying attention to potential cultural differences.

Tajfel and Turner (1986) also postulated that there are three types of variables that can affect intergroup differentiation; (I) one must be personally identified with his group; (II) the circumstances should allow evaluative intergroup comparisons, (III) the out-group must be satisfactorily comparable (similar or proximal) and the relative distinctiveness should enhance with comparability. Brown (2000) suggested that these assumptions have been utilized in the examination of many

intergroup relationships, some of which are in-group bias, responses to status inequality, out-group stereotyping, and shifting intergroup attitudes via contact.

The incidents of in-group and out-group biases have been historically very well known, either from anecdotal observations (Sumner, 1906) or from more formal examination of the occurrences (Mullen, et al., 1992). The pervasiveness of this in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination can readily fit in SIT's concepts and SIT appears to provide good explanations for this phenomenon. (Brown, 2000). Furthermore, SIT's assumptions in relation to in-group favoritism have been replicated by many studies (Huddy, 2001). SIT has also been interested in the examination of status inequality since its conception. It presented a rational explanation for common attitudes towards "status inequality". A "need for distinctiveness" assumption of the SIT is in line with the prediction that people usually form the highest in-group bias out of the members of lower status out groups (Brown, 2000).

SIT also changed how stereotyping is studies in social psychology, specifically its cognitive aspect. According to SIT, social classification and stereotyping should not be understood only as information-processing tools that moderates and simplify individual thinking (Tajfel, 1981). SIT suggesting associating categorization and stereotyping directly to social identity processes, thereby emphasizing their social roles as facilitating making sense of specific intergroup relationships and justifying various behaviours towards out-group and in-group members. In short, SIT has put forward hypothesis that could be tested and applied to a broad range of groups (Huddy, 2001). A detailed discussion of the consequences of this shift in rethinking stereotyping is beyond the scope of this paper (for comprehensive review see Brown, 2000).

The early research of SIT focused on a cognitive viewpoint, attempting to explain perceptual distortions that came with categorization (Tajfel, 1981; Tafjel & Wilkes, 1963). SIT then focused on demonstrating the effects of simple social classification. Tajfel later modified SIT to include additional motivational variables along with cognitive factors (Tajfel, 1986). Huddy (2001) argues that Tajfel implied that individuals, labelled as members of a group and categorized themselves accordingly internalize the group label as a social identity. Subsequently, SIT assumes that simple categorization is sufficient to explain the development of social identity, but additional motivational factors are needed to create intergroup discrimination (Huddy, 2001). Category salience has been shown to facilitate the formation of a group identity (McGuire et al., 1978). For instance, ethnic minority children are found to be more likely to describe themselves with their ethnicity, provided that their ethnic identity is salient (McGuire et al., 1978). This suggestion was also confirmed in a meta-analysis in which group salience was found to endorse the creation of favourable in-group bias (Mullen et al., 1992). However, Tajfel and Turner (1979) also suggested

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motivational foundations of social identity, including: social mobility (denying one's group membership), positive distinctiveness via social change or social creativity (increasing the status of one's group). As indicated earlier, the option of social mobility is not practical or can easily be achieved by group members in real life group settings.

II. LIMITATIONS OF SIT AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

II.A. Development of Social Identity

Research on ethnic and national identities has shown that identity formation cannot be basically described by the centrality of a group designation (Huddy, 2001). SIT has mainly focused on studying the consequences of group membership in relation to intergroup conflicts, but it failed to provide a detailed account on the development of identity. This oversight has been consequential for practitioners, for instance, political behaviour researchers, who are interested not only events, such as discrimination and hostility, owing to the salient group distinctions but also in the development of identities (Huddy, 2001). SIT is yet to explain how an individual decide to identify with a group as a member. Nevertheless, the mechanism in relation to how an individual decides to identity with a group can have essential practical implications. Typically, in real life situations individuals do not arbitrarily find themselves as members of certain groups. Group memberships are intentionally attained either by prospective members or assigned by others due to some other specific reasons. This decision has been largely ignored by SIT researchers who in their studies typically assign individuals to different groups artificially and assume the uniform group identity development because of this arbitrary group assignments (Huddy, 2001). Followers of SIT argue that "the subjective aspect of identities" is central to SIT (Oakes, 2002, p. 812) and that self-categorization theory addresses how and why social categories become a part of self-identity (Oakes, 2002). However, they do not articulate the processes on how an individual decides to identity with a social group within the framework of SIT.

Another limitation of SIT is that it assumes social identity as an all or none occurrence. According to this perspective, once a group identity is perceived to be important then it becomes dominant (Tajfel et al., 1979). The problem with this assumption is that it cannot explain fluctuating identity strength that endures across circumstances. Huddy (2001) argues that it is challenging to adapt SIT to political events without dealing with identity choice and degree in identity power. The findings suggesting that basically being a member of a group can result in a favourable in-group bias have important implications in intergroup relations. Nevertheless, SIT's hypothesis on the nonexistence of group conflicts despite the presence of distinct and salient groups, or by the weakness of ethic identities

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within members of salient groups are not clear (Huddy, 2001). The question that would have practical implication is that why do individuals differ in the degree that they identify with a group despite salient group distinctions? This question has not been satisfactorily address by the supporters of SIT.

II.B. Cultural differences: Individualistic versus collectivist cultures

It is very well known that societies around the World display cultural differences. One major categorization of societies is the classification of individualistic versus collectivist societies. By the nature of being individualistic versus collectivist, social groups relationship with their members and the interactions with other members are likely to vary. These differences can be twofold; what an individual gains from being a member of a social group and what a given social group expects from its members may not be the same in individualistic versus collectivist social groups. Individuals who are members of a social group within individualistic categorisation may be allowed to have more flexibility in the formation, maintenance, or abandoning of social identity whereas the same level of leniency may not be available for the members of a collectivist social group. SIT does not appear to focus or investigate these potential cultural differences. Cultural differences may also be pertinent in the case of "unsatisfactory" social identity and how a member react to these stations and what a social group sees as an acceptable method for its members to deal with "unsatisfactory" social identity. Intuitively, one can expect individualist social groups being more flexible than collectivist social groups with regards to allowing their members to make individualistic decision; ultimately in collectivist social groups cooperation and following groups' objectives would have priority over individual members' goals and desires. By investigating above potential cultural differences between social groups, SIT may increase its applicability to practical and real-life issues.

II.C. Acquired versus Ascribed Identities

According to Taylor (1989) social identities can be categorized as acquired (obtained and described by oneself such as second career or divorce) and ascribed (recognized and labelled by others such as race and ethnicity). Societies may place various importance acquired versus ascribed social identities. For instance, in contemporary American society individuals' identity highly characterized by acquired identities (Huddy, 2001). The importance of acquired and individual choice in identity can be observed even with fixed identities such as race and ethnicity in a way that ethnic switching or defining one's race would be different from their parents. Although SIT put forward the concept of social mobility, the studies generally do not allow participants to choose their identity or study social mobility. Furthermore, social mobility does not appear to be practical in real life settings. Generally, in SIT studies participants are randomly assigned to groups and assumed to internalize their group memberships without a choice of identity. Also, SIT studies typically do not investigate individual variations in the

motivation to adopt such experimentally (perhaps artificially) ascribed identities (Perreault & Bourhis, 1999). Thus, SIT assumed deterministic view of social identity where social identity is determined by the salience of one's group membership, which neglects to investigate individual choice. Identity choice is an important feature of social identities particularly outside of laboratory settings but also can be influential in a laboratory. Perreault and Bourhis (1999) found that group identification can be stronger with the sense that lab group membership is made by choice.

The assumption that social identities are more frequently obtained rather than being assigned underlines the importance of individual variation in the process of social identity. Duckitt (1989) suggested that authoritarian behaviour may be explained partly by the firmer inclination of some individuals to identity with dominant groups (e.g., whites in the USA). In this line of inquiry, Perreault and Bourhis (1999) conducted one of the rare studies examining individual differences in identity attainment. They investigated the effects of ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, and personal desire for structure on strength of in-group identification in a group experiment. They discovered that all three personality traits are correlated with strength of in-group identification; however, but these relationships with identification seem to be motivated by ethnocentrism (Perreault & Bourhis, 1999). On the other hand, Huddy (1999) suggested that this study resulted in more questions than answers, such as what are the sources of a broad dislike of outsiders? Or are there supplementary fundamental personality traits that can explain both ethnocentrism and in-group identity embracement. There are also other individual differences that need to be considered as potential causes of in-group bias, including motivational factors such as tendencies toward belonging, uniqueness, and certainty (Huddy, 2001). It is particularly significant for applied social psychologists to examine why some individuals would strongly embrace a group identity, whereas others in a matching social context do not accept the same social group identity. SIT generally disregard personal variations and has not been able to sufficiently account for individual differences for social identity acquisition.

II. D. Group Differences in the Liberty to Acquire Identity

Identity acquisition can be influenced by both a group's permeability and vagueness around group membership (Huddy, 2001). The studies, examining the group permeability of group borders in various groups, found that individuals are more willing to abandon membership in a low-status group (Jackson et al., 1996). Examinations of group permeability also brings about questions in relation to the influence of *external labelling* on social identity acquisition. For instance, it may be more difficult for an African American to escape being labelled as such than a Caucasian from Italy in Turkey. In other words, less permeable group borders and more frequent external labelling can increase the chances that a group member

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will internalize group identity. On the other hand, attributes that can be easily concealed increases the role of identity acquisition choice (McKenna & Bargh, 1998). For instance, a French person can identify themselves (acquire) more easily as being Quebecois in Canada than a Japanese individual, with their similar accents and physical appearances to the local Quebecois.

SIT assumes group memberships are fixed and known. Consequently, empirical studies have focused on research with unambiguous naturally occurring groups or experimental groups with clearly defined borders (Huddy, 2001). This assumption does not fit well with some social groups, particularly groups formed on basis of ideology or beliefs. For instance, a person who supports needle exchange programs and legalized abortion, but also who is in favour of strict immigration policy and more government control on the market should be identified as a liberal or conservative? At what point would liberal or moderate perspective transform into conservative or vice versa? In other words, social identities are generally more fluid and relate to one another in real life settings than what is commonly assumed in a laboratory setting by SIT studies.

II. E. Boundary versus Meaning

As social identity acquisition involves a personal choice (acquired identity), investigating the relationship between being a in a social category and internalizing its meaning may have important implications. SIT has focused on the degree at which group borders define group membership and form group identity attachments. This focus on group borders, however, occurred at the expense of the meaning of group membership internalizing (Deaux, 1993). If all social group identities were basically assigned to all group members, an understanding of group borders could be suffed to analyses the consequences of a group membership. Nevertheless, once group identities attained, the level at which internalizing a meaning of group membership can have a strong impact over the voluntary acceptance of an identity and its consequences when attained (Huddy, 2001). Disregarding a member's internalizing of a group membership is problematic for application of the theory. For instance, political psychologists do not focus solely on group since the process of labelling groups and thereby defining group borders, is entangled with the meaning of group membership. Group boundaries are clearly important in relation to social identity categories, such as darker skin colour for African Americans; however, it is also imperative to examine how an individual internalizes the meaning of such social identity (e.g., being African American). In other words, a darker skin colour is an important feature of being African American as a social category, but internalizing its membership is not necessarily correlate with the darkness of skin colour. In diverse groups, group members may have various group identity (Cohen, 1986). Diverse meanings may occur because of various factors, for instance, the identical group is present in various geographical regions or in distinctive subcultures or

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even because of the meaning of group membership is being disputed as a result of political reasons (Huddy, 2001). I have lived in Canada for more than 15 years where I observed that Turkish Canadians born in Canada more likely to express a bi-national identity as a Turkish-Canadian; however, individuals born in Turkey, despite their dual citizenship, tend not to hold bi-national identity. They tend to identify themselves either as Turkish or less frequently as Canadian. Furthermore, the internal meaning of a group can be substantially different from its meaning to others, particularly out-group members (Cohen, 1986). For instance, an individual speaking with Turkish accent in Toronto may face resistance by some other individuals when he identifies himself as Torontonian. Therefore, researchers should examine the formation of social identity from the point of views of both in-group members and out-group members to analyses the meaning of group membership. It is essential to enhance SIT research to include several real-world identities of diverse strength. The main issue is not that SIT is not applicable to identities that are present outside of lab, but the personal preference, social mobility, and internalization of such identities are scarcely discussed in SIT studies. Furthermore, to understand the process of identity development, SIT needs to focus on the characteristics of individuals that make them more inclined to accept certain group identity (Huddy, 2001). For instance, some individuals may tend to adopt bi-national, or other multiple identities, whereas others may tend to define themselves with one-national, or another social group identity. Therefore, it may also be informative to investigate at what point these individualistic people are compelled by societal forces to internalized in-group membership and develop dislike towards an out-group.

II. F. The Relationship Between Group Identification and In-group bias

SIT assumes that a positive social identity is based on favourable intergroup evaluations. According to this assumption, there should be a positive correlation between level of group identification and the extent of positive intergroup differentiation or favourable in-group bias (Brown, 2000). The review of studies examining this relationship found that the support for SIT's assumption was modest at best (Hinkle & Brown, 1990). Among the 14 studies examined, the overall correlation between the strength of identification and degree of bias was very weak (+0,08); and even though majority of the relationship were positive, the correlation was not strong (+0,24) (Hinkle & Brown, 1990). The findings suggest that social groups, group frameworks, and even group members may be differentiated within the dimensions of individualism, collectivism, and autonomous relational direction. Another researcher also found that the relationship between group identification and bias suggested by SIT is most likely to exist in the collectivist and relational combination, whereas it is least likely to occur in the individualist autonomous cell (Brown, et al., 1992). Furthermore, Turner (1999) criticized the justification for the identification and bias hypothesis in the following terms: favourable in-group bias is only one of the several identity

protection tactics. Secondly, studies investigating this hypothesis has always been correlation, therefore there could be some other variables responsible for the relationship. It needs to be noted that many of these correlational studies have been conducted in the field with real-life groups in which experimental manipulations of identification and random assignments to conditions were not practical. Taxonomic hypothesis is essentially problematic as they assume that group characteristics are static and unchanging; however, group characteristics can be fluid and contextually change.

One of the main assumptions of SIT is that favourable in-group bias is induced by an aspiration to see one's group and oneself in a better position (Tajfel, 1979). Consequently, a causal relationship between intergroup differentiation and self-esteem has been assumed (Brown, 2000). However, years of research have not conclusively supported this relationship with conflicting findings over the years (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). Some researchers suggest that conflicting and inconsistent findings in this relationship may be due to social desirability factors (Farnham, et al., 1999). In fact, Farnham et al. (1999) demonstrated that implicit assessment of self-esteem correlated with an implicit assessment of in-group bias. With the conflicting findings, some researchers in favour of SIT argued that self-esteem should be seen as a by-product of in-group bias not as a direct cause or effect (Hogg & Abrams, 1990).

II. G. The effects of Intergroup Similarity

SIT is fundamentally a theory of group separation, and it aims to explain the process in which group members tend to perceive their groups unique and superior to out-groups (Brown, 2000). Therefore, groups that find themselves to be like each other should be particularly motivated to display intergroup discrimination (Turner, 1978). This assumption has been tested thoroughly and has received uncertain support (Brown, 2000). Some findings suggest that similar groups display more intergroup attraction and less bias than dissimilar groups (Brown & Abrams, 1986; Grant, 1993). One possible explanation for these contradictory findings come from the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT) by Brewer (1991). Brewer (1991) suggests that individuals seek for a middle ground between the conflicting needs for distinctiveness and assimilation. This compromise brings out an 'optimal' selection of in-group for identification functions and the same trade-off may be functional at the intergroup level.

SIT also predicts that members of low-status groups could have a few identity-protection responses (Turner, 1978). These strategies include leaving the group or challenging the dominant group's superior status position. An examination of these strategies is beyond the scope of this paper (for a comprehensive review see Doosje et al., 1995b; Klink, 1998). However, it needs to be noted that an important question remains unanswered with this prediction; which one of these conflicting strategies would be used in each intergroup relationship. Ellemers and colleagues

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(1997) suggested that the more committed group members would be the least likely to adapt leaving the group, which can be described as an individual mobility solution in case of unsatisfactory identity. This view has been also supported by field research, suggesting there is a significant negative correlation between group identification and individualistic strategies (Abrams et al., 1998). Nevertheless, efforts to predict what other tactics could be used by low-status groups have been less successful (Brown, 2000). In fact, Brown and Ross (1982) find that even under identity threat situations many other strategies are used by both low-status and high-status groups. Therefore, SIT's prediction on how low-status group members maintain their social identity needs to be refined. SIT should reconsider the concept of social identity and that strength of group identification and favourable in-group bias may be concurrently high in certain intergroup relationship, but that does not necessarily mean they are related (Brown, 2000). There may be some other variables impacting both level of group identification and in-group bias, such as presence of another social group competing for limited resources. Some researchers also argue that social identities can be obtained in ways other than via intergroup comparisons (Hinkle & Brown, 1990).

Furthermore, SIT does not appear to make a distinction between various kinds of groups. SIT considers all group psychologically comparable for their members in relation to the social identity processes. Nevertheless, research suggest that different groups facilitate very different identity functions (Deaux et al., 1995). Some social groups function as entertainment or high status for their members, whereas some others provide safety and security for its members. For instance, being a member of a tennis club may bring high social status and entertaining, whereas being accepted as a member to a social group in a prison may have survival implications for its members. Thus, SIT may be further refined by incorporating group diversity in identity processes and social functions.

II. H. Adding an Affective Piece

Some suggest that SIT needs to examine the mechanisms of out-group hostility and negative emotions (Brown, 2000). As Brewer (1999) indicated SIT can be defined as a theory of in-group love rather than out-group hate. However, in contemporary societies most of intergroup relationships are stamped by real expressions of outright prejudice and aggression. In order for SIT to examine and solve these real social dilemmas it should consider and study such manifestation of negative emotions (Brown, 2000). Smith (1993) attempted to included appraisal theories of affect within the SIT structure and argued that it may be practical to differentiate between five main emotional state. These are fear, disgust, contempt, anger, and jealousy, each of which could have its own antecedent and consequences for intergroup behaviour. For instance, according to Smith fear and jealousy for out-siders could be more characteristic of lower-status groups, whereas disgust and anger could be more likely be observed in dominant

groups (Smith, 1993). Another attempt to integrate emotions into intergroup relations was made by Fiske and colleagues (1999). They postulated that variety of traits can be thought along two dimensions, competence, and warmth. Thus, depending on the dimension that exists in any specific stereotype, intergroup orientations of (dis) respect and (dis) liking may occur correspondingly (Fiske et al, 1999). Brewer (1999) also suggested several variables that may facilitate the conversion of intergroup narcissism into out-group belittlement or worse. These social psychological variables include societal complexity (fewer complex societies may have tendency to intense intergroup hatred than more complex ones), the existence of super-ordinate goals without a matching super-ordinate identity (groups may see it undesirable the loss of subgroup identity implied by the cooperative ventures), the endorsement of mutual values out-groups (this may oddly enough make common declarations for group distinctiveness more intimidating) (Brown, 2000). Lastly, Leyens et al. (2000) suggested that some emotional traits are generally seen as fundamentally human (for instance shame, resentment, love), whereas some others are regarded as being shared with animals (for instance anger, pain, pleasure). They have discovered some evidence that essentially human emotions are most likely to be associated with in-group members while other emotions with out-group members. The implication of this perspective is significant; that is people tend to see in-group members more humane by associating human emotions with them, while they tend to perceive out-group members less humane by associating them with other emotions.

CONCLUSION

SIT is a prominent social identity theory that can be potentially applied to real life settings, and subsequently it can be utilized in the applied fields such as political psychology. However, current interest in SIT in the applied fields has been very limited. In this critical review, I aimed at summarizing both SIT's strengths as well as its limitations that have had hindered its applications in the applied fields. Furthermore, there are some discrepancies between SIT's assumptions as well predictions in its conception and subsequent interpretations by the followers of SIT, which may also contribute the limited application of SIT. The examples of these discrepancies were discussed in this review.

Finally, some of the suggestions on refining SIT were discussed. I think that there is a great potential for SIT in applied fields. This objective may be facilitated by (I) focusing on both the consequences of social categorization and how individuals decide to or ascribed to these social categories, (II) examining individual and social differences in identity acquisition, (III) incorporating group differences in the liberty to acquire and change social identity, (IV) adding an affective piece into the model, and (V) taking cultural differences into account. This contemporary perspective is likely to make SIT a better fit in applied settings.

Applied fields need practical social identity theories and SIT has the potential to fulfil to this need.

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