

Introduction

Individual-group relationship has proved very difficult to theorise in SP.

Issues of scale - lots of different sizes and types of groups - e.g. family, local communities, friends, work and much larger groups - e.g. gender, faith, sexuality, ethnicity.

Early SP avoided the mega-scale groups in favour of small-scale groups of people who met regularly in person - e.g. **Triplet**'s (1898) study of social facilitation - children working in pairs => group = the presence of another person.

This has continued and this type of group is the one which has been studied mostly by SP. Often called intragroup relations - e.g. **Allport** - groups act simply to intensify the habits and responses of individuals => groups are nothing more than the aggregated responses of individuals.

Asch - 'conformity' studies - treats social groups as contexts which affect individual behaviour - not as meaningful entities in their own right.

McGarty and Haslam - looked at the immediate effect of other group members on the individual and summarises this as the effect of social influence on social interaction and social perception.

All four of these views are individualistic in focus.

Group dynamic tradition (based on psychoanalysis) looks at conscious and unconscious flows between individuals working together - therefore more social in focus.

But balance of SP research implies groups distort the rational thinking of individuals - often resulting in conflict. Reinforced by experimentation, putting individuals into extreme and staged situations as the unit of analysis.

CRiSP Chapter 6 - Intergroup processes: SIT

Tajfel - concerned with the study of intergroup relations - a different tradition c.f. **LeBon** - studies of crowd behaviour ... and onto a study of racial and national conflicts during mid C20 (larger scale of group).

Intergroup approach - how people identify with the larger social group that they belong to and how this identification acts on the social judgements a person makes.

Looks at broader questions of links between a person's identity and societal dimensions - e.g. ethnicity, class.

Tajfel - interested in understanding the impact of the attribution of social groups on social interactions.

Rejected the dominant approach of experimentation without social context, ecological validity and without reference to broader socio-cultural issues.

Wanted to find theories that could link macro-social work (sociology, politics) with the micro-social work in psychology.

Initial research (1957) is surprising - investigated cognitive biases in judgements made about coins of different sizes and values. Found people overestimate size differences between coins of different value and so underestimate differences between coins of similar value.

Influenced later work (1969) - if we do this for variables of size and value for coins, then perhaps we do this for judgements about continuous variables of intelligence, laziness, attractiveness vs. categorical variables of people into clear-cut social groups - e.g. nationality, ethnicity, social status.

We see people who belong together in the same group as being 'all the same' and we exaggerate differences between groups - this is the root of all prejudice.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is based on **Tajfel's** idea of relations between groups being defined by cognitive biases. The aim of the theory is to investigate and identify the individual variables which contribute to intergroup processes, supplemented by a 'social' approach to describing socio-cultural (identity) and economic (resources) variables which shape relations between groups.

SIT is the dominant approach to intergroup processes in European SP.

SIT:

(i) How people identify with social categories (groups of differing scale) shapes their perception of their immediate social context and how they may act or act in it.

(ii) Contrast between groups is important - by taking an 'us versus them' stance we reinforce our identification with our group and contrast its +ve attributes against the failings of others (potentially leading to conflict)

Tajfel and Turner (1979) try to demonstrate how SIT can blend cognitive and social approaches to intergroup processes and offer ideas about what may lead to conflict.

Suggest SP of intergroup relations has two alternative approaches - e.g.

Theory of authoritarian personality (Adorno et al) - an outstanding approach according to **T&T** on patterns of intergroup prejudice - stresses the role of intra-individual and interpersonal psychological processes (psychodynamic)

Or:

Sheriff et al - Realistic group conflict theory (RCT) - real conflict of group interests causes intergroup conflict. Has strong empirical support.

Intergroup hostility is motivated by competition for tangible resources - i.e. motivated by reward.

However, if groups are dependent on each other for obtaining rewards/resources, co-operation is the result.

But **T&T** argue RCT is weak in the area of identification with the in-group - they see this as central to explaining intergroup phenomena, but in RCT identification is seen more as a by-product of belonging to a group.

T&T argue SIT builds upon RCT.

Social context of intergroup behaviour

Argues that reasons for intergroup behaviour can be found on a continuum between the interpersonal (individual relationships within the group fully determine behaviour) and the intergroup (membership of social group/category fully determines behaviour).

Interpersonal extreme - wife and husband
Intergroup extreme - opposing armies

Assumes conflict between groups will cause members of each group to behave towards each other on the basis of group membership, overriding individual characteristics and relationships.

Social categorisation and intergroup discrimination

Argues a lab analogue of real-world ethnocentrism is in-group bias -i.e. in-group favouritism over the out-group as seen in MGP experiments.

All evidence suggests in-group bias is omnipresent. But it is not always sufficient to generate conflict and it is not always necessary for competition and discrimination between groups to occur!

Economic MGP experiments often show group members favouring creating maximum difference (MD) in

outcomes between groups, even if it means they fail to maximise in-group profit (MIP).

Argues research shows the MGP effects are not a result of demand effects from the experimenter (from questioning of participants afterwards about why they behaved in the way that they did).

Social identity and social comparison

T&T define a group as “a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and of their membership of it.”

Intergroup behaviour therefore defined as **Sherif** - and depends on individuals identifying that their group and those of others belong to different social categories.

Social categorisations are cognitive tools in this view.

As well as systematising the world, they also help us to self-reference - which becomes our social identity.

Assumptions / arguments for SIT:

1. Individuals try to maintain and enhance self-esteem
2. Social groups have +ve or -ve connotations - therefore social identity is +ve or -ve across the groups an individual belongs to.
3. Evaluation of own group determined w.r.t. specific other groups. High +ve comparisons = high prestige.

Therefore:

1. Individuals want a +ve social identity
2. +ve social identity is based on favourable comparisons with other groups

3. If social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals leave groups and join more +ve ones, or attempt to make their own group more +vely perceived.

Three classes of variable therefore influence intergroup differentiation:

1. Group membership is internalised by individuals - they identify subjectively with their in-group.
2. Social situation must allow for intergroup comparisons
3. Not all out-groups are compared with - they must be perceived as relevant. Implies similarity, proximity and situational salience important for this process.

Status hierarchies and social change

Status is the outcome of intergroup comparison (it is not a resource or commodity)

Change comes about through:

1. Individual mobility - dis-identification with current in-group.
2. Social creativity - from:
 - new dimension for comparison found - e.g. hut building quality -> the surroundings of the hut (**Lemaine**)
 - changing values assigned to attributes of the group - e.g. ‘black is beautiful’
 - comparing in-group with a different out-group
3. Social competition - improve status by direct competition with the out-group; attempt to reverse positions.

Tajfel - depends on whether cognitive alternatives are available if this strategy is to be successful.

Concludes that much of SIT is not new - but it has provided a testable framework.

Objective vs Subjective conflicts

Nearly impossible in real-life conflicts to determine if the cause of a conflict is objective (competition for resources) or subjective (defence of identity). Even things that appear to be objective (e.g. salary levels and maintenance of differentials) have subjective aspects too- i.e. some advantages only make sense in a comparative framework of intergroup competition.

Commentary on T&T

SIT identifies a weakness in RCT - in that it does not attempt to explain how conflict for non-material resources occurs - e.g. conflicts over identity, such as those seen between religious or ethnic groups.

SIT addresses this by proposing conflict depends on how people identify with their social groups - so interaction in society is on an

interpersonal ↔ intergroup continuum.
[increasing depersonalisation]

What moves people along this continuum is a second belief continuum:

Belief in social mobility ↔ Belief in social change

Social mobility = you can change groups you are in
Social change = group is set for life

Strong beliefs in social change associated with intergroup identification to the fore; strong beliefs in social mobility associated with interpersonal factors.

The distinction between personal and social identity is at the heart of SIT.

SIT provides a way of combining cognitive explanations and social explanations - biases are cognitive, but the

categorisations we apply them to are social in origin.

Conflict between groups seen as the need to create favourable comparisons between in-group and out-groups.

T&T argue conflict is inevitable - and becomes more likely when group members not only perceive inequity, but that change is possible.

Billig's critique of "Cognitive aspects of prejudice"

Argues for a development of **Tajfel's** ideas as:

(i) No SP is value free, society is different 2002 cf 1950s/1960s.

(ii) **Tajfel** was wrong to ignore motivational themes - as without considering them, extreme prejudice cannot be understood.

Tajfel's image of humanity

Tajfel argued that there was a common rational humanity as a way of positioning against the ideas of **Lorenz** and others that biological irrationality and an aggressive instinct was at the heart of human nature - the 'blood and guts' model.

Tajfel is against the 'blood and guts' model

Psychological: 'Waxing and waning' of conflict occurs - so a biological explanation in itself cannot be complete. The social/historical/political conditions therefore also need to be taken into account, hence a role for SP.

Moral/political: Presenting social conflict as an unchanging instinct creates an argument that nothing can be done to address prejudice and justifies it as part of the human condition.

Cognition and prejudice

Underlying rationality is behind the seeming irrationality of behaviour and prejudice according to SIT. **Tajfel** suggests a cognitive basis - extrapolating from object judgement studies to the judgements made about out-groups/in-groups as being central.

Both scenarios involve cognitive processes of categorisation, according to **Tajfel**.

Cognitive dynamics of prejudice involve categorisation, assimilation and coherence.

Assimilation is part of **Tajfel's** attempt to create a genuinely social approach - categories are not created by individuals, but the ones used are already culturally available.

Billig argues that this approach is a great rebuttal of the 'blood and guts' model, but criticises it as:

A discursive view of categorisation, rather than a cognitive one is more appropriate for the categorisation of prejudice. Prejudice is essentially constructed in language. Speakers are very flexible in their use of categories and are not simply restricted to minimising in-group differences and/or maximising out-group differences.

Holocaust and explanation

Billig notes **Tajfel** did not apply SIT to explain the holocaust (which he survived).

Explanation => understanding - any explanation of the Holocaust which attempted to use cause and effect to understand it would fall short in **Billig's** view.

But **Tajfel** argued categorisation, assimilation and coherence were universal processes - not culturally socially or historically specific. However, to use SIT arguments of protecting self-integrity as a way of explaining genocide is not informative or appropriate.

Billig argues there cannot be anything intrinsic about categorisation, assimilation or coherence that can account for the historical specificity of Nazi ideology - the explanation for extreme prejudice must therefore lie outside of cognitive explanations.

Prejudice and bigotry

Cognitive approaches linking prejudice to categorisation are unable to explain the 'waxing and waning' of prejudice (in much the same way as the 'blood and guts' model cannot explain the 'waxing and waning' of conflict).

An additional component is required to explain this phenomenon - and it is not an innate one!

Billig suggests this additional component comes from historical and cultural elements, not psychological ones. These are motivational factors - i.e. prejudice is not a by-product of cognitive processing, but is a part of "being" - an 'emotional investment'.

Tajfel avoids as it might be thought as a throwback to **Adorno's** psychodynamic view of conflict or a reductionist one to biology; and **Tajfel** argues individuals are prejudiced - not groups - therefore a resolution is not psychodynamically based.

Social constructionist view is that emotions are socially constituted (**Edwards; Harré and Gillett**). They are therefore discursive constructions. Hate is not an individual cognitive state, but an intersubjective construction in the language of 'hate talk'. (**Whillock and Slayden**). Hate is not a feeling - but to believe and say particular things about others (**Billig**).

Depersonalisation and dehumanisation

There is another absence in SIT which parallels its failure to differentiate between prejudice and bigotry - namely, the difference between depersonalisation and dehumanisation.

An emotional investment is necessary to change inevitable cognitive prejudice into 'being prejudiced'. Depersonalisation needs a similar investment to turn into dehumanisation.

Towards a study of bigotry

Bigotry is ideological - a feature of group relations

Ideologies have a discursive basis - categories of ideology are framed in language - not in cognitive categories.

Ideologies have emotional aspects - they are not cognitive representations of social reality. They are socially shared explanations, based on socially constructed emotions (**Billig; Edwards ...**)

Depersonalisation and dehumanisation can be reconceptualised discursively - e.g. dehumanisation is found in ethnic jokes and hate-talk.

Repressed and unrepressed emotions - a discursive approach can incorporate Freudian theories of repression that avoids individual reductionism. Language is both repressive and expressive. Social norms forbid some constructions and encourage others. Therefore, bigotry may become a kind of forbidden pleasure, a temptation.

Pleasure is found in bigotry - e.g. extreme racist propaganda incorporates humour and mockery (**Billig**). There are complex relations between language and the pleasure a racist feels - these cannot be explained by reason and logic (**Sartre**).

Conclusion

Billig - a former **Tajfel** student (like **Wetherell**). Is keen to point to the historical and cultural context which SIT emerged from and the personal choices made by **Tajfel** when theorising - e.g. not investigating the Holocaust in terms of SIT.

Billig argues **Tajfel's** key ideas - categorisation, assimilation and coherence are there to support his position of people having a universal rationality - rather than being at the mercy of irrational instincts as per **Lorenz** and others. This is a moral and political position which affects **Tajfel's** outlook and research.

Billig argues however that categorisation is discursive and not cognitive when applied to prejudice and bigotry. Categorisation is not therefore a constraint on the way we think, but is something done in language - a form of social action in its own right.

The link between depersonalisation and dehumanisation is denied in later SIT work (**Brown, 2000**) - but for **Tajfel**, depersonalisation is the first step on the slippery slope towards dehumanisation.

Billig criticises contemporary SIT as having squandered the legacy of Tajfel - and argues that SIT needs to re-engage with the social and political climate of today. He suggests the exploration of the relationship between bigotry and ideology is one that should develop in, seeing it as collectively produced through interaction.

Billig is therefore arguing that discursive psychology as being a radical redevelopment and continuation of the intergroup approach pioneered by **Tajfel**, rather than being a purely competing approach.