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Being One of the Gang: A Social Acceptance Approach to Establishing Productive Team Norms

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BEING ONE OF THE GANG: A SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE APPROACH TO ESTABLISHING
PRODUCTIVE TEAM NORMS

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PRODUCTIVE TEAM NORMS

Abstract

Social acceptance into a sport group is a critical motivating factor for sport participation. Indeed, this drive for in-group acceptance is also a key reason why individuals adhere to normative group behavior, which is sometimes dysfunctional, but often productive. The current theory-to-practice article offers a series of suggestions for coaches and practitioners, based on a framework that synthesizes components of the social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) with the Waldron and Krane (2005) model. These suggestions are designed to create a sport environment that facilitates social acceptance, and subsequently promote the establishment of, and adherence to, productive team norms.

PRODUCTIVE TEAM NORMS

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Being one of the Gang: A Social Acceptance Approach to Establishing Productive Team Norms

As with any group of people, sport teams have unwritten sets of behavioral standards, called norms, that members are expected to uphold (Carron & Eys, 2012). Team norms represent the cultivation of shared beliefs and attitudes among team members (Patterson, Carron, & Loughhead, 2005). Carron and Eys (2012) explain that these expected sets of behaviors form through the social reinforcement of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. While some norms that teams develop can be problematic (e.g., substance abuse; Grossbard, Hummer, LaBrie, Pederson, & Neighbors, 2009), team norms often are productive, such as good sportpersonship and active community involvement. In this way, peers often socialize one another constructively (Donlan, Lynch, & Lerner, 2015). The present theory-to-practice paper is aimed at coaches and sport psychology practitioners who can help develop and promote adherence to productive team norms. I begin by briefly describing the theory about how and why team norms develop, followed by theory-based strategies designed to lead sport teams towards healthy and productive team norms.

Theoretical Framework

The underlying theoretical support draws from the social identity approach (Rees, Haslam, Coffee, & Lavalley, 2015) and the Waldron and Krane (2005) model of norm-conforming behavior. While the distinct perspectives complement each other well, they both center on athletes' need for acceptance. Indeed, peer belongingness is one of the most commonly listed motivations behind sport participation (Martin, Carron, Eys, & Loughhead, 2012).

Social Identity Approach. The social identity approach stems from two overlapping social psychology theories from the 1970s: social identity theory and self-categorization theory.

This perspective addresses the intersection of individual psychological processes with social group processes (i.e., team dynamics), and, helps to explain the motivation behind social behaviors (Reicher, Spears, & Haslam, 2010). Simply put, this theoretical framework explains behavior that stems from an individual's self-concept as a member of a group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and, thus, group membership provides individuals with a guide for acceptable forms of behavior.

Groups are not simply a feature of sport participation, but rather are ingrained as an instrumental part of one's sense of self – which then becomes a strong determinant of behavior (Rees et al., 2015). Once an athlete begins to identify with the team, behavior becomes more normative and loyalty to the group increases in a process known as depersonalization, whereby individuals come to understand themselves in terms of a shared social identity with others (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Depersonalization is the core process that ties group members together, including player to player and player to coach ties (Rees et al., 2015). Rimal and Mollen (2013) assert that depersonalization produces conformity to group norms as these standards inform individuals about certain behaviors and attitudes that are appropriate for group members. Kauer and Krane (2013) apply Turner et al.'s (1987) work by suggesting that at the root of depersonalization, new group members downplay their own individuality and adopt mannerisms that are consistent with those of the group (e.g., similar speech and dress) because they are seeking acceptance and recognition as a member. Acting in ways that are consistent with the social norms assimilates individuals into the group, leading to social acceptance by other group members (Krane & Kaus, 2014). Finally, self-stereotyping is a process by which individuals integrate common characterizations of the group into their self-concept, which leads individuals to adopt the values of the group (e.g., integrity, hard work), and

strive to live those values (Rees et al., 2015).

Closely related to social identity is the group-image and related values for which the team collaboratively has decided to stand. Collective identity, defined by Lee, Cornwell, and Babiak (2012) as the sense of belongingness with a group, is reflected in a positive attitude towards self-categorization with the group (e.g., Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). Having a collective identity can motivate individuals to protect the reputation of the group and uphold the group's values through individual and group actions. When a team creates a reputation, members are likely to promote productive behaviors such as high effort and cooperation (Thompson, 2013). Moreover, adherence to productive group norms increases as members strive to represent the collective identity that has been created by peers (e.g., Paradis & Martin, 2012).

Waldron and Krane Model. The model forwarded by Waldron and Krane (2005), which centers around the idea that behavior is largely driven by the need for acceptance, tied together concepts from achievement goal theory, the sport ethic model (Hughes & Coakley, 1991), and Messner's (2002) model of athlete group dynamics. Drawing from these three theoretical frameworks, Waldron and Krane (2005) highlight how the drive for social approval can motivate adherence to group norms. As athletes strive to fit in, gain status, and avoid social exclusion, they behave in ways that are in line with the norms of the team (Ginis & Leary, 2004). Messner's (2002) model of athlete group dynamics adds that the norms and socially accepted behaviors of a sport peer group are driven by a small group of skilled players with high social status known as the 'leaders' and the rest of the team follows along with these norms so that they do not become socially rejected by the group. Recent research supports that group members are more likely to conform to behavior that is in line with high-status peers (Choukas-Bradley, Gilletta, Cohen, & Prinstein, 2015).

Waldron and Krane (2005) also draw from the concept of the sport ethic (Hughes & Coakley, 1991) in which the “win at all costs” culture surrounding sport mandates that athletes adhere to integral athlete norms. The norms of being an athlete are not inherently problematic; however, it can become a health-risk issue if an athlete accepts the norms without question to an extreme degree, such as using performance enhancing substances for the sake of helping the team (Coakley, 2014). This reckless adherence to sport norms, referred to as overconformity, is fueled by the desire for social acceptance and recognition by group members (i.e., fellow athletes). Coakley (2014) explains that athletes are most likely to overconform when they have a low self-esteem, a deep need to be accepted as an athlete by sport peers, and see achievement in sports as their only way to get ahead and command respect. An environment of social acceptance, however, can reduce the risk of athletic overadherence, and promote productive team norms.

Waldron and Krane (2005) forwarded this three-part model to explain how athletes come to adhere to reckless team norms; however, the current paper will apply this model of behavior to the development of productive team norms. At the heart of each of its three components is the notion that athletes need and actively seek out social acceptance, which can promote athletes to abide by productive and healthy group norms. Once again centering on athlete’s drive for social acceptance, the Waldron and Krane (2005) model ties together nicely with the social identity perspective to explain that normative behavior is supported and mimicked by the team members because of a desire to fit-in and act in a way that identifies them with the in-group. Alongside the social identity perspective, which suggests that an athlete’s self-concept as a group member leads to depersonalization and subsequent normative group behavior, the Waldron and Krane (2005) model also adds that athlete’s fear of social rejection by teammates can influence conformity.

The fundamental premise and common theme of the current theoretical frameworks, is that athletes feel a drive for acceptance and a deep rooted innate fear of social rejection which promotes conformity to the norms established by group leaders.

Strategies for Establishing Productive Team Norms

Coaches often attempt to create the norms for their team by setting rules and using reinforcement strategies. However, when players themselves feel that they have a hand in developing, establishing, and enforcing the productive team norms, players will be more likely to internalize and endorse such behaviors (e.g., Amiot, Sansfacon, Louis, & Yelle, 2011). It is also critical to remember that group norms are not formed overnight, but instead take time to develop through ongoing interactions among team members, including coaches (Carron & Eys, 2012).

The following steps are designed to lead to an environment of social acceptance that is conducive to athletes autonomously establishing and adhering to productive norms. Additionally, I include a reoccurring example of a hypothetical high school basketball team, called the Hawks, that will help the reader to see these steps in action.

Step 1: Form a Collective Identity. The first step in establishing a productive set of team norms is encouraging the formation of a collective identity by having members of the team work together to decide on a specific image for the team. Coaches can gather the team and ask that members collaboratively construct a reputation that members proactively work to maintain. A brainstorming session with the team might involve members identifying actions, attitudes, and values that uphold the ideal team image. The athletes should be asked to consider what is needed to help each member become the best person, player, and teammate possible. Coaches can instruct the members of the team to write down ideas and have team captains read the anonymous suggestions aloud, then thoroughly discuss the suggestions with the team to come to

a decision on a productive team identity. In the hypothetical example, the Hawks have decided that it is important to be a team that is successful in the classroom, well-respected around campus, and that uses their influence to make the community a better place by standing against bullying. There are many similar causes that teams can take up, and unite around.

Once an identity has been agreed upon, the next step is allowing the players to establish a set of statements that affirm some ideal behaviors that directly support the newly established team image. By having the autonomy to construct the team's ideal behaviors, players are more likely to accept, internalize, and comply than if the coach decides these based on his or her own agenda (Amiot et al., 2011). Examples of affirmations that a team may construct are: "We pride ourselves on playing our hardest until that last whistle," or "We are a tight-knit group who stick together no matter what." In line with the ideal image that the Hawks created, the set of guidelines they abide by include: "We always attend class and always put school on top of the priority list," "We go out of our way to be caring and respectful," and "When we someone being bullied or picked on, we go out of our way to stand up for that person."

Theory suggests that individuals will adhere to the positive team image that peers have created because of social pressures to fit the mold of the group and to become accepted by peers (e.g., Paradis & Martin, 2012). Moreover, by having the high status 'leaders' guide and support the formation of a productive identity the rest of the team will behave accordingly in effort to feel social approval (Choukas-Bradley, 2015; Messner, 2002; Turner et al., 1987).

Step 2: Fulfill the need to fit-in. The next set of suggestions specifically targets the need to fit-in. In practices, especially, inclusivity is highly encouraged, such as equal attention from coaches and equal playing opportunity. Based on the theoretical principles in focus, an inclusive atmosphere where all players feel accepted can promote adherence to the productive team image

and norms. More specifically, coaches can foster feelings of acceptance in their players by creating a superordinate team mindset (i.e., requiring cooperation from all members) where every single member of the team plays a crucial role in the team's success (Evans, Eys, & Bruner, 2012). There are many superordinate tasks or goals that can be presented to the team with the premise that each member's participation is required for the goal to be accomplished. Superordinate challenges can become a daily occurrence, such as a football team's offense and defense units coming together at the end of practice to accomplish a joint task requiring equal efforts from all sub-units, or a long-term goal that will take a complete team effort to accomplish (e.g., setting out to achieve a certain team GPA). This will allow each team member to feel a sense of inclusion and responsibility, which ultimately will increase adherence to the team's productive norms. Athletes may feel more inclined to behave in line with the productive team image if they feel that they are a meaningful piece of the puzzle. The Hawks coach always saves the last 10 minutes of practice for a superordinate challenge. Sometimes this involves extra conditioning in the form of a relay race where the team is challenged to finish under a certain time. Other times the coach will be more creative and construct a fun challenge such as having the entire team link hands in circle and pass a hula-hoop all the way around the circle. Whatever the challenge, the principal point is that it must take cooperation and participation from all members of the team.

Furthermore, Murrell and Gaertner (1992) found that teams are more effective when members identify with the team rather than sub-units of a team (e.g., offense/ defense). This research finding suggests that coaches should encourage a superordinate identity in which players identify themselves only as a member of the team, and when applicable, as a member of the school/university as opposed to a specific team (Krane & Kaus, 2014). Moreover, successful

teams frequently speak about their sport in terms of “we” and rarely as “I” (e.g., Zucchermaglio, 2005). Coaches can encourage players to speak in terms of “we” as much as possible, such as: “we had a good practice,” or “we don’t put up with bullying at our school.”

Step 3: Value diversity. An important step in creating and maintaining productive group norms is establishing an inclusive environment that values individual members. Within a team, each player brings something unique to the group as an athlete and as a person. It is important that members realize the importance of individuality, and appreciate the value in having diversity within the team. Coaches are encouraged to present the team with activities that highlight each member’s unique individuality. As an example of an activity that encourages diversity, the Hawks coach instructed each member of the team to state one little known fact about themselves that contributes to the team’s diversity (e.g., their religion), and one unique fact about themselves that makes the ideal team identity particularly important to them (e.g., was bullied as a kid). In doing so, each player will feel pride in their unique qualities – as opposed to feeling pressure to hide differentness from teammates in an attempt to blend in. It should once again be emphasized that each player is an equally important and unique piece of the puzzle.

Step 4: Social Recognition. The final suggestions aim to help team members feel social recognition, which is a common desire among athletes. To establish a positive self-concept, individuals will attach themselves to a group that gives them positive social recognition in which they find their social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As a coach or practitioner, there are productive and healthy ways of helping team members feel this recognition such as providing members with identifiers (e.g., hats, jackets, hair-styles) that emphasize the team and its many traditions and accomplishments (Martin, Paradis, Eys, & Evans, 2013). Emphasis should be placed on the honor and importance of representing the team, and players agree that the logo be

respected at all times. Specifically, while outwardly identifying as a team member, individuals are less likely to misbehave as to avoid bringing shame to the team, and more likely to behave in a manner that gives the team a positive public image. The Hawks decided to make team shirts that proudly display the team logo with the words: “We stand against bullying” on the front, and “if you ignore it, they will think it’s okay” on the back. This is a strong example because the players will feel pride in standing for an honorable cause, and wearing a shirt like this can also help to encourage others in the community to join the effort.

Conclusion

Given that team norms can be either productive or dysfunctional, coaches and sport team leaders can utilize this set of suggestions to create an environment that will allow members to feel social acceptance which will subsequently facilitate the development of productive team norms over time. Moreover, these suggestions – designed to increase perceptions of social acceptance – are intended to help sport teams behave in ways that will support the team’s pursuit of an ideal group image. While unproductive team norms can largely be explained through the Waldron and Krane (2005) model combined with aspects from the social identity approach, the current theory-to-practice paper offers suggestions based in the same theoretical framework to develop healthy and productive team norms.

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Appendix: Social Identity Approach Literature Review

Humans are inherently social creatures. From an evolutionary psychology perspective, humans cluster into groups for the sake of protection (Van Vugt & Schaller, 2008), which is behavior still found in present day society when looking at social groups such as gangs (Figuerido, Gladden, & Hohman, 2011). Individuals can be grouped based on a seemingly infinite number of factors, some more salient than others. While a stranger may categorize the man who lives down the street in terms of observable characteristics (e.g., Caucasian, male, tall), that individual likely has a much more complex self-identity that stems from his membership in groups that are important to him. In addition to his knowledge of which groups he belongs to, it is of critical importance that this man is also well-aware of the groups to which he does not belong. Such knowledge of group membership informs everyday actions and behaviors by outlining what is acceptable and unacceptable, as well as provides specific sets of norms by which individuals abide. These social psychological group processes fit under the umbrella of the social identity approach (SIA).

The SIA stems from two distinct, but overlapping, social psychology theories from the 1970s: social identity theory (SIT), and self-categorization theory (SCT). Indeed, Brown (2000) suggests that the term “social identity approach” originally emanated as a response to researchers and scholars combining the two theories. The slightly elder of the two theories, SIT, was developed to explain the tendency for humans to partition the social world into more comprehensible units based on categorization of persons into groups (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). This theory holds that intergroup behavior can be predicted from an individual’s perception of group status, the legitimacy and stability of that group status, and the fluidity with which one can move between groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The standard definition of social identity is “that

part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his/her knowledge of his/her membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). Despite the popularity of this definition within the literature, it should be pointed out that social identity is a very complex topic, and that any one definition will merely scratch the surface.

Whereas SIT focuses on the role of identity in intergroup conflict and harmony, SCT is a sub-theory that focuses on the social-cognitive processes that underlie one's social identity (Abrams & Hogg, 2010). SCT, was developed to address the shortcomings of SIT (Turner, 1999). Notably, SCT is less focused on intergroup relationships, and instead more broadly explains the basic cognitive processes of how and why humans categorize themselves and others (Turner, 1982).

The purpose of the current review is to aggregate critical literature regarding the social identity approach, and review recent work that demonstrates the importance of this theoretical perspective in sport-based groups. This entails reviewing the seminal work that highlights the key tenets of SIT and its sub-theory, SCT. The following section focuses on three intergroup social processes: intergroup comparison, intergroup conflict, and intergroup harmony. Next, the SIA will be used to explain how group membership impacts individual behavior through a phenomenon called depersonalization, which can lead to strong adherence to social norms. The relevance of the social identity approach in studying group behavior in sport will then be addressed. Finally, the current paper will discuss Cameron's (2004) tripartite conceptualization of social identity that is used to measure this concept quantitatively, and recent sport psychology work that has utilized this instrument.

A Tale of Two Theories

The two theories that comprise the social identity approach, SIT and SCT, undeniably share many qualities. Though interlaced, the two theories are unique and may have distinct applications (Brown, 2000; Postmes & Branscombe, 2010). The current section will provide a brief a review of both theories.

Social identity theory. Individuals find their place in the social world (i.e., in relation to others) through membership of social groups (Tajfel, 1978). The self-conception as a group member is known formally as one's social identity (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). More specifically, one's social identity refers to the extent that he or she views him- or herself in terms of group membership and how strongly they identify with that group (Tajfel, 1978). Moreover, group membership provides people with a guide for acceptable forms of behavior, and strong identification with a group leads an individual to behave in ways that represent the characteristics of that group. Such behavior that is in line with group identity is largely a product of between-group social comparison (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998).

A key aspect of SIT is that an individual comes to a clear social identity through social comparisons between the in-group and out-groups (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Notably, one's social identity and individual feelings of self-worth are enhanced when the in-group is perceived as both distinct and superior to out-groups. This is known as positive distinctiveness, which is a strong motivator that drives intergroup behavior (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). That is, people have an innate desire to perceive the groups to which they belong in a positive manner to boost perceptions of themselves (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). One strategy for bolstering the perceptions of one's group, and subsequently achieving positive distinctiveness, is through in-group favoritism (i.e., positive view and preferential treatment of in-group members; Taylor &

Doria, 1981). In addition to enhancing the perception of the in-group, people also increase self-image perceptions by holding negative views of the out-group (Billig & Tajfel, 1973).

Self-categorization theory. Stemming from the work on SIT, SCT is broadly explained as being “concerned with the antecedents, nature and consequences of psychological group formation: how some collection of individuals come to define themselves to be a social group and how shared group membership influences behavior” (Turner, 1985 p. 78). Although individuals categorize themselves based on highly abstract distinctions (Rosch, 1978), Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell (1987) suggest a three level hierarchical continuum model of identities that details a simplified understanding of self-categorization: (1) superordinate level: the self as a human being, (2) the intermediate level of in-group-out-group categorization, and (3) the subordinate level: the self as a unique individual, distinct from other in-group members. Lorenzi-Cioldi and Doise (1990) claim that these three levels can be understood as representing one’s human, social, and personal identity, respectively.

The antecedent portion of SCT relates to the *accessibility* with which one can be categorized (i.e., the perceiver’s readiness and ability to categorize) and how well one *fits* the broad patterns of a category (Oakes, 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). As an example, someone with knowledge of the sport of basketball has the accessibility to categorize a tall young woman wearing high-top shoes entering the gym (i.e., fit) as a basketball player. Self-categorization takes place in a very similar fashion, whereby individuals base their own identity on their existing knowledge of similarities among group members, and differences between group members and non-group members (Rees, Haslam, Coffee, & Lavalley, 2015). Referring back to the example, the tall young woman may be more likely to define herself as a basketball

player if this self-categorization fits her understanding of the patterns of similarity among basketball players and the difference between basketball players and non-basketball players.

Regarding the nature of self-categorization, SCT suggests that this process leads individuals to view themselves as more similar to other group members based on key stereotypes of the group (Turner & Oakes, 1989). This process of perceiving the self as a typical example of the in-group is known as depersonalization (reviewed in-depth below), through which the self comes to be understood in terms of a shared identity with other group members (Hogg, 1992; Turner & Oakes, 1986).

The consequences of self-categorization are many, but one key consequence is related to social influence. Notably, self-categorization gives individuals the sense that they should agree with members of the in-group and disagree with members of the out-group (Abrams, Wetherell, Cochrane, Hogg, & Turner, 1990), which makes the actions and behaviors of in-group members highly influential on other members. An example of this influence is that group members become inclined to conform to norms that are seen as shared with group members (Rees et al., 2015). In-group members are more influential when the nature of the influence is in line with values and norms of the group. Groups often communicate norms indirectly, as members infer the behavior through fellow group member's actions, but norms can also be communicated directly through intentional discussions and even non-verbal signals (Hogg & Reid, 2006).

Behaving in line with the norms of the group accentuates similarities among group members, and differences between members and non-members (Hogg, 2016), which allows the formation of *prototypes*. According to Hogg and Reid (2006), prototypes are sets of attributes, such as attitudes and behaviors, that define a group, and more importantly, distinguish it from other groups. When people are categorized into a group, they are viewed through the lens of the

group's prototype, in which they are compared to the ideal group member to determine how well they embody the image of the group. Turner (1991) points out that a group prototype is actually the embodiment of group norms in that the relevant attributes are shared by the group members.

Contrasting SIT and SCT. Turner and colleagues (1987) address the common tendency for researchers to lump SIT and SCT together by stating that is it actually okay to do so if the reason is for terminological convenience, so long as it is explicitly understood and explained that they are indeed distinct theories that address different problems and support different hypotheses. While it is well known that the two theories are indeed distinct, it remains a challenge for scholars to describe exactly how the two differ.

Despite decades of scholarly attempts at eloquently differentiating the two theories, the preface of Turner and colleagues' (1987) book remains the most popular explanation. Turner suggests that there are two important differences between theories. The first being that work on SIT focuses largely on achievement of positive distinctiveness of an individual's in-group as the key variable to understanding behavior, while SCT "makes social identity the social-cognitive basis of group behavior, the mechanism that makes it possible (and not just the aspects of the self that are derived from group membership)" (Turner et al., 1987, p. ix). Despite Turner's efforts to help scholars differentiate between the two theories (reviewed in Hogg & McGarty, 1990), it remains relatively challenging to discern. The second point that Turner makes is that SIT considers behavior to stem from somewhere along an interpersonal—intergroup continuum that ranges from "acting in terms of self" to "acting in terms of group" which neglects the possibility of group action being an expression of the self, and vice versa. On the other hand, SCT suggests that group and individual behaviors are both "acting in terms of self," in which the "self" operates at various levels of abstraction (Hogg & McGarty, 1990). Turner and colleagues admit

that the two theories are difficult to distinguish, and that an umbrella term is perfectly acceptable because of the common roots, similar uses, and close link between theories.

Intergroup Processes

Intergroup comparison. Hinkle and Brown (1990) suggest that a fundamental aspect of human social cognition is that humans cannot know who they are without reference to others. In this way, social comparison is central to identity, which holds true for group identity. Social identity is formulated and maintained by means of evaluative social comparisons between in-groups and out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

From a SIT perspective, intergroup comparisons are made to demonstrate or show that the in-group is superior to out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Group members seek positive distinctiveness by making favorable comparisons with competing groups, such that the criteria for comparison is something that the in-group will be better at than the out-group (Tajfel, 1972). The drive for positive distinctiveness means that strongly identifying group members will see ‘us’ as different from and better than ‘them’ as a means of feeling good about who they are and what they do (Cikara, Botvinick, & Fiske, 2011). An example from sport of favorable comparisons that give the group a sense of positive distinctiveness is that when teams are clearly outmatched in terms of skill, they place the importance of the intergroup comparison on other factors such as “we play with more integrity” (cf. Lalonde, 1992).

SCT, on the other hand, places more focus on the cognitive processes of categorical assimilation (e.g., adjusting to the culture of a group) and differentiation. In this case, intergroup comparisons are made that demonstrate the uniqueness of their group whereby group members evaluate one another on aspects that maximize the ratio of inter- to intra-group differences (Hinkle & Brown, 1990). In other words, intergroup comparisons are made on

qualities in which the in-group is most different from the out-group. Ultimately, individuals can discern the degree to which fellow members are similar to each other based on how different they are from out-group individuals.

Intergroup conflict. In the most extreme examples, groups are fighting for resources such that one group's survival means that the other group will not. Such intergroup conflict is currently taking place in Northern Uganda, where numerous ethnic groups are constantly struggling for the same resources (Lapwoch & Amone-P'Olak, 2016). Such zero-sum examples provide a glimpse into realistic competition that explains the conflict of interest between groups.

Fortunately, not all competition involves life or death scenarios – indeed, groups often compete over less important resources such as pride. Conflict directed towards the out-group may be more aimed at enhancing the in-group than explicitly disadvantaging the out-group (Brewer, 2001). That is, individuals rarely are motivated to disadvantage another, unless the utility of this behavior results in the individual's own in-group benefitting by comparison. A real-world example of this comes from the Middle East, where there is on-going conflict between two competing groups, the Turks and the Kurds, whereby the two groups constantly engage in efforts to harm disadvantage the other group, but primarily as a means of directly benefitting their own group (Çakal, Hewstone, Güler, and Heath, 2016).

While group members are likely to show favor towards members of their in-group (Turner, 1978), they also are likely to openly discriminate against out-group members (Oakes & Turner, 1980). A ubiquitous example of this intergroup conflict is found in race relations – such is the case in the ethnically mixed Israeli city of Jaffa, whereby members of the Jewish and Palestinian groups hold favorable opinions of the in-group (i.e., their own) and open prejudice against the out-group (i.e., the other's) members (e.g., Berger, Benatov, Abu-Raiya, & Tadmor,

2016). Such conflict arises between groups, even when the groups are differentiated by meaningless methods such as the flip of a coin (Brown, 2000). The series of studies that set out to understand the minimal conditions that might lead to intergroup conflict are called the ‘minimal group studies,’ where Tajfel (1972) assigned members completely at random to groups with no prior meaning, and still, individuals demonstrated in-group favoritism and out-group hostility. While this may seem silly, it speaks volumes to just how central social identity and group membership can be to humans. We are indeed social beings.

Much of the conflict between groups is due to members’ desire to prove group distinction (Brown, 2000). A classic example of how this plays out comes from the organizational psychology literature, in which Brown (1978) found that factory workers from three distinct functions (i.e., different areas of specialty within the factory) preferred to take a pay-cut so long as their group of workers was paid more than the other groups. In other words, the drive for positive group distinction is so powerful that people are willing to make less money in total for the pure sake of status compared to other groups of workers.

Intergroup harmony. For as long as the field of social psychology has existed, researchers have been trying to solve the ubiquitous issue of intergroup conflicts. Such attempts often turn to aspects of the SIA to guide the pursuit of intergroup harmony. One attempt, known as the contact hypothesis, suggests that intergroup tension can be reduced by specific systematic methods of bringing members of different groups together into close contact (Allport, 1979). Among many necessary conditions for this hypothesis to be effective, members of opposing groups should have prolonged contact that centers on a cooperative activity, whereby all participants have equal status. As an example, sport has often been suggested as a means of

bringing people together to create harmony towards people from opposing countries (e.g., Schulenkorf, Sugden, & Sugden, 2016).

Another method for increasing intergroup harmony, which builds upon the contact hypothesis, is to cross-cut group memberships (Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015). This method suggests that two individuals who are in different groups according to one categorization (e.g., Hispanic and Asian), are likely to be in the same group on another categorization (e.g., both women). When two categories cut across each other, discrimination based on the differences will be reduced (Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015). While this method is strongly supported (e.g., Brewer, Gonsalkorale, & van Dommelen, 2013), it is important to note that when individuals differ on two or more crossing categories, a doubly opposed in-group identity conflict arises whereby intergroup harmony decreases (Brown & Turner, 1979; Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015; Urban & Miller, 1998).

Many hypotheses suggest that intergroup harmony can only come about by altering the salience of group identities (e.g., Hewstone & Brown, 1986). One way of doing this is to make superordinate identities (i.e., shared by all relevant individuals) more salient, and subsequently downplaying the identity features that are at odds (e.g., Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). The aim of this method is to subsume the two (or more) differing groups (e.g., warring ethnicities) into one general superordinate category with hopes that all can be perceived as in-group members (e.g., Ugandandan; Lapwoch & Amone-P'Olak, 2016). Unfortunately, it may not be an easy task to get individuals to overlook their differing identities. According to Hogg (2016), creating one “cozy single superordinate group” (p. 8) can be very difficult. Re-categorization efforts, such as this superordinate identity strategy, are fiercely resisted by individuals that value their existing social categorizations (e.g., Hogg & Hornsey, 2006).

Because of the difficulty in getting conflicting groups to recreate a completely shared identity, crossed categorization is more successful. This is where two distinct groups keep their individual distinct identities, but also create a shared an identity with the other group on other dimensions (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007). Hogg (2016) also recommends that groups use a strategy called multicultural framing of intergroup relations, which is where groups actively celebrate and value distinctiveness (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). Similarly, a group can construct an intergroup relational identity in which the group becomes defined as having a mutually cooperative relationship of two out-groups. An example from my own experience as an athlete comes from a situation where an aboriginal tribe in northern Manitoba, called Peguis, had their community ice arena burned down, the neighboring tribe, called Fisher River Cree Nation, allowed all the hockey teams, both youth and adult, to join forces. The two groups that used to be bitter rivals celebrated the temporary merger (i.e., it took Peguis three years to rebuild the burned rink) by rebranding the team as the “Two-Nations River Hawks,” which built a strong relationship between the two neighboring tribes and created intergroup harmony.

Depersonalization

Factors that make in-group membership highly salient, such as having noticeable similarities with the other members in the group, increase perceptions of social identity and minimize perceptions of individuality within the group (Deschamps & Devos, 1998). This process, known as depersonalization, refers to a “shift towards the perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of self as a unique person” (Turner et al., 1987, p. 50). To date, the most current definition of depersonalization is the view of oneself as a category representative rather than as a unique individual, characterized by a change in identity (Hogg, 2016). Through this process of

depersonalization, members view one another as interchangeable models of a category as opposed to distinct individuals. When individuals categorizes themselves, they begin to view themselves in terms of the defining attributes of the in-group, known as self-stereotyping (Hogg, 2016). Furthermore, Hogg (2016) suggests that seeing oneself in terms of group membership leads to prototypical, or depersonalized, ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

Depersonalization leads to behavior that conforms to the in-group norms and transforms one's self-conception (Hogg, 2016).

Turner and colleagues (1987) suggest that the depersonalization process involves the assumption that all members share the same characteristics and values which leads members into complying with group norms. The normative behavior of a stereotypical group member is emulated by other group members who view such behavior as reinforcing their membership and identity as a group member (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1998). A rather large body of literature supports the notion that when group members perceive themselves as representatives of the larger social group (rather than distinct individuals), they become more susceptible to the influence of the group (e.g., Lee, 2006).

SIA in Sport

Group dynamics scholars in the field of sport psychology have taken a deep interest in the social aspects of sport (e.g., Martin, Eys, & Spink, 2016). One such phenomenon from within this domain is athlete social identity, which has been studied in regard to membership on a specific team (e.g., Martin, Balderson, Hawkins, Wilson, & Bruner, 2016), a particular sport (e.g., Sønnerlund et al., 2014), a sub-culture of athletes, such as being a gay or lesbian athlete (Krane, Barber, & McClung, 2002), and athletic identity generally (Benson, Evans, Surya, Martin, & Eys, 2015). Rees et al. (2015) recently conducted a review of social identity research

in sport, and concluded that social identity is the basis for sport group behaviors. A key point made by Rees and colleagues is that groups are not simply a feature of sport participation, but rather are ingrained as an instrumental part of one's sense of self – which then becomes a strong determinant of behavior.

Turner's (1982) work is forwarded to sport by Rees and colleagues, who argue that behavior of teams can be attributed to the process of depersonalization, through which athletes view themselves as interchangeable with any of their teammates. In other words, members strive to act in a way that is directly in line with fellow group members. Notably, strong sport team membership can have a positive impact on an individual. Depersonalization often takes place in which an athlete defines him or herself in terms of team membership. When teams hold themselves to high standards, (e.g., "we" value integrity, reliability, and loyalty), they strive to enact that meaning by taking on those characteristics (Rees et al., 2015; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976).

Cameron's Tripartite Model of Social Identity

The ability to quantify one's social identity is crucial for positivistic research. The early work of Tajfel and Turner (e.g., 1979) laid a solid theoretical framework for the SIA; however, it wasn't until decades later that Cameron (2004) created the three-factor model of social identity that addressed the issue regarding dimensionality. Specifically, it has long been theorized that social identity consists of multiple factors or dimensions. Researchers often have suggested that Tajfel's (1978) commonly referenced definition of social identity alludes to the idea that social identity may indeed be multidimensional: awareness of group membership, group evaluation, and emotional aspects of belonging to the group (e.g., Brown, Condor, Mathews, Wade, & Williams, 1986). Stemming from these earlier efforts, Cameron completed five studies with a

total of 1,078 participants that supported a tripartite model of social identity that includes: (a) cognitive centrality (i.e., time spent thinking about being a group member); (b) in-group affect (i.e., the positivity of feelings associated with group membership); and (c) in-group ties (i.e., perceptions of similarity, bond, and belongingness with other group members).

Most people belong to many social groups, yet each of those memberships is not perceived with equal importance. Identification with a group that has more meaning compared to other group memberships can be thought of as *central*, and can also be characterized as being enduring across many situations. Simply put, cognitive centrality can be thought of as how often one's group membership comes to mind. An additional way of looking at cognitive centrality is the amount of importance that group membership has on the self (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). In the tripartite model of social identity, Cameron (2004) summarizes cognitive centrality in terms of the frequency with which the group comes to mind (Gurin & Markus, 1989), along with the importance of the group to one's own self-definition (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Example questions from this subscale include: "I often think about the fact that I am an (in-group member)," and "in general, being an (in-group member) is an important part of my self-image."

In a very general sense, in-group affect refers to the emotions that are attached to membership in a group, such as feeling glad or regretful. Relating back to the drive for positive distinctness stemming from intergroup comparisons, this evaluative dimension of social identity plays an instrumental role (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As an example, when social comparisons are favorable for the in-group, members' in-group affect will likely be very positive. Cameron's (2004) measure includes questions such as "in general, I'm glad to be an (in-group member)," and "I don't feel good about being an (in-group member)."

The final component of Cameron's (2004) tripartite model of social identity refers to emotional closeness and the feeling of merging oneself with the other members of the group. Cameron operationalizes in-group ties as the extent to which "group members feel 'stuck to,' or part of, a particular social group" (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990, p. 482). This emotional attachment can be broken down further in terms of sharing a common bond (Cameron & Lalonde, 2001), having strong emotional ties (Brown et al., 1986), a general sense of belongingness (Phinney, 1992), and perceptions of fitting in (Hinkle, Taylor, Fox-Cardamone, & Cook, 1989). Example questions from the in-group ties subscale are: "I have a lot in common with other (in-group members)," and "I feel strong ties to other (in-group members)."

Recent applications of SIA in sport research. The availability of an instrument that quantitatively measures social identity has given researchers the ability to study this construct in relation to other variables. Work by Bruner and colleagues (e.g., Bruner et al., 2014) have used a sport-specific modified version of Cameron's (2004) three model instrument, which has opened this domain to high-quality recent studies. As an example, Bruner, Eys, Evans, & Wilson (2015) recently found evidence that when a group has a shared outcome and members are interdependent upon one another for that outcome, perceptions of social identity are enhanced. In another recent study, Martin et al. (2016) found evidence that perceptions of groupness (i.e., the extent that the team represents a functioning group) both at the team and individual level increase perceptions of social identity, as does taking on a leadership role within the team/group. In another recent study, Bruner et al. (2016) found that strong team identification negatively predicts antisocial behavior towards teammates, while playing on a team that has strong group-level identity promotes greater prosocial behavior towards teammates and negatively predicts prosocial and antisocial behavior towards opponents. This finding from Bruner and colleagues

demonstrates the importance of social identity in conforming to behavioral group norms. Given the importance of social identity in sport, it is crucial to the field that researchers can undertake in lines of research that investigate the potential antecedents and consequences emanating from social identity.

Conclusion

The SIA is an extremely complex pair of intertwined theories that help explain the nature of latent group processes such as group identity and social categorization. Although this approach is based in social psychology, its application stretches over a wide variety of disciplines and academic fields of study. Unsurprisingly, seminal social identity work has incredibly high citation rates (Postmes & Branscombe, 2010). Recent sport psychology work has embraced the SIA to help explain the motivation behind the behavior of athletes, such as why individuals adhere to the norms of the team to which they belong. As a take home message, it is important that social sciences, such as sport psychology, remain focused on the fact that humans are inherently social beings. That is, people have a strong need for group membership which can have a large impact on individual behavior.

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