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Social Identity Definition and Enactment: A Broad SIDE against Irrationalism and Relativism

Introduction

The ideas which later came to be formalised as the Social Identity Model of Deindividuation phenomena (SIDE) were first suggested, to me at least, by a passage in Georges Lefebvre's classic account of French revolutionary crowds:

'in the midst of the crowd, the individual, escaping the pressure from the little social groups which frame everyday life, becomes much more sensitive to the ideas and the emotions which relate to the larger collectivities of which he also forms a part' (1954, p. 277; author's translation)

To put it more grandly, it is, perhaps, only in the crowd that individuals become the subjects of history. There are two ideas here, two strands which form the twin dimensions of SIDE. On the one hand, Lefebvre is stressing the way in which the crowd context alters the way in which people see themselves and their social world. As a consequence it also changes what they see as important and how they are inclined to act. On the other hand, the crowd alters the ties that bind individuals. It frees them both from the ordinary relationships which bind them into social convention and also from the coercive power of authority. It therefore allows individuals to act upon their understandings even against the constraints of their opponents. In sum, the crowd provides both the inclination and the ability to act as a collective subject.

Hitherto, we have tended to refer to these twin dimensions as the cognitive and strategic aspects of SIDE. However the terms have the danger of being seriously misleading. The shift to collective definitions of self and social reality is not simply cognitive but, as Lefebvre's quote makes clear has affective and connative dimensions as well. Equally, the ability to overcome constraint and express these definitions is not simply strategic but is also bound up with how one perceives the constraints to operate. What is more, as we go on to examine the wider implications of an analysis based on these dimensions, the terminological inexactitudes become even more damaging. Perhaps the names have stuck and it is too late to change. However, in the hope that they have not, I will from now on refer to the dimensions of identity definition and identity enactment. The aim of this chapter, then, is in part to examine how far we have got in understanding the relationship between the subject and social reality by examining both dimensions separately and in their combination. However, it is also to map out how much further we might go by so doing. I shall first of all

address these issues by looking at the impact of crowd conditions — or, to be more specific, of relations of visibility — upon the definition and enactment of identity and hence upon social action. I shall then look more broadly at the potential of this approach for solving some of the key problems of social psychology.

On the narrow SIDE

Lefebvre's discussion of French revolutionary crowds, in particular his stress on collective understandings, had, as its intellectual target, the claims of Gustave Le Bon. Despite Le Bon's status as the most influential of all crowd psychologists and the status of his book on crowd psychology (Le Bon, 1895, trans. 1947) as possibly the most influential of all psychology texts (cf. Moscovici, 1981), Lefebvre dismissed his assertions as mere 'polemical tracts' and argued that he had 'no direct knowledge of the social history or even the political history of the revolution' (1954, p. 71; author's translation). By ignoring the social and political context in which crowds act, Le Bon obscured the socially meaningful nature of crowd action. He suggested that, far from bearing historical understandings, crowd members are devoid of all understanding. Simply by virtue of becoming an indistinguishable part of the mass — the process of submergence — individuals lose their conscious sense of self, their sense of responsibility and hence their ability to make rational choices. At the same time they gain a great sense of power. This heady mix of power without responsibility leads crowd members to act in uncontrolled and atavistic ways.

From the 1950's onward, and particularly in the period following America's bout of urban conflict, the idea of submergence was adapted to the rigours of experimental social psychology and emerged in the form of deindividuation theory. While the theory has a number of variants (for a review, see Reicher, Spears & Postmes, 1995) they all share the essential Le Bonian premise that immersion in a group, particularly as operationalised in terms of lowered personal visibility, results in a loss of identity, a loss of control and at best, mindless subservience to environmental stimuli — at worst, untrammelled destructiveness. However, deindividuation theory is only a partial appropriation of 'submergence'. In concentrating on crowd irrationality, the emphasis on crowd power is all but lost.

Given this emphasis of deindividuation research on the loss of self and of self-control, our initial work was designed to refute this assumption. It was based on social identity theory and the then emerging self categorisation theory (Tajfel, 1978; 1982; Turner, 1982). In particular it drew on the assumption that identity is not singular but is rather a complex system in which a distinction can be made between personal identity — what makes us unique as individuals compared to other individuals — and social identity — what makes us unique as group members compared to members on other groups. It also drew on the associated assumptions that a group is a set of people who share a common social identity and that, when acting in terms of social identity people seek to conform to that which characterises category meaning. These are clearly ideological and historical products and, in many ways, converge with what Lefebvre meant by 'collective mentality'. The argument, then, was that people do not

lose identity and hence lose control in the crowd. Rather they shift from personal to social identity and their behaviour becomes shaped by the understandings that define the relevant social category. Two types of evidence supported this claim.

The first kind of evidence came from field studies, starting with an analysis of the 'St. Paul's riot' of April 1980 (Reicher, 1984a). This analysis showed, firstly that far from being randomly destructive, there was a clear social pattern to the events and clear limits in terms of the targets of crowd action. Secondly, crowd members referred to themselves and others in terms of their social identity. They acted as members of the St. Paul's community, and they recognised others in terms of whether or not they too were members of that community. Thirdly, the patterns of action and the criteria by which actions either spread through the crowd or else were stopped by the crowd were clearly explicable by reference to the meanings associated with category membership. Since, similar studies have been carried out in the context of such diverse phenomena as student demonstrations (Reicher, 1996), international football tournaments (Stott & Reicher, 1998), tax revolts (Drury & Reicher,1999) and environmental protests (Drury & Reicher, in press). They all reveal the patterns of crowd action to be explicable once viewed as the consequence of people acting on the basis of a shared social identity.

Secondly, some early experimental evidence (Reicher, 1984b) suggested that the effects of anonymity depend upon context. When people are rendered anonymous under conditions of low group salience, this further isolates them from the group and lowers actions that are normative in terms of the relevant social identity. However, where they are made anonymous in a group setting, this removes cues to inter-personal cues, increases group salience and hence increases normative action. The effects of anonymity in a group are therefore dependent upon the way in which the salient social identity is defined. This finding was confirmed and extended through the work of Russell Spears, Martin Lea, Tom Postmes and others (see Postmes, Spears & Lea, 1999 for a recent review).

Even if these studies were overtly concerned with the effects of visibility conditions akin to those found in the crowd upon self-definition, the issues of power and enactment repeatedly came to the fore. Thus, in St. Paul's, participants stressed not only their sense of the police and other authorities as oppressive but equally, the way in which their anonymity to these authorities made it possible for them to fight them without fear of retribution. Equally, if more obliquely, similar phenomena occurred in the deindividuation studies where our authority as experimenters was at stake. In one study, which failed in its overt purpose and hence was never published, subjects simply rejected the rather arcane manipulations we were seeking to impose upon them — except in the 'individual anonymous' condition. There, they behaved like lambs even when they were asked to mime taking an engine from a car (don't ask why, it was part of the cover story). In contrast to the others who could wink and nod and signal and seek support from others in thwarting us, anonymity undermined ingroup co-ordination and atomised subjects in the face of the central authority. While, in both the field studies and the experimental example, visibility affects action through it impact on power relationships, there is an obvious distinction between the former where visibility effects work upon the relationship to the outgroup and the latter where visibility

effects alter relationships to the ingroup. This is a distinction which was maintained in our formal studies of how visibility affects the enactment of identity.

The first set of studies concerned visibility to the outgroup (Reicher & Levine, 1994a,b). These showed that increased visibility to a powerful outgroup lowers the expression of behaviours that are punishable by the outgroup and normative for the ingroup. Conversely, increased visibility to such an outgroup increases the incidence of behaviours that may be subject to the disapproval of the outgroup but would attract no sanction from them. There are no effects upon non-normative behaviours. It seems, then, that when we could be seen by a repressive outgroup and punished for expressing certain aspects of our identity, we desist from such expressions but we accentuate those acts which we can get away with and which mark our rejection of that outgroup. We were tempted to name this the 'screw you' effect, since that is what group members seemed to be saying — however we desisted in print for fear that the arbiters of good taste in the discipline might come down heavily upon us for so doing.

Next, we turned to the effects of visibility to the ingroup (Reicher, Levine & Gordijn, 1998). Our expectation was that one consequence of increased visibility to fellow ingroup members would be to increase their potential for mutual support and hence increase the expression of those aspects of their social identity which would attract repression from a powerful outgroup. The results were made rather complex by the fact that, in our initial studies, the relevant intergroup relationship was not that we sought to impose between those who were pro- and anti-fox hunting, but rather between the subjects and ourselves. When that relationship was made the focus of study in a final study, the results confirmed our expectations. Nonetheless, while the results are at least consistent with the proposed explanation, they are far from conclusive. What aspect of visibility is crucial? Is it the visibility of the subjects or of their responses? Is it the visibility of others to oneself or of oneself to others or both? And what are the precise mediating mechanisms? These are all questions in search of more data.

However flimsy each strand of evidence might be on its own, if we weave them all together we have, by now, a rather sturdy line of argument. According to the social identity model of deindividuation phenomena (what we have hitherto called SIDE and which, here, I will call, 'narrow SIDE'), relations of visibility affect human social behaviour through the ways in which they affect both the definition of identity and the possibilities for enacting social identity. Lest such a brief summary is too gnomic, it is important to ward off two possible misinterpretations. The first is that the definitional and enactment dimensions are alternatives. While they may be analytically separable, we would insist that, substantively, both tend to operate together. So, in studies on 'definition' we find 'enactment' to be an issue, and the reverse also applies. Thus, in the studies of enactment, despite attempts to keep identity at a high and constant level of salience, we nevertheless found that the visibility manipulations still had an effect. Interestingly, though, the consequence of visibility upon salience and upon empowerment to act had opposed consequences for action. Thus, in the final study reported in Reicher, Levine and Gordijn (1998) increased visibility to the ingroup decreased identity salience (presumably by making inter-personal differences more apparent) but still increased the expression of ingroup normative/outgroup punishable

behaviours through its effects on the possibilities of enactment. Exactly how visibility manipulations will affect behaviour in any given situation therefore needs to consider a complex matrix of possibilities, including the initial salience of group identity, the presence of outgroups and power relations between groups, the pertinent dimension of action and the extent to which it would attract outgroup sanction, the precise way in which visibility impacts upon both intra- and inter-group accountability and co-ordination. The need to undertake such a situated analysis takes us to the second area of possible misunderstanding.

There are two possible ways of understanding SIDE. The one, which I want to warn against, is to view it as a fixed theory which proposes a set of fixed effects — most notably that anonymity under group conditions leads to increased group salience and increased expression of ingroup norms. Such an approach allows us to ignore the specific social configurations in which action occurs. It allows us to do psychology and put social analysis on hold. That might be attractive by making life easier, but it also leads to false generalisations. The other approach, which I want to recommend, is to see SIDE as a conceptual prism through which to view the effects of visibility relations on action. It provides an idea of the psychological processes through which certain social relations affect behaviour. Since it is not seeking to isolate factors for the purpose of experimental clarification, but rather to analyse how they co-occur in the context of key social phenomena, it asks us to look at definition and enactment together. It also asks us to devote detailed consideration to how the specificities of any given context impact on these twin dimensions. Therefore, and this is crucial, it does not bracket psychology off from context, but rather it *demands* social analysis and provides a means of understanding how contextual factors shape individual action. There is a clear parallel here with the way that people misunderstand the social identity tradition more widely and see it as postulating generic relationships — such as 'those with low self-esteem will differentiate themselves from outgroups more'. They fail to see the differentiation process as a psychological dynamic whose consequences must be analysed in their social setting. The impact and the potential of SIDE will be much reduced if it falls prey to a similar misunderstanding.

To be more concrete about the distinction, let us first consider the relationship between anonymity within a group and the salience of social identity. It may well be that in the studies that we have conducted thus far, anonymity does indeed increase salience. However, this should not be elevated to a general 'effect' without considering the nature of the categories involved. These have included such groups as 'Social Scientists' (vs. Scientists), 'Students' (vs. Academic staff), and 'Anti-fox hunters' (vs. Pro-fox hunters). That is, they are categories defined in terms of social and position and ideology. What is more they are all akin to what Anderson (1983), in his discussion of nationhood, calls horizontal communities. Members are imagined as equivalent and what is important is to know that a person is a member rather than knowing where they stand within the group. The question is whether the anonymity-salience relationship would hold where these criteria do not apply. There is evidence that it would not. Thus, where categories are defined in terms of physical appearance, then group anonymity would obscure the basis for category membership and hence decrease salience. Russell Spears presents evidence to support this contention elsewhere in this

volume. Equally, where categories are defined in terms of inter-connected differences rather than the interchangability of members, then anonymity may obscure those differences and hence reduce salience. A similar point is made by Haslam (in press) who draws on Durkheim's distinction between organic (difference based) and mechanical (similarity based) solidarity. The prediction is that the nature of the visibility-salience relationship depends upon which type of group one is dealing with. Putting both issues together, the more general point is that any predictions about the relationship between visibility and identity definition must take into account the ideological and structural features of the specific categories in question. This is an example of what is meant by arguing that SIDE demands rather than substitutes for situated social analyses.

Now let us turn to the relationship between visibility and the enactment of social identity. Hitherto the studies that have been mentioned deal with the effects of visibility to the outgroup and the ingroup upon the enactment of identity in the face of outgroup constraint. However, enactment of identity is not only constrained by the outgroup. I have argued elsewhere (Emler & Reicher, 1995) that self-categorisation theorists may be right to stress the importance of cognitive self-definition as a category member (the group-in-the-individual) as the psychological precondition for group behaviour. However, the ability to so define oneself may be dependent upon the acceptance of such claims by others, especially other category members (the individual-in-the-group). This is a point that I shall expand upon later in the chapter. For now, I am concerned with the effects of visibility manipulations upon the ability to claim and hence act upon an identity. To use a personal example, living as I do by the river Tay, I may well want to define myself as a Scot — drawing upon the Scottish National Party's definition of New Scots as those who are resident in the country and who are committed to it. However it would be difficult for me to make such a claim in my strong English accent when drinking in a bar up nearby Dundee's Hilltown area. The conditions of visibility would clearly moderate my claims. More systematic experimental evidence in support of this point is provided in studies reported in the chapters by Manuela Barreto and by Olivier Klein. The point I am making here is that, especially at its present stage of development, SIDE does not pretend to be an exhaustive account of all the ways in which visibility affects the enactment of identity. Rather — and the point is sufficiently important to bear repetition — it is intended to provoke the analyst to consider all the ways in which particular visibility conditions affect the enactment (and the definition) of a particular identity. There may well be other ways in which visibility can impact on the ability to express identity beyond those that have already been listed. The success of SIDE will be as much in the questions it provokes for the future as in the answers it has already given. Its ambition, in other words, is to open up enquiry rather than to close it down by insisting, at the outset, that we have already arrived at a point of destination.

This, then, is the cue at which to move from what has been largely a description of research on the effects of visibility upon identity definition and enactment to a consideration of some 'key social phenomena' to which SIDE might be profitably applied. I will consider just three, although there are undoubtedly others of equal social importance. The three are the effects of the rise in surveillance technologies,

the psychological impact of changing forms of collective decision making, and the effects of context upon opinion polling and voting behaviours.

The issue of surveillance is dealt with in sufficient detail in Mark Levine's chapter to require only a brief mention here. As he points out, we live in what is increasingly a surveillance society. Every time we use a credit card our location and our preferences are being logged. Every time we use the internet, our interests and activities are being observed, and, in Britain at least, much of the time that we are in public spaces our presence is being recorded on video cameras. These cameras are hard to oppose since they are justified in the context of stopping the enactment of crime through increased visibility and hence probability of punishment. It is argued that they are defending the community against those who are disreputable. To oppose them is therefore to be placed as outside the moral community. However, this argument is used entirely unreflexively. That is, the supporters of surveillance cameras may base their argument through a construction of the categories of watcher (representing the 'community') and watched ('community aliens') but they fail to consider how others may construe the categories and how this might affect both their views of the cameras and their more general behaviour towards those whose eyes are those cameras. Such consideration gives rise to a number of questions. First of all, do people generally see the cameras as representing themselves and as looking at others or do particular groups (say young men, working class youth, black people, gay people, political activists and so on) see the camera as the 'other' who is looking at them? Secondly, what are the consequences of these different points of view? If we take Giddens' argument that someone who is trusted does not need to be observed and, conversely, that someone who is constantly observed does not need to be trusted (Giddens, 1991), it would follow that seeing oneself as the target of the camera leads to a breakdown of trust, an alienation from and even a delegitimation of the category of watchers. In short, it may be that surveillance cameras create oppositional identities and therefore create the instigation to offend against authority even as they suppress its enactment, at least within camera's range. SIDE therefore offers a psychological framework for addressing the behavioural consequences of surveillance society.

Moving on to the issue of collective decision making, we are again led to address the consequences of what has been a major shift in contemporary western societies and British society in particular. Using the pretext that mass meetings allowed radical bullies to intimidate respectable workers, Conservative administrations passed a series of Trades Union laws were passed throughout the 1980's and early 90's which, amongst other things, made industrial action illegal without secret ballots. What, then, are the psychological consequences of moving the individual from the mass meeting to the lonely contemplation of a ballot paper? On the one hand, we might expect a shift which is the reverse of that described by Lefebvre. There is a return from being a subject of history, a representative of broad social forces to the petty concerns and pressures of everyday life. One is no longer a worker or a Trades Unionist but a householder, a parent, an atomised individual. Being isolated from the collective affects self-definition and therefore affects the understandings, the values and the priorities which guide decisions. On the other hand, we might effect a disempowerment. The old slogan of 'Unity is Strength' is not entirely empty. Collective

action by Trades Unionists and similar groups occurs in a context of uneven power relations where the other side has considerable punitive options and the only power of the ingroup is through combination. To undertake action without clear evidence of mutual support is a considerable risk. To be isolated from others, to remove any possibility of guaging that support is to make the enactment of an oppositional identity far less likely. In addition, it is important to acknowledge a partial truth in the Conservative argument. Being visible to fellow ingroup members does make one more accountable to members of the category and may increase the need to accede to dominant group norms in order to obtain continued acceptance of group membership. However, depending upon the norm this may as easily decrease as increase radicalism. The overall point, however, is that once again it is intellectually simplistic and politically one-sided to concentrate on the issue of enactment (and only one aspect of enactment at that) while ignoring how visibility also affects the nature of the acting subject. The conditions of visibility in the collective form the will of the actor and do not just determine whether people can act on that will as opposed to being subjected to the will of others.

The question of decision making can be extended to look at the process of voting intentions and behaviours more generally. Every time opinion poll results are at odds with actual election results — as in Britain in 1992 when the Conservative returned to power despite prediction that Labour would win — there is a long inquest. And every time, the solution is found in methodological refinements: poll more often, exclude respondents who will not or are not eligible to vote, partition the 'don't knows' in more sophisticated ways — and so on. There is however, another explanation which is more subversive of the basic premise upon which polling takes place. The premise is that there is a unified political subject with a set political attitude at any given time. Polling is therefore a neutral technology which seeks to take extracts from as 'pure' a vein of that attitude as is possible. However, if the subject is fragmented and varies as a function of context, and if forms of polling serve to constitute that context and hence the subject, then things become very different indeed. It may be that where the poll is conducted — in the home, in the street, in the workplace — will affect which identity is salient and therefore the perspective from which the subject answers. It may be that who the poll is for — and hence who the subject is visible to — affects the types of claim the subject is willing to make. However, if this is true then there is a yet more radical implication. That is, the same considerations apply to the act of voting itself. The isolation, the privacy, the anonymity of the ballot box — that central icon, ritual and criterion of democratic society — may itself be far from neutral. It is not just a sanctuary in which the democratic will is protected but a context which forms the political will. By isolating the individual it privileges an individualised and anti-collectivistic politics. It produces very different results to those one might expect from allowing voting in different contexts such as home or workplace (and these points are becoming increasingly pertinent as governments seek to increase voter participation through the use of new technology in new settings). Of course, this is, at present, mere speculation. But the importance of the issues makes enquiry all the more urgent. The potential of SIDE is to provide new and unexpected insights into the psychological and behavioural consequences of some of

the central facets of our social being. Equally, it can provide an informed commentary on the way in which actual or proposed changes will impact upon human action.

What a broad SIDE could do

What I want to do now is move from a consideration of 'the narrow SIDE', which deals specifically with the impact of visibility conditions upon the definition and enactment of social identity, to looking more broadly at the explanatory potential of combining these two dimensions. If 'narrow SIDE' is about the consequences of visibility manipulations on the definition of identity and the ability to enact identity in the face of external constraints, 'broad SIDE' broadens the horizons in two directions. On the one hand, the concern is not simply with the impact of visibility, but rather with the impact of social reality in general upon identity definition and enactment. On the other hand, in this broader approach, enactment refers to all aspects of the way in which the expression of identity is oriented to social reality — not just the way in which expression is moderated by real world constraints but also the way in expression is used in order to reconfigure these restraints. In a nutshell, whereas the narrow SIDE refers to a **S**ocial **I**dentity model of **DE**individuation phenomena, a broad SIDE refers to all aspects of **S**ocial **I**dentity **D**efinition and **E**nactment.

In order to appreciate the potential of such an approach, I can do no better than echo what Donald Levine (1998) has to say about the problem of splitting in his analysis of political economy — where by splitting he means 'the separation, indeed polarization, of the moments of a single idea until those moments stand opposed to each other, and we can only hold onto one if we give up the other' (p. 3). He goes on to say, in a phrase that could be seamlessly applied to social psychology, that: 'this failure is nowhere more evident than in the so-called 'schools', 'frameworks', or 'paradigms', that many believe organize thinking in political economy' (ibid.). The psychological traditions I have dealt with thus far are a reflection of just such a split which runs, like a catastrophic fault line, through the core of social psychology in general and work on collective processes in particular. On the one side stand those who are cognitive nihilists and for whom mindful deliberation is entirely absent from collective behaviour. For them, acting collectively may alter the relationship to external constraints (and thereby affect the propensity to act) but there are no internal constraints upon what one is willing to do. Such a view is perfectly expressed by Gabriel Tarde's aphorism that 'society is imitation and imitation is a form of somnambulism' (1901, p. 95). Facing them are the cognitive absolutists. From their viewpoint, the intelligible procedures through which contextual information is processed are not only relevant for behaviour, but constitute all that is relevant for behaviour. There are many different 'cognitivist' schools, with fundamentally different views on such fundamental issues as the relationship between social cognition and social reality. Nonetheless, they all lay the entire explanatory burden on internal constraints and external constraint is entirely absent. In both cases, therefore, the link between internal and external constraint — between the terms of cognition and the possibilities of enactment — is broken because one or the other is absent.

The consequences of this break depend upon which term is missing. The nihilists deny reason and hence portray collective life as inescapably irrational. The absolutists see nothing but reason in action and therefore, whether they embrace or recoil from such relativism, cannot establish any basis on which to endorse one form of reason over any other. The promise of a broad SIDE, then, is that by addressing both internal and external constraints (or, to put it slightly differently, by exploring cognition only in relation to the constraints upon social action), it allows us to challenge both the Scylla of irrationalism and the Charibdis of relativism. A few examples may help give some weight to such a bold claim. I will deal with each in turn.

Irrationalism has taken many forms over the years. If Le Bonian group mind theory is less popular than it once was, his underlying assumption — that collective life is marked by lack of judgement and lack of intellect — remains alive and well. For those who wish to combat irrationalism as it appears in contemporary social psychology, there are two challenges in particular that need to be met. Firstly, the prevailing notion of stereotypes — as rigid, simplifying and distorted perceptions which flow inevitably from the mismatch between the complexity of collective being and the limitations of our human cognitive apparatus — must be laid to rest. Secondly, one must overcome the almost universal assumption that group membership entails a generic and unwarranted bias towards all things related to the ingroup.

Over the last few years, self-categorisation theorists have devoted themselves to precisely these challenges. Insofar as SCT starts from the premise that social perception reflects social reality, and that we perceive reality in collective terms to the extent that it is organised in collective terms, it could hardly do otherwise. Hitherto, most of the attention has been addressed to our understanding of stereotyping (though see McGarty, 1999; Turner & Bourhis, 1997), and the arguments have been conducted exclusively on a cognitive level. Thus, it has been argued that stereotypes are representations of the similarities and differences that exist in given inter-group relations. The stereotypic position of any given group is that which minimises intra-group differences in comparison to inter-group differences. The stereotype of a group is therefore dependent upon the comparative context in which it is assessed. Stereotypes only appear rigid if one ignores the inter-group dimension and takes particular comparisons for granted. However, as soon as one systematically varies the frame of reference so one sees that stereotypes are sensitive to shifts in social reality (Haslam & Turner, 1992, 1995; Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994).

Apart from a concern that the frame of reference be taken as a given in itself rather than a topic of potential dispute (cf. Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a,b), I would not dissent from this position. Indeed, it has undoubtedly had a revolutionary effect on the study of stereotypes. I would only worry if the assault on irrationalism were restricted to an argument concerning identity definition. The position would be much strengthened by adding in support arguments concerning the enactment of identity. Indeed, in many ways such arguments are more straightforward and hence more compelling for doubters. They start with a move which undermines the whole logic that underpins accusations of distortion and irrationality. That is, to suggest that stereotypes are erroneous because they are a misrepresentation of social reality is to presuppose that stereotypes must be understood in relation to how things are. In other

words, stereotyping is understood as a perception of social *being*. However, stereotyping may equally well be understood as oriented towards remaking the world in a particular image. Stereotyping is equally about social *becoming*.

This distinction between '*being*' and '*becoming*' and its implications in terms of how we understand truth and error has a long philosophical pedigree, but is perhaps most closely associated with Nietzsche and Heidegger. It is expressed with exemplary clarity in Heidegger's essay on 'World and Life as 'Becoming'' which forms part of his collected essays on Nietzsche (Heidegger, 1991, vol. 3, pp. 64-7). Heidegger writes: 'the representation of something as in being in the sense of the constant and the stable is a valuation. To elevate what is true of the 'world' to something permanent, eternal and immutable in itself means at the same time to transpose truth to life itself as a necessary condition of life. Yet if the world were constantly changing and perishing, if it had its essence in the most perishable of what perishes and is inconstant, truth in the sense of what is constant and stable would be a mere fixation and coagulation of what in itself is becoming; measured against what is becoming, such fixating is *in*appropriate and merely a distortion. The true as the correct would precisely *not* conform to Becoming. Truth would then be incorrectness, error — an 'illusion,' albeit a perhaps necessary one.' (p. 64, emphasis in the original). Applying the argument to our present concerns, stereotyping can only be judged as error if it is placed in relation to the world as given. As soon as it is viewed in a context of changing the world, the 'truth' of stereotypes, as conventionally understood, becomes at best irrelevant and at worst an illusion in itself. The point was made by Tajfel in one of his early papers on images of the nation. Even the most cursory examination of nationalism suggests that national stereotypes are employed in the process of creating and re-creating nation states as much as the reality of national states serves to create national stereotypes. As Tajfel puts it, such images are 'often endowed with the magic of self-fulfilling prophecies' (1970, p.130). He goes on to note that, insofar as they make future realities as much as reflect present reality, then 'the issue of the'-core of truth'in stereotypes loses much of its true-false simplicity' (ibid.).

In a number of studies now involving a range of very different types of group, we have shown how group stereotypes are constructed and deployed so as to mobilise collective action designed to create particular social realities (e.g. Hopkins & Reicher, 1997a,b; Reicher & Hopkins 1996a,b; Reicher, Hopkins & Condor, 1997a; Reicher & Sani, 1998; Sani & Reicher 1998, 1999). For instance, Labour and Conservative politicians variously define Scottish identity in terms of communal values and collective support or else in terms of individual enterprise and self-help so as to win support for their policies and parties and hence to win a mandate to put those policies into practice (Reicher, Hopkins & Condor, 1997b). It is not that one or the other (or both) of them misperceives the nature of Scottish reality. It is not that either of them is out of touch with how Scots are. The supposition is self-evidently a misunderstanding of what is going on. The national stereotypes are clearly a matter of making the world in the image of identity rather than of defining identity as an image of the world.

The argument does not only apply to stereotypes but equally to a whole series of other collective phenomena which are often seen as misjudgements. Thus, in the run

up to a general election, members and representatives constantly asserted how their party was more powerful, more authentic and — in particular — more popular than their rivals. This could be taken as evidence of ingroup bias, of false consensus and of other similar phenomena. However such claims could also be seen as strategies for achieving support on both normative and practical grounds: vote for us because we are genuinely representative of you the electorate, moreover, a vote for us will not be a wasted vote. Such an interpretation is given more weight by the fact that, in a post-election period when the same representatives were arguing for coalition rather than single party politics, they began actively to play down ingroup popularity and support in order to argue the impossibility of going it alone (Hopkins & Reicher, in press).

My point should be clear by now: to fight irrationalism on a purely social cognitive basis by claiming that collective assertions are relationally valid definitions of a social categorical reality is to restrict oneself unnecessarily and to condemn oneself to significant defeats. No doubt, such assertions may sometimes be statements about what is, and then they are properly viewed as a matter of comparative context. However, frequently they are claims about what may or should be, in which case they do not represent the present and appear irrational if approached as such. It is necessary to understand that stereotyping, 'ingroup bias' and other associated phenomena are as much about making the world as reflecting it. By adding the dimension of enactment to that of definition, irrationalism becomes a far easier foe to deal with.

There is another difficulty in limiting ones conceptual arsenal to arguments concerning the definition of identity, even if these definitions are tied to social reality as relationally valid perceptions. How can one then adjudicate between the different perspectives tied to different positions? Moreover, what limits the range of positions one can adopt and ones ability to shift between these identities? If one tries to answer these questions on a perceptual/positional basis one mere postpones the moment of reckoning, for the question simply arises as to the constraints on these second order positions — and so on in infinite regression. On a conceptual level, then, the definitional argument in isolation leaves one easy prey to relativism. On a more practical level, the danger is that one suggests a view of social being in which individuals flit momentarily from one identity to the next and from one incommensurable set of understandings to the next. Each time we move into a new context, we move into a new reality that has no reference to the previous one. Such a view of social life in which any coherence, any progress, and career becomes impossible, is plainly implausible. It is necessary to introduce some inertia into the system by which identity claims and shifts between identity are limited. It is also necessary to introduce some inter-connectedness between context and identities and some means of deciding how to reconcile alternative perspectives. As you might expect by now, I will argue that both tasks become manageable if enactment is considered alongside definition.

A number of years ago, when researching into adolescent delinquency, we were faced with explaining one of the most persistent patterns both in the literature and in our own findings: boys commit far more delinquent acts than girls (cf. Emler & Reicher, 1995). The most usual explanation for this phenomenon is that delinquent identity is psychologically incompatible with the identity of girls. However, as Billig (1987) has pointed out, contradiction — far from being an aversive state as dissonance

theorists suggest — is our everyday state of being. Why should it prove a particular problem for girl delinquents? Our argument was that the incompatibility was not a problem in itself, but rather that achieving any identity depends upon ones claims being accepted by fellow group members. It is hard to be a 'delinquent' if all the other 'delinquents' refuse to accept you or socialise with you (in a similar vein, McCrone, Stewart, Kiely and Bechofer argue that claims to be Scottish are limited by the way one anticipates how others would receive them). The problem for adolescent girls is that they depend upon the same audience — of adolescent boys — to validate their 'delinquent' and gender identities. The contradictory definitions of the two identities does not pose a problem intrapsychically, but in the willingness of the other to accept one as 'tough and mean' on the one hand and 'soft and gentle on the other'.

As I argued more generally elsewhere (Reicher, 1996), it is easy to hold contradictory identities if one can validate them through separate audiences. It is the social relations of visibility and contact between audiences which constrains ones ability to hold different identities and to shift identities. If further persuasion is needed, I suspect we have all experienced the discomfort of simultaneously encountering two sets of people with whom one sustains very different identities: ones political friends and ones academic colleagues; ones football friends and ones parents. For me, at least, it brings back painful, if not farcical memories. But my point is not to relive personal humiliations. Rather it is to stress that the free play of identity is limited by the possibilities of expression in a world where our own projects are moderated by the projects of others — which is another way of saying that identity definition depends upon identity enactment.

This might seem like yet another restatement of what has gone before — that we need both dimensions of the SIDE model in order to address the social psychology of human subjects — and in one sense it is. But in another sense it goes beyond the previous arguments in ways that are of fundamental importance. Most notably, whereas previously I have discussed definition and enactment in additive terms, or else addressed how real world constraints affect the expression of a previously defined identity, here I suggest that such constraints affect the very definition of identity, not just its expression. This implies that the dimensions may stand in a mutually constitutive and transactional relationship rather than as separate and complementary factors. I want to conclude by expanding on this point and by showing how such a dynamic understanding of the definition/enactment relationship not only addresses the specific issue of relativism but also points towards a new way of doing social psychology.

History is on our SIDE

It may be helpful to start by expanding on the foregoing argument. Why should it be difficult to claim a (delinquent) identity if others refuse to accept it? There are a number of reasons, but, crucially, collective acceptance is necessary in order to be able to act in terms of ones (delinquent) identity. If one tried to be delinquent in the absence of acceptance and support — say if one tried to resist teachers and make trouble in class — one would rapidly be isolated, apprehended and stopped. The key

point is that identity is oriented to action. One cannot be a delinquent, a socialist, a Catholic or whatever without acting as such. Indeed, as we have argued, identity should be seen as a model of social action: what is possible and what is proper given one position as a category member in a particular set of categorical relations (Drury & Reicher, 1999, in press; Reicher, 1995, 1997; Reicher, Hopkins & Condor, 1997b). This implies an inherently two way relationship between identity definitions and constraints upon social action. On the one hand, identity mobilises action and seeks to affect the nature of social constraints — either to preserve them or to rearrange them. On the other hand identity is affected by the nature of existing constraints. In order to understand how this balance between the self as determining and the self as determined is played out, another element of my previous argument requires elucidation.

Constraint in our increasingly technological world is always mediated or else constituted by others — mediated in the sense that the impact of the material world depends upon the access we are allowed to the technologies through which we act in the world (the meaning of distance depends upon whether we have a car); constituted in the sense that our actions depend upon how others allow us to act. Most of the situations that we study as social psychologists, especially in the case of collective action, are cases where others act directly as constraint. Thus, in a crowd, the external reality which impedes our movement is the line of shields deployed by the police. Consequently, the relationship between identity definition and real world constraints must be analysed as a matter of inter-group relations: how do the actions deriving from our self-definitions prevail upon others, or how do the definitions of others and their orientations to us prevail over our own actions?

What is more, as some of our recent studies on the inter-group dynamics of crowd events have shown (Drury & Reicher, 1999, in press; Reicher, 1996, 1997; Stott & Reicher, 1998) these relations do not always remain static but may indeed change in the course of interactions. This happens particularly where there is a difference between the self understandings of crowd members and the ways in which they are understood by a powerful outgroup — the police. Consequently, individuals who act upon one understanding of their social position (we are moderate citizens exerting our right to protest) find their actions blocked and themselves repositioned by the police response (they are an oppositional threat to the social order and must be preventing from causing disorder). This repositioning not only changes the social relations of crowd members to the police, and hence their identity, but also to each other. Radical demonstrators, who once might have been seen as 'other' by the erstwhile 'moderates', become included in the common oppositional ingroup, and this psychological extension enhances expectations of co-action and hence feelings of power against the police. That is, both the nature of the categories and the balance of constraint between crowd and police is altered going into the next phase of the interaction.

Four broad points emerge from these analyses. The first is that both the definition and the enactment of social identity are necessary to understanding these collective dynamics but, above all, it is necessary to understand the inter-relationship between elements that may be more usefully conceptualised as moments in a single process rather than separate elements. That is, the self definition of one group (the police)

lead to actions that constitute constraints upon the actions of others (the crowd); these constraints in their turn affect the self definition of the crowd which then produces new constraints for the police — and so on. Secondly, this process must take self and other into account and must look at their evolving relations. That is, the process is necessarily historical and interactive. Thirdly, through this process we can see how the differing perspectives of different groups are reconciled — not through deliberation but through practice and the success in enacting one perspective over the resistance of others. Fourthly in describing these collective dynamics we are dealing not only with the problem of relativism or the domain of crowd psychology — sadly, a relatively marginalised area in social psychology — but also with many of the central concepts of the discipline: most notably, the salience of different social categories, the stereotypes applied to self and other and the nature of intergroup relations. That is, historical and interactive studies of identity definition and enactment provide a basis for addressing our subject in general and not just a limited set of phenomena.

That is the conclusion. Throughout this chapter I have sought to illustrate the explanatory potential of addressing identity definition along with identity enactment — and of understanding the ways the two inter-relate. The more broadly we conceptualise these elements and the more fully we explore their relationship, the greater the potential and the more profound the implications for social psychology. SIDE helps us embark upon a journey of transformation. There is a long and exciting road ahead.

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