Social Identity Theory

Intro Activity:

Write a short personal introduction of yourself, in around 100 words, as if you were introducing yourself to an audience or completing the "About Me" section on a social media account.

How many groups did you link to your identity?

I am in my 5th year as a teacher at Tates Creek High School. Originally from Ohio, I have been living in Lexington for the past 8 years. I like watching soccer and conducting research.
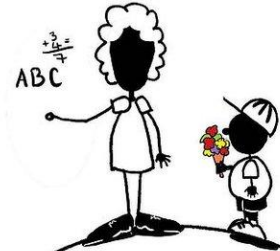
Social Identity Theory

Our sense of self comes from the groups we belong to.

In fact, it would be very difficult (if not impossible) for you to define yourself *without* mentioning any social groups.

People have a basic need for self-esteem.

We want to feel good about ourselves. We all want to feel like worthy, capable people that deserve respect and recognition from others.

Self-esteem sometimes comes from personal achievements.

Your self-esteem is also closely linked to your social identity - the achievements and success of your group. Simply belonging to a highly regarded group gives your self-esteem a boost.

Research: Cialdini
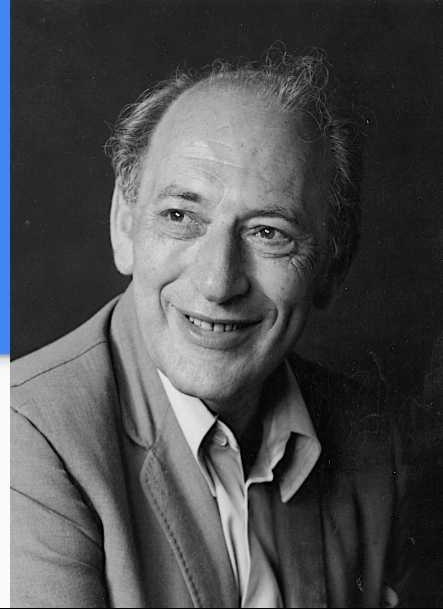
Research: Tajfel
Universities of Oxford and Bristol

Career studying how social identities are formed, and how they influence our behavior.

Developed social identity theory (1979)

Multiple cognitive processes are involved in belonging to a group:
- categorization
- identification
- social comparison
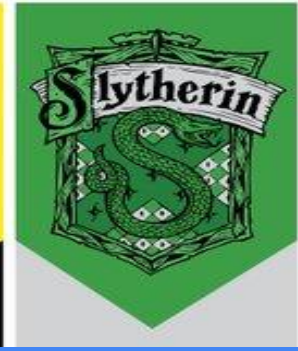
1. Categorization

The process by which you group people together on the basis of certain characteristics - like their gender, age, nationality, religion, social group, occupation, and so forth.

Each category is like a box in your mind, and when you meet someone you immediately place them in a particular box.

2. Identification

When you take on the values and beliefs of the group

Default group identification - many identify with the gender and nationality they are born with.

Group identification by conscious decision - joining a fraternity or convert to a particular religion.

COURAGE

INTELLIGENCE

HARD WORK

AMBITION

BRAVERY

CREATIVITY

PATIENCE

CUNNING

3. Social Comparison

Comparing your group (the in-group) with other groups (out-groups).

We look for ways to make our group seem better than the other group, perhaps by emphasizing our accomplishments and desirable qualities, and looking for deficiencies our rival groups.

Positive Distinctiveness

People in your group are unique and different from those in other groups. Your group is the best (or at least as good as any of those other groups).

Stereotyping

We assume that people within a group all have certain characteristics in common - *"out-group homogeneity effect"*

This is closely related to stereotypes. For instance, all Spanish people take long siestas, and all Germans are efficient and boring.

Research: Tajfel

People have a tendency to identify with and fight for the interests of their groups.

In the British school system, students are divided into different-colored "Houses" for school competitions, and students are often fiercely competitive in achieving victory for their House.

Tajfel wanted to demonstrate that even the most trivial and meaningless groups tend to inspire in-group loyalty and competitiveness, and thus carried out experiments based on what he called the **minimal group paradigm.**

Groups play a very significant role in influencing behavior.

In positive ways - like when citizens of a country rally together to recover from a natural disaster, or when members of a religion organize fundraising activities.

In negative ways - wars, ethnic cleansing, even genocide (ie. the Crusades or the Serbian genocide)

Advantages of S.I.T.

- SIT describes the **cognitive processes** (categorization, identification, and social comparison) that explain group loyalty and out-group hostility

- SIT is supported by research, such as Cialdini's and Tajfel's studies

Weaknesses of S.I.T.

- SIT does not completely explain why some group relations may involve friendly rivalry, while others descend into outright hostility and violence.
- There are undoubtedly other factors that influence group relations (such as competition for scarce resources, or historical relations between the groups)

Exit Activity:

Watch the video on student cliques in a British secondary school and answer the following questions:
1. Identify examples of categorization, identification, and social comparison
2. How do the students in this video try to establish **positive distinctiveness** for their group?