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Social Identity Theory

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INTRODUCTION

Thirty-something women like 'Sex and the City,' but men go for sports. Youngsters watch MTV, whereas the older generation tunes in for the 'Golden Girls' (Cassata & Irwin, 2003). Germans, Mexicans, and South-Koreans have something in common: They all prefer television produced in their home country over international programming (Waisbord, 2004). Although perhaps intuitive, ratings and shares clearly show that media consumers prefer entertainment that refers to the social groups they belong to—be it gender (Oliver, 2000; Oliver, Weaver & Sargent, 2000; Trepte, 2004), age (Haarwood, 1999) or culture (Greenberg & Atkin, 1982; Zillmann et al., 1995). In particular, they seek out entertainment that favors their 'in-group,' sometimes even drawing a sharp line to distinguish them from other 'out-group' people. We can assume that social identity influences the selection of media entertainment, because people are creating their personal media profile to support their own identity. Also, it is likely that processes of social identity come into play during the reception process and that they determine the effects of watching entertaining fare.

Social identity theory (SIT) focuses on "the group in the individual" (Hogg & Abrams, 1988, p. 3) and assumes that one part of the self-concept is defined by our belonging to social groups. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), people categorize themselves and others as belonging to different social groups and evaluate these categorizations. Membership, alongside the value placed on it, is defined as the social identity. To enhance their self-esteem, people want to develop a positive social identity. To do so, they show all kinds of different behavior that might also be observed in the context of entertainment selection and reception.

Social identity has been shown as a plausible theoretical background for identity related gratifications in the uses-and-gratifications approach to understanding media use (Blumler, 1979). Blumler (1985) stated that "[. . .] little attention has been paid to the social group

memberships and affiliations, formal and subjective, that might feed audience concerns to maintain and strengthen their social identities through what they see, read, and hear in the media" (p. 50). However, over the next twenty years, the idea of social identity in terms of SIT has only very superficially 'inspired' research on identity processes. Only then did scholars systematically begin research that was based on assumptions of social identity theory (Harwood, 1999; Trepte, 2004; Zillmann et al., 1995). SIT is, therefore, still a comparatively new social-psychological theory in terms of how often it has been applied to problems and questions in media effects and entertainment research.

In this chapter, social identity theory and social categorization theory will be outlined and its application in entertainment research will be considered. SIT has been used to show that selective exposure can be determined by group memberships and to prove effects of identification in the context of models such as media dependency and third-person effect. Also, SIT has been used to explain inter-group processes in computer mediated communication. Finally, future developments and a research agenda for SIT in entertainment research will be discussed.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

Social identity theory (SIT) was first proposed by Tajfel (1978, 1979) and later by Tajfel and Turner (1979). It is a social-psychological theory that attempts to explain cognitions and behavior with the help of group-processes. SIT assumes that we show all kinds of "group" behavior, such as solidarity, within our groups and discrimination against out-groups as a part of social identity processes, with the aim to achieve positive self-esteem and self-enhancement (Abrams & Hogg, 1988).

Research on SIT has mainly been stimulated by thoughts about social settings and groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel (1979) proposed the "minimal group paradigm" and showed that mere categorization to one group or another makes people discriminate against the designated out-group and favor their in-group. Groups in the early experiments had no face-to-face interaction and the categorization was randomly assigned (Tajfel, Flament, Billig, & Bundy, 1971). Even these minimal conditions led the members to in-group favoritism and discrimination against the out-group. They tried to maximize the difference of rewards between in-group and out-group, whereas maximizing their own, in-group profit was less important to them.

Thus, in comparison to most other social psychological theories, SIT does not begin with assumptions considering the individual, but rather with assumptions referring to a social group. A social group consists of a number of people who feel and perceive themselves as belonging to this group and who are said to be in the group by others (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). Intermember interaction can take place, but is by no means a presupposition for the perception of its members as belonging to the same group. For instance a football club can be considered a social group, as well as a group consisting of all of the women in an organization. Also, members do not have to share interdependent goals or a similar understanding of a concurrent out-group to make them a social group. Tajfel (1979) structures the definition of a group alongside a cognitive component (knowing about the group membership), an evaluative component (positive or negative evaluation of group membership) and an emotional component (positive or negative emotions associated with the group membership and its evaluation). Based on his understanding of social groups outlined here, he suggested four underlying principles of SIT, which are social categorization, social comparison, social identity and self-esteem. All four will be elaborated in the following paragraphs. But before, very briefly self-categorization theory as a further development of SIT will be outlined.

Further Developments on Social Identity: Self-Categorization Theory

SIT has further been developed in co-operation with numerous scholars, particularly by Tajfel's colleague Turner (1987), who later proposed the self-categorization theory (for an overview see Turner, 1987, 1999; Turner & Onorato, 1999). Both theories share the idea of social identity, but in self-categorization theory (SCT) social identity is seen as the process that changes interpersonal to inter-group behavior. SCT does not define interpersonal and inter-group behavior as the poles of one continuum, but suggests that personal and social identity represent different levels of self-categorization. It is the "relative" salience of different levels of self-categorization which determines the degree to which behavior expresses individual differences or collective similarities (Turner, 1999). In some situations even both, personal and social identity, can become salient (Turner & Onorato, 1999).

In research on media entertainment, however, it is hard to draw a clear line between SIT and SCT, because rather than trying to "prove" one or the other theory, scholars have addressed processes of social categorization and social identity found in both of the theories. Some authors particularly address both theories (Mastro, 2003; Zillmann et al., 1995), but most of them refer to the more general SIT and then reflect developments that have been made in the tradition of SCT. The self-esteem hypothesis (Hogg & Abrams, 1990), ideas on salience (Oakes, 1987), and also the accentuation principle have initially been triggered and suggested by Tajfel (1978, 1979), but have further been developed under the aegis of Turner (1987). To accommodate this progress, the chapter will consider the principles of social identity outlined in SIT and it will be complemented by theoretical developments in the realm of SCT.

Social Categorization

Tajfel (1979) states that due to reduced capacities in processing information we define categories and schemes to encode and decode messages. Similar to other entities in our surrounding, we categorize people into groups to simplify our understanding of the world and to structure social interaction. For instance, we use categories such as 'Punk' or 'Skater' to describe groups with similar and specific clothing style and habits, and we have certain expectations, hopes and fears about people belonging to social categories. Tajfel and Turner (1979) summarize: "Social categorizations are conceived here as cognitive tools that segment, classify, and order the social environment, and thus enable the individual to undertake many forms of social action. [. . .] They create and define the individual's place in society" (p. 40).

Based on group categorization, differences between categories (interclass differences) are accentuated and differences between members within the same category (intraclass differences) are underestimated or restrained. This "accentuation principle" is more pronounced when the categorization is salient, important and of immediate relevance to the individual (for the first theoretical ideas on the accentuation principle see Tajfel, 1959; for the first experiment see Tajfel and Wilkes, 1963; see also Hogg & Abrams, 1988, p. 20).

If social categorizations are shared by all group members, they function as "social stereotypes" and help interpret, explain, and even justify our behavior (Tajfel, 1981). In addition, the goal of SIT scholars in social psychology is to define consequences and behavioral outcomes of the processes underlying social identity. Since Tajfel published his article "Cognitive Aspects of Prejudice" in 1969, one of the major issues on the research agenda has been social stereotyping (Oakes, 1996). It has triggered a tremendous amount of research in the field of applied social psychology (for reviews see Hamilton & Sherman, 1994; Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994).

Of course, we also categorize *ourselves* into groups such as sporting clubs, fans of certain TV series, or members of a university. All people belong to a number of different groups, but they are not of the same importance at the same time. In SIT, Tajfel (1979) adds to the idea of minimal groups that the group membership has to be "salient" to initiate behavior in terms of social identity. Although, there is a long tradition of research on salience that goes back to Festinger's idea of religious identity in 1947, there is no theoretical development in line with SIT. Oakes (1987) proposed that salience means that group membership influences perception and behavior. This notion of "psychological salience" is differentiated from "stimulus salience" that might be some situational cue reminding of a group membership and that functions as a causal antecedent of psychological salience (Oakes, 1987, p. 118). Early conceptions of salience proposed that group memberships are more likely to be salient, if the differences between categories are "clear". Conversely, Oakes (1987) suggests that salience occurs if a social categorization is accessible *and* best fits the information available. "Accessibility refers to the relative "readiness" of a given category to become activated; the more accessible the category, the less input is required to invoke the relevant categorization [...]" (Oakes, 1987, p. 127). Accessibility is determined by the relative centrality or importance of a group membership and by its current emotional or value significance to a person. The fit of a categorization is termed as the degree to which observed similarities and differences between people correlate with the expected social categories (Oakes, Turner & Haslam, 1991). Hence, it is a fit between input and category specifications. Given the same accessibility, the category will become salient that guarantees the best fit between an observed stimulus (e.g., a person with Iroquois haircut) and a predefined (and stereotypical) idea of a category (e.g., a Punk).

Social Comparison

The first type of behavior that is triggered by social categorization is social comparison. To define an individual's place in society, social categorizations are evaluated in comparison with other groups. SIT assumes that we not only categorize ourselves and others, but that we evaluate the groups. To get an idea of the superiority or inferiority of our group and of how reasonable and adequate our belonging to it is, we compare it with other groups, their characteristics, members, and benefits. This concept is based on Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison. Festinger assumes that we have a need to compare our opinions and abilities with others, particularly if there are no objective standards that we can refer to.

The aim of social comparison, in terms of SIT, is to evaluate the social groups to which we and others belong. Social comparison usually takes place with groups that are similar to one's own group, and refers to dimensions that compose the group. Both the other group's similarity and the dimensions, on which inter-group comparisons take place, define the relevance of inter-group comparison. The "closer" the other groups are to ourselves in terms of the dimensions on which we compete, the more relevant the social comparison gets and the more we "need" and want a positive outcome. The outcome of social comparisons largely determines our social identity and self-esteem.

There are three premises for social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 41). First, individuals must have internalized their group membership as a part of their self-concept. They must be identified with their in-group. Second, the situation must allow social comparison. Third, the out-group must be relevant in terms of similarity and proximity (Hinkle & Brown, 1990).

Social Identity

Tajfel (1978) defines social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the

value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 63). Thus, social identity is based on more or less favorable comparisons between the in-group and a relevant out-group.

By differentiating between in-group from out-group on dimensions in which the in-group falls at the evaluative positive pole, the in-group acquires a "positive distinctiveness," and thus a relatively positive social identity in comparison to the out-group. The main aim of individuals is to achieve *positive* social identity. Positively discrepant comparisons produce positive social identity, and negatively discrepant comparisons produce negative social identity.

As groups and their performance and status change, social comparison takes place constantly and social identity is negotiable. "Categories come and go (prior to the mid-twentieth century there was not such occupational category as 'computer programmer'), their defining features alter (historical modifications of stereotypes of North American Blacks), their relations with other categories change (inter-group relations between the sexes), and so on." (Hogg & Abrams, 1988, p. 14). For that reason, the motivation to reach positive social identity is always present and in progress.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) conceptualized different belief structures and associated strategies to reach a positive social identity. If inferiority of their own group cannot be denied, members might leave a group and join a higher status group. This strategy is based on the belief structure of "social mobility." It is restricted by the perceived characteristics, group boundaries, strength of objections, and sanctions of the groups. If social mobility is not possible, or the confrontation with the dominant group has to be avoided, group members might adhere to the belief structure of "social change". This implies strategies such as "social competition" or "social creativity". Social comparison with lower status groups is used to emphasize the in-group's superiority on the relevant dimensions of comparison. Social creativity implies redefining the value associated with the low-status criterion, focusing on additional dimensions of comparison, or comparing with a different group. For an overview on the strategies and belief structures see Tajfel & Turner (1979, p. 42 ff.) and Hogg & Abrams (1988, p. 27).

Self-Esteem

SIT suggests a fundamental individual motivation for self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1982). In his early work, Tajfel (1969) stated that the motivation underlying positive social identity is to preserve the integrity of the self image and, later, he assumed that the main drive is to reach self-enhancement (Tajfel, 1972). The formal theoretical statement on SIT finally refers to self-esteem as the motivation underlying inter-group behavior. The idea stems from social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954; see prior) and implies that people strive to confirm aspects of their own self-definition. In terms of SIT the need for positive self-esteem is satisfied by a positive evaluation of one's own group (Turner, Brown & Tajfel, 1979). If a group membership is crucial to one's self-concept (e.g., football club membership to a professional player), social comparison should lead to positive social distinctiveness and enhance self-esteem.

However, in SIT the motivation for self-esteem is considered a premise and has not clearly been integrated in the processes of social identity. Also, the empirical status remains unclear and the combination of cognitive (categorization) and motivational (self-esteem) constructs have not fully been discussed (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Hogg & Abrams, 1990, p. 32). For that reason, Abrams and Hogg (1988) elaborated on this issue and suggest "the self-esteem hypothesis." It states two corollaries: First, that successful inter-group discrimination leads to increased self-esteem (self-esteem as a dependent variable); second, that low or threatened self-esteem motivates increased out-group discrimination (self-esteem as independent variable). Research on both corollaries does not unambiguously support one of each. Several reasons for lacking support have been discussed (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Hogg & Abrams, 1990). It has been

criticized that in most of the studies global self-esteem has been measured, although SIT refers to self-esteem as "the esteem in which specific self images are held" (Hogg & Abrams, 1990, p. 38; see also Turner, 1982). Another reason discussed is that self-esteem might be one, but not always *the* motive. There are supposed to be other, competing needs that are to be fulfilled with inter-group comparison and evolving positive social identity (Hogg & Abrams, 1990); for instance, the general motive of self-knowledge or self-actualization. In this sense, self-esteem is seen as a consequence of having fulfilled the need to know more about oneself. Other motives might be to construct meaning or to reach consistency by self-categorization. Also, exhibiting power or control and reaching self-efficacy have been discussed as motives to enhance self-esteem in the first place. Summing up research on the idea of self-esteem in SIT, Hogg and Abrams (1990) state that "while it clearly does play an important role, self-esteem may be one of a number of motives and effects of different forms of group behavior. Possibly more fundamental is some form of self-evaluative motive" (p. 46).

SOCIAL IDENTITY IN MEDIA EFFECTS AND ENTERTAINMENT RESEARCH

In communication studies, social identity was considered to be of relevance to selective exposure relatively early on (Blumler, 1979, 1985; McQuail, 2000). Despite this early recognition, however, SIT has long been neglected in media psychology and entertainment research. Only within the last decade empirical studies have been done based on its assumptions and in its methodological tradition. Alongside with empirical data on the subject matter, theoretical models that conceptualize processes of social identity before, during, and after the consumption of media entertainment have been developed (Reid, Giles & Abrams, 2004; Trepte, 2004).

In the following sections, ways in which SIT can contribute to the psychology of entertainment will be elaborated. Studies and models in this area of research usually either address how social identity determines media selection and media preferences or how the media affect social identity. The following sections will deal with these two perspectives, respectively. Additionally the last section will address how SIT has been applied to reception processes in computer-mediated communication.

MEDIA PREFERENCES GUIDED BY SOCIAL IDENTITY

To find out why people choose certain entertainment products, a variety of theories have been proposed. Very different kinds of models in terms of their paradigmatic background now serve as explanations for selective exposure (for an overview see: Vorderer, Wulff & Friedrichsen, 1996; Zillmann & Bryant, 1985; Zillmann & Vorderer, 2000). In the late 1990s, social identity and SIT were added to these models. SIT contributes the idea that we choose entertainment in concordance with certain group memberships and connects social settings and individual motivations in entertainment consumption. This process is made easier as entertainment diversifies and attempts to serve the needs of the vast variety of groups. Particularly in today's successful entertainment programs, such as casting shows (e.g., "American Idol"), game shows (e.g., "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire"), and talk shows, all kinds of different social backgrounds, even the rarest types of social groups, are shown and addressed (Trepte, 2005). Also, technical developments such as digital video recorders and digital cable simplify this specialization (Harwood & Roy, 2005).

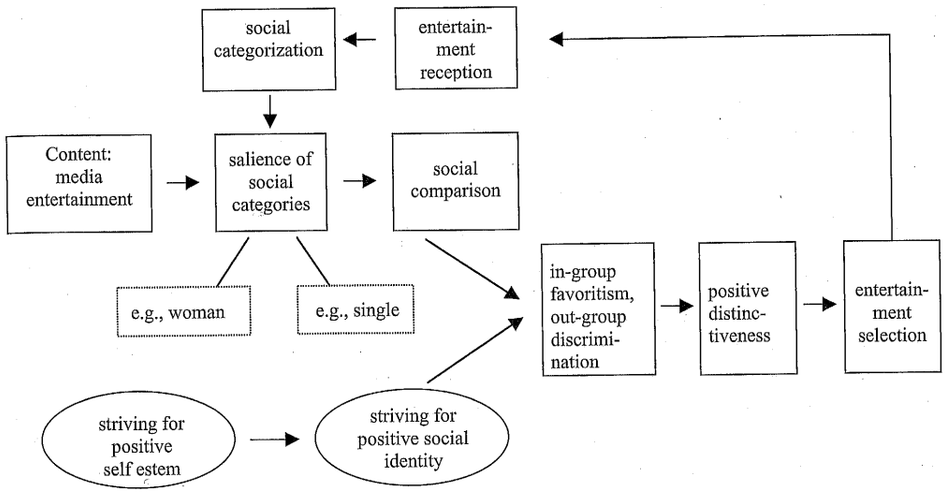

FIG. 15.1. Processes of social identity in entertainment consumption

The idea behind the influence of social identity on entertainment media preferences has been conceptualized by Trepte (2004; see figure one). The process shown can either be situated before or during media reception, given that recipients make choices—either to stay with it or to switch. The model starts with recipients of entertainment content making their choices (see box labeled 'Media Entertainment'). As an example, consider a woman who wants to pick an entertainment program on television. She either browses the channels or looks at the short descriptions in the TV Guide. By doing so, certain social categories she belongs to (such as young, urban, female, and single) will become salient, because some shows (such as "Sex and the City" or "Ally McBeal") fit to these categories. For her, the shows offer the opportunity to "meet" members of her in-group and to compare herself with out-groups. Given that she has the motive to attain positive self-esteem and positive social identity, she might select one of the shows, because her in-group (female single) is depicted in a rather favorable way. Also, the story offers content that might discriminate the out-group (e.g., married women or men). The woman's goal to reach positive distinctiveness might be met and she will pick the show, because of this promising outcome. Consequently, her social identity will be strengthened, because a positive evaluation of the in-group takes place during media reception. A redefinition of the categories' characteristics might take place and succeeding media choices will be influenced by this experience.

The model shows that working on one's social identity and enhancing self-esteem might be a motive for media selection. A number of studies have been done to empirically prove how group memberships determine media selection. As categories or group memberships they address the recipients' age (Harwood, 1997, 1999), their gender (Knobloch et al., 2005; Oliver, 2000; Oliver, Weaver & Sargent, 2000; Trepte, 2004), their culture, national and ethnic background (Zillmann et al., 1995; Mastro, 2003; Trepte, 2004). Also, institutionalized groups such as school classes have been investigated (Tarrant, North & Hargreaves, 2001). The empirical studies considering the categories of age, gender, and culture will be outlined in the following.

Harwood (1997) employed a content analysis to code fictional, prime-time television shows according to the age of all characters with speaking roles. Compiling the results with the Nielsen ratings of these shows revealed that young (0–20 years old), middle-aged (21–60 years old),

and older (over 60 years old) viewers prefer shows featuring lead characters of their own age. In a second study, Harwood (1997) manipulated short descriptions he took out of TV-guides considering the protagonists' age, and he asked students to rate how often they might choose to view the show. Although he found the overall pattern that participants preferred shows with same-age characters, participants did not rate all of the shows in the expected direction. Only for six of the twelve shows could significant results be yielded, all of which had a romantic couple as a key element. Other shows, such as police dramas, were not preferred by the youngsters, even if they featured younger characters. It seems that for younger viewers' age identities particularly come into play if relationships and romance are considered. In a corollary study, Harwood (1999) tried to replicate these results. However, the age group identification was not associated with preferences for shows featuring protagonists of their own age, and only weak correlations could be yielded between age group identification and age identity gratifications in particular (such as, "I like watching people of my own age"). Also, a rather weak relationship between self-esteem, age identity, and viewing behavior was found. To summarize, there is a preference for characters of one's own age that can be observed in ratings and shares, but media selection itself is not fully determined by needs evolving from age identifications. To support the results based on the Nielsen ratings, further research employing more than one age group is needed. In addition, experiments in this line of research should entail media selections that is not only based on short descriptions, but that is followed by the actual viewing of an entertainment program and, thus, have a higher external validity.

One group membership that has many cues in entertainment programming is certainly gender. The "battle of the sexes" has been one of the most frequented topics in entertainment. Ratings and shares clearly show that women— and even little girls—prefer entertainment programs that feature female characters, whereas men and boys prefer male characters (Knobloch et al., 2005; Oliver, 2000). Additionally, the preference for certain content differs with gender (Oliver, 2000; Oliver, Weaver & Sargent, 2000; Trepte, 2004). Identification with gender (measured with Bem's Sex Role inventory, 1974), influences how much people watch "sad films" and how they evaluate them (Oliver, 2000; Oliver, Weaver & Sargent, 2000).

In terms of SIT, the distinct lines drawn between men and women on various entertainment programs should elicit processes of social comparison. It can be assumed that because of the accessibility of gender categories and its emotional value, they very easily become salient. Additionally, entertainment programs offer people of both sexes multitudinous material for social comparison and the opportunity to attain positive social identity. Studies on SIT and gender (Trepte, 2004; Trepte & Krämer, in preparation) prove this notion. Trepte (2004) manipulated short descriptions of ten entertaining TV series, according to the gender of the protagonists. She showed that participants from Germany and the United States clearly preferred the shows featuring characters of their own gender. This result could partly be replicated for an experiment conducted in the UK and Germany (Trepte & Krämer, in preparation). In both countries, women evaluated series with female characters more positively than those with male characters; however, this effect was not found for men. An interesting side-effect occurring in both studies was that, although salience was manipulated, women were not affected by the manipulation in their evaluation of an entertaining TV series. They rated the "female series" more positively, whether or not gender was given as a prior cue. This highlights the psychological salience of gender, which easily affects attitudes and behavior. Especially women, who are still under-represented as lead characters in entertaining programs of many countries (Elasmar, Hasegawa & Brain, 1999), are very aware of their gender, although they picking entertainment programs to fit their needs and watch television much more selectively (Reid, Giles & Abrams, 2004).

Culture, nation, and ethnic background are other categories that have stimulated a lot of research in the area of SIT (Hamilton & Sherman, 1994; Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994), and

that have later been adopted in the research of social identity in media effects. Even though they are crucial variables for social identity, is has also been difficult to empirically link them to entertainment.

Zillmann et al. (1995) exposed African-American and White high-school students to music videos featuring popular rock, nonpolitical rap, or radical political rap. They assumed that African-Americans would enjoy radical political rap, which articulates African-American defiance, more than the other genres, because rap considers the ethnicity of African-American performers and themes, and because it affronts agencies of power that oppress African-Americans. The authors assumed that Whites would not appreciate this music genre (Zillmann et al., 1995). In terms of SIT, listeners prefer music favoring the in-group. As expected, African-American students enjoyed rap more than rock, and Whites enjoyed rock more than rap. Other than these results, the authors' expectations on the influence of listening to "in-group music" on self-esteem, social cohesion, or ethnic support, were not met. For that reason, they suppose that "Rap—radical rap in particular—appears to be a momentary, fleeting delight for African-American audiences" (Zillmann, et al., 1995, p. 21), rather than delivering positive self-esteem. Zillmann, et al. (1995) remark that an experiment reflects only one very brief media experience compared to all the music listening that has been done before and is experienced daily. They suppose that any effect of media consumption on self-esteem might have already materialized before and cannot be demonstrated by later exposure.

Trepte (2004) carried out a study on media choices guided by nationality, focusing on whether entertaining TV-series with a salient nationality (U.S. or German) would lead to media preference. Student participants were asked to rate whether they found short descriptions of series, which they were told to have been produced in either Germany or the U.S., entertaining and if they would like to watch them. The results did not differentiate between countries. The author suggests that there is not enough experience in the United States with internationally produced TV series and that U.S. citizens would have a hard time conceptualizing what a German program would be like. To support this interpretation of the results, the study was replicated in the U.K. and in Germany, because British viewers are more likely to be exposed to German entertainment programming (Trepte & Krämer, in preparation). Results showed that Germans would prefer the series produced in Germany over a British series, but British people would watch a series from either country. Also, if people identify strongly with their own country, their choices are not necessarily influenced in the expected direction. Trepte and Krämer (in preparation) assume that the genre of TV series might not be a relevant dimension to compare on. Unlike televised soccer and other sports programming, entertaining TV series might not trigger social comparisons between people coming from different countries. In terms of SIT: The psychological salience of categories such as nation and culture is not high, if TV series coming from different countries are to be evaluated.

Mastro (2003) addressed the effect of ethnic in-group favoritism on the judgment of media content. She assumes that racial identification among Whites would decrease their propensity to justify a Latino's criminal behavior featured in a movie. Additionally, she assumed that Whites exposed to Latino criminality on television would report higher self-esteem than those exposed to White criminality. To test her hypotheses, Mastro (2003) employed two studies. First, she made White participants read a script for a TV drama. Second, she showed them excerpts from a TV police drama that varied only in the race/ethnicity of the criminal. As dependent variables, she employed the justification of the criminals' behavior (measured by six items such as "considering the circumstances, the crime was justified") and self-esteem (measured with Rosenberg's self-esteem scale, 1991). Limited support was provided for both hypotheses. Whites with high racial identification justified the White characters' criminal behavior, but there was no relationship between their racial identification and the justification of the Latinos' criminal behavior. However, watching the TV drama did have a positive

effect on participants' self-esteem. The Latino's criminal behavior did increase the Whites' self-esteem.

This is, however, the only result that significantly proves effects of media entertainment on self-esteem. In previous research, scholars repeatedly tried to find moderating variables that increase the likelihood to select media entertainment based on group membership. In particular, they used measures of self-esteem and identification with the group. However, results almost unequivocally indicate that neither self-esteem and nor identification moderate the relationship. As shown above, young adults did not show increased self-esteem after they had the chance to choose age-related shows (Harwood, 1999). There is no relationship between the selection of shows featuring characters of the own sex and gender-specific self-esteem (Trepte & Krâmer, in preparation). The same results emerge for categories of nation and culture. Self-esteem is not enhanced if home-grown TV series have been selected (Trepte & Krämer, in preparation), nor if people of a certain ethnic group observe that an ethnic out-group is discriminated in an entertainment program (Mastro, 2003). Also, listening to musical genres that are associated with the ethnic in-group, and articulate their defiance, does not enhance self-esteem (Zillmann et al., 1995).

The difficulties in realizing effects of self-esteem might be attributed to the fact that self-esteem can hardly be manipulated by a single, brief exposure to media entertainment in an experimental setting. People are exposed daily to media entertainment that is similar to those offered in the experiments. Consequently, all effects on self-esteem are reflected in the participants' behavior before they enter the experimental setting. It is highly unlikely that the experimental manipulation would have an effect on measures of self-esteem. Additionally, research on self-esteem hypothesis suggests that there are multiple motives for social comparison (Hogg & Abrams, 1990; see prior). Particularly for media entertainment, it has been shown that self-knowledge and self-actualization might be motives that drive the audience's media choices (Trepte, 2005).

Similarly, only limited support emerges from applying the extent of identification with the in-group as moderating the relationship between group memberships and media selection. In different studies, scholars tried to show that high identification with the in-group increases the relationship of group membership and media choices. For instance, it was assumed that high gender or age-group identification would intensify the relationship between the gender or age-group viewers belong to and their appreciation of a show featuring characters of their own gender or age (Harwood, 1999; Trepte & Krämer, in preparation). However, none of the hypotheses on the moderating effects of identification—be it nation, culture, age or gender—achieved support. These results are in line with fundamental research on SIT. Hinkle and Brown (1990) refer to different experiments and show that the motivational impetus for positive social identities does not automatically increase with high in-group identification.

In the experiments on media entertainment, groups with high psychological salience, such as gender, culture, or age, have been applied. Results showed that the dimensions of comparison were relevant to the group, because participants selectively chose media content referring to the in-group. Hence, lacking salience of the group, or an irrelevant dimension of social comparison, cannot be the reason for the results. However, the reason might be found in the nature of experiments in media entertainment. Maybe, high-identifiers, in comparison to low-identifiers, do not show a stronger need to favor the in-group and discriminate the out-group in every social comparison they perform, but they use different ways and settings to compare, and by that show their motivation for higher social identity. Media entertainment might just be one setting amongst others that allows for social comparison. Further research should compare the drive for social comparison in different settings such as work-life, family, and peers.

EFFECTS OF MEDIA ENTERTAINMENT ON SOCIAL IDENTITY

In a world where entertainment products are very diversified and customized to all kinds of different social groups, it seems to be crucial to ask for its effects in stabilizing and loosening identities. Reid, Giles and Abrams (2004) as well as Harwood and Roy (2005) primarily address the consequences of media consumption on strategies of social mobility, social creativity, and social comparison, as consequences of media consumption. They suggest that "the media occupy a causal role in inter-group relations that can function to maintain the status quo (i.e., act as a force for social stasis), or act as a producer of social change" (Reid, Giles & Abrams, 2004, p. 20). In the core of their social identity model of media uses and effects, Reid, Giles and Abrams (2004) assume that media users engage with the media and form their identities and their strength of association with a group, as well as their beliefs of how stable the group's status is, how permeable the group boundaries are, and their perceptions of group vitality from that engagement. Depending on the audience's conception of these variables, it might either exhibit strategies of social mobility, social creativity, or social competition, to create a positive distinctiveness. Strategies of social mobility are likely being chosen if the identification with the group is low, the group has a stable and legitimate status, and boundaries are permeable and in-group vitality is low; whereas strategies of social competition are likely to be chosen if the identification with the in-group is high and it has a rather unstable status, impermeable boundaries, and high group vitality.

The most important idea behind the model is that people not only select the media to fit their identities and to "deliver" identity related gratification, but also—and very importantly—media entertainment functions as a source of information on groups and their legitimate status. However, as media content is influenced and filtered by interests of money, power, and dominant private interests, so also is the perception of groups, their boundaries and impact (Reid, Giles & Abrams, 2004, p. 22).

How the media influence inter-group attitudes and beliefs about out-groups has been shown in research on media effects (Bryant & Zillmann, 2002). For instance, the coverage of sporting events is usually influenced by ethnocentric views and therefore determines the viewers' feelings of nationality (Horak, 2003). Stereotyped portrayals of minorities, such as Latinos or African-Americans, transported by entertainment programming influence, their self-perception and how they are perceived by others (for an overview see Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002). Armstrong, Neuendorf, and Brentar (1992) showed that exposure to TV entertainment was associated with the belief that African-Americans have a higher socio-economic status according to income, social class, and education; whereas exposure to TV news led to the perception that African-Americans were worse off in contrast to Whites.

Similarly, individual's ideas of group vitality might be influenced because of entertainment. Groups that are underrepresented in television, such as the elderly and women (Elasmar, Hasegawa & Brain, 1999), might perceive group boundaries as impermeable and their status as rather fixed. The opposite is also possible: Minority media may encourage social mobility. Similarly, mainstream entertainment is able to influence the belief structures of social mobility and social change. For instance, telenovelas in Latin American countries provided images of poor people ascending to higher status groups and having access to symbols of capitalism (Straubhaar, 1991). And studies demonstrate that shows such as "The Cosby Show" or "Sesame Street" were able to improve perceptions of interracial relationships (Harwood & Roy, 2005). In fact, media effects research offers numerous studies that prove effects of stereotyped portrayals in entertainment on group identification and group vitality. However, these studies do not explicitly consider the processes underlying social identity or try to apply SIT.

Apart from that, there is previous research based on SIT to theoretically explain media effects. Duck, Hogg, and Terry (1999) investigated how social identity affects the perception of media persuasion and they based their studies on SIT, SCT, and the third person effect. The third person effect implies that people typically think that negative media content has more impact on others rather than on themselves (Davison, 1983). It was expected that the salience of self-categorization accentuates the perceived similarity between self and in-group others and thus the third person effect will have a stronger impact. In the study, 58 Australian students watched 11 commercials that showed risks and effects of HIV. The results revealed that students who identified with the student community expected the AIDS advertisements to have the same impact on themselves and on others. In contrast, low-identifiers perceived the ads to be influential for the student community and other people in general, but not for themselves. Duck, Hogg, and Terry (1999) assume that media impact is only acknowledged if it is socially accepted. This implies identification with the social group in question and the acceptance of the media message within that group.

Morton and Duck (2000) investigated the relationship of gay media use, identification with the gay community and media dependency to gay media messages. Media dependency means that media effects vary according to how dependent audiences are on them as sources of information and whether messages are linked to the satisfaction of their goals (Ball-Rokeach, 1985). Morton and Duck (2000) suppose that in terms of SIT, people not only categorize their world according to group memberships, but also learn stereotypic characteristics and norms of the in-group, and exhibit theses norms in subsequent behavior. The authors expected that members of the gay community would perceive gay media content as relevant to their social identity, and for that reason display the strongest dependencies on gay media for sexual health information. Also, they assumed that dependency on gay media would produce effects on personal safe sex attitudes for high-identifiers. Their study of 76 gay men showed that identification with the gay community has no impact on dependency on gay media. But high-identifiers, who displayed more intense dependence on gay media, had rather positive personal attitudes toward safe sex. Thus, if identification and media dependency are related, media messages being communicated in in-group media have stronger impact on group members. And contrarily, gay men who are not as concerned about or don't identify as much with the gay community are not directly affected by its media messages, even if they rate high in media dependency.

SOCIAL IDENTITY IN COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

Theories of social identity and social categorization have been applied to processes of communication in computer-mediated communication (CMC). In fact, they have fundamentally changed the belief that CMC must lead to a leveling of hierarchies and power as well as to anti-normative behavior. Spears and Lea (1994; see also Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995) suggested the social identity model of de-individuation (SIDE). They grounded their framework in social identity theory and "argue that this framework is able to account for both the liberating and repressive potential within CMC systems and predict when and why each will occur" (Spears & Lea, 1994, p. 427).

The main idea of the SIDE model is that during anonymous CMC a user's personal or social identity can be more or less salient. When a social identity becomes salient, and the person identifies with the group, conformity to an internalized group norm will be strong. The normative and even stereotyping effect is thought to be more accentuated than in

face-to-face interaction because individual characteristics of other users cannot be identified. In contrary, when personal identity is salient, de-individuation in CMC increases and activates individual norms. In a 2x2 experiment Spears, Lea, and Lee (1990) manipulated the salience of personal or social identity, and fixed settings that differed according to anonymity and de-individuation. In the de-individuated condition, participants located in different rooms discussed topics such as nuclear power stations, or governmental subsidies for theatres via CMC. In the individuation condition, participants, who were located in the same room and instructed not to talk to each other, discussed the same topics online. After the discussion, participants were asked for their attitudes on the issues. The results show an interaction effect: de-individuated discussants, who were immersed in a group, produced greater polarization in the direction of a pre-established group norm than participants who were addressed as individuals. Also, there was a greater change toward the norm in the case of the de-individuated condition as opposed to the individuated-group condition. In the individuated condition there was no difference between subjects with salient social and personal identity. Hence, we can summarize that the more people are immersed in groups under conditions of anonymity and de-individuation, the more likely they are to follow group norms. In contrast, people with a salient personal identity, who find themselves in an anonymous setting of CMC, are least likely to obey group norms.

The SIDE model suggests a variety of applications for entertaining CMC, such as chatrooms, online computer games, and fan forums. However, only little has been done to prove the SIDE model's implications for entertainment applications. Utz (1999) has investigated multi-user-dungeons (MUDs) in which people meet virtually to play (text-based) fantasy games. She assumes that people participating in MUDs are interested in fantasy games and role plays in general and hope to meet companions. For that reason, their social identity should be salient right when they enter the community. In a survey with 206 German MUDers, Utz (1999) accordingly showed that newcomers, who don't know MUD-members in physical life, identify stronger with the group. Also, a newbie overestimates the homogeneity of the group.

It is likely that virtual groups can be invented on the Net and create the same processes of social identity as they would do offline. Also, the SIDE model may explain social influence exhibited in CMC. This field of research is particularly promising, because previously the anonymity and violence of CMC has been emphasized as a danger (Kiesler, Siegel & McGuire, 1984). The SIDE model offers an approach on which the meaning of the anonymous social community to online gamers can be understood.

SIT AND ENTERTAINMENT: A RESEARCH AGENDA

The application of SIT in entertainment research as shown in this chapter is a developing field to explain selective exposure based on group membership, to understand the influence of entertainment on identity-related issues and to follow up on communication processes taking place in computer mediated communication. Although SIT has only recently been applied in the area of media and communication studies, it has already shown to explain some aspects of media usage and effects. There are shortcomings, however, that can be observed in the way SIT has been applied to entertainment research. In addition, not all possibilities of using the theory have been employed. In these terms, previous research and theorizing on SIT and entertainment show three major issues that should be on the agenda of future research.

First, it seems crucial to find out more about the motivational variables in SIT. What drives people to choose entertainment due to their social categories—is it self-esteem, self-actualization, or self-knowledge? And what role does social identification play? Particularly in

exposure to entertainment, the motivation variable is under-researched in terms of theoretical and empirical implications. In former studies shown in this chapter, the first step has been taken. It has been shown that group membership is associated with preferences for certain kinds of entertainment, for example young people like shows featuring people of their own age groups (Harwood, 1997) and women like series with female lead characters (Trepte, 2004). The second step will be to elaborate on psychological processes that motivate behavior like that.

Very closely related to this problem is the fact that social comparison has not fully been integrated into empirical research on SIT and entertainment. There are no experiments in which participants have been observed to actually compare themselves with their out-group. All studies are based on the idea of evaluating the in-group versus the out-group. More research is needed that asks for details on social comparison, either by observing it within the situation of processing media input or by designing experiments that go beyond mere evaluations and imply relevant operationalizations of in-group favoritism. As long as this second step of broadening our understanding about the psychological and motivational variables in SIT has not been taken, we can only know for sure that: "Outcomes from an identity based television selection may not reflect SIT's traditional social comparison/self-esteem link, but rather a more basic solidarity/affiliation effect" (Harwood 1999, p. 130).

Second, in previous research on SIT and entertainment, social categories with very high psychological salience have been employed such as gender, cultural, or ethnic background. However, it seems that the dimensions of comparisons were not always relevant. Do people from different countries compare themselves on dimensions such as the 'quality of entertaining TV series'? There might be audiences that are very much involved with television entertainment (such as the authors of this book) that might consider this a relevant dimension, but the regular recipient might not share this notion. Hence, to create reasonable effects, dimensions of comparison should be chosen that actually mean something to the audiences. The international song contest "World Idol" brought together the winners of shows such as "American Idol" (U.S.), "Deutschland sucht den Superstar" (Germany), "Pop-Idol" (U.K.), and nine other countries. "World Idol" was very successful in almost all European countries. However, comparing unknown, teenage, amateur singers does not define the success of this show. Rather, it can be attributed to the popularity the shows got in the different countries before. It can be assumed that the international audiences of this entertainment event knew the singer of their own country by the time "World Idol" was broadcast. Hence, the dimension of comparison has already been learned by the viewers due to prior media experiences.

Another relevant dimension of comparison in entertainment is sports programming, which is deeply rooted in the media experiences of many viewers. There are multitudinous applications for looking at sports in entertainment research. It is likely that watching sports is contributing to positive or negative social identity. Nationality, but also other kinds of groups such as region, club, age or gender are addressed in sporting events. Hence, in further experiments, dimensions of comparison should accommodate entertainment media and the audience in question.

Third, a very promising field that has widely been neglected in research on SIT is the effects of media entertainment on minorities. Reid, Giles and Abrams (2004) address this issue in their "social identity model of media uses and effects." Nowadays, there are more chances than ever for minority groups to find their platform of entertainment, because all kinds of media—especially television and the Internet—are diversifying (Greenberg, Mastro & Brand, 2002). But, at the same time, certain groups are underrepresented in the mainstream media. These are either sizable societal groups, such as the older generation, or women (Elasmar, Hasegawa & Brain, 1999), but also minority groups, such as homosexuals or African-Americans (Greenberg

& Atkins, 1982). The fact that some groups are underrepresented in mainstream entertainment could have a number of effects. Media literate audiences might find their personal entertainment in niche media and experience positive social identity because they are able to find entertainment that reflects their understanding of which the group to they belong, and does not discriminate against them. In contrast, there are audiences that do not have access to minority media and widely rely on mainstream offers. The "digital divide" may have strong effects on groups and their identities. Further research is needed to find out how media entertainment affects identity-related behavior and what entertainment producers, and also governmental institutions, could actually do to enhance positive identity for minorities and for groups that are underrepresented in the media.

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