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## A Methodological Review of Exploring Turner's Three-Process Theory of Power and the Social Identity Approach

**Abstract** Turner's Three-Process Theory of Power together with Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) have been influential in social psychology to examine power-related behaviors. While positivist experimental and survey methods are common in social psychological studies, these approaches may not adequately consider Turner's constructs due to a comparative lack of ecological validity. Drawing on a methodology-focused review of the existing research of applying aspects of Turner's theory of power and SIT/SCT, the interpretivist case study approach by using interviews and other data collections is highlighted as an alternative and useful method to the application of Turner's framework. The applicability of the interpretive case study approach is further emphasized in comparison with the positivist experiments and surveys. This paper also discusses how this new way of exploration may allow us to understand Turner's work better.

**Keywords** Interpretivist; Positivist; Social Identity; Power; Ecological Validity; Experiment; Survey; Case Study

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## Background

Positivist experimental and survey methods are common in studies applying social psychological theories (e.g., Fritsche et al. 2013; Lee, Bock, and Suh 2014) and much can be gained from these approaches. For example, they have been shown to be particularly useful in searching for cause and effect relationships as the basis of theory development and testing (Dube and Pare 2003). Interpretive methods, on the other hand, have been sparse in social psychological studies. This paper applies a methodological focus outlining the applicability of interpretive approaches in applying social psychological theories, in particular, Turner's Three Theory of Power based on Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT). In this paper, we focus on only experiments and surveys for the positivist approach and only case study methods for the interpretivist approach with a focus on interviews, observations, or documentation study, given the fact that these

are the most often employed tools within each philosophy.

Though the interpretivist approach appears to be limited to studies drawing on the accounts of a small number of people, it would seem that particular aspects of this approach may have some merit in studies where a close examination of the experiences and meaning-making activities is needed (Lin 1998; Reid, Flowers, and Larkin 2005). While the positivist paradigm uses lab experiments, questionnaires, and surveys to reduce phenomena to the simplest of elements, the interpretivist paradigm, with its emphasis on meaning, shows the depth and richness of reality (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Lowe 1991). Easterby-Smith and colleagues (1991) have highlighted differences in key features of positivist and interpretivist paradigms (see: Table 1). This example highlights the different ways that positivists and interpretivists understand social phenomena dependent of the social actors who construct and make sense of the phenomena (Walsham 1993; Doolin 1996).

Table 1. Comparison of positivist and interpretivist paradigms.

POSITIVIST PARADIGM	INTERPRETIVIST PARADIGM
The world is external and objective	The world is socially constructed and subjective
Science is value free	Science is driven by human interests
The focus is on facts	The focus is on meanings
Search for causality and fundamental laws	To understand what is happening
Reduce phenomena to simplest elements	Look at totality of each situation
Formulate and test hypotheses by structured instrumentation (e.g., lab experiments, questionnaire surveys)	Use multiple methods to establish different views of the phenomena (e.g., interviews, observations)
Large samples	Small samples looked at in-depth or over-time

Source: Adapted from Easterby-Smith et al. 1991.

Depending on this context, and the question being asked, there are a number of advantages and disadvantages to both the positivist and interpretivist approaches.

One advantage of the positivist approach in this context is that it uses deductive strategies to discover casual relationships that can be used to predict patterns of behavior across situations (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991). These patterns can then provide the basis of generalized knowledge for theory application and development, in particular, for generating qualitative insights (Levitt and List 2007). Indeed, the findings in many social psychological theories are produced by laboratory experiments involving created scenarios and artificial grouping contexts (e.g., Turner 1978). When considering the exploration of social psychological theories however, an important weakness of the positivist experimental approach is its lack of ecological validity (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

Ecological validity, that is, the ability to capture authentic daily life conditions, opinions, values, attitudes, and knowledge base expressed in the natural environment (Bem and Lord 1979; Cicourel 1982), is an important concern in studies involving experiences and meaning-making activities. Exploration involving real-life contexts is important to the application of social psychological frameworks where complex human relations occur. Indeed, the artificially constructed and simplified environments employed in many experimental studies are less able to reflect what takes place in real daily life settings (Cicourel 1982). The direct approach of an interpretivist case study, however, is able to enhance ecolog-

ical validity as it focuses on real-life issues (Darke, Shanks, and Broadbent 1998).

Though the appeal of the positivist survey approach is that it reflects the "real-world," this often lacks the depth of exploration that the interpretivist approach offers. One example is the use of rating scales to measure participant's perceptions of events. While responses to these scales are able to reflect a general situation, they are insufficient to understand deeply how and why each perception is rated in a particular way. Moreover, surveys are less effective in considering the instability and discontinuity of personal factors or situational factors due to their assessment of complex phenomena with single items only (Tregaskis, Heraty, and Morley 2001; Larsson and Hyllengren 2013). Turner and Reynolds (2010) note that the frames of reference within which people define themselves are always changing, and thus self-categories are infinitely variable, contextual, and relative. Therefore, it is important to consider the variability of self-categories as an indication of their truthfulness and orientation to reality.

It is also worth noting that the simplified and closed questions in surveys and the technical aspects of this instrument make it difficult to clarify theoretical concepts to participants and make sure the definition of terms understood by participants is how the terms are defined in the theoretical framework applied. Once questions are sent out to the participants, it is difficult for the participant to obtain informal clarification about questions or terms from the researcher (Cicourel 1982). For example, the terms used in Turner's (2005) social psychological theory, such as "psychological group," "out-group discrimi-

nation," and "coercion," need explanation and clarification to the participant as it is likely that different people have different understandings of the terms. These terms and concepts provide the theoretical basis for creating and implementing questions, and then, analyzing responses. Thus, survey seems to be an esoteric and indirect instrument that may lead to invalid data if the participant's understanding of the questions or theoretical concepts was wrong in the first place.

Another important advantage of the interpretivist paradigm in the current context is that it allows the understanding of the deeper structure of phenomena (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991), as well as a focus on natural social structure (Levitt and List 2007), culture, and historical context (Darke et al. 1998). This is important because an individual's perception of themselves and others, which is produced and reproduced through ongoing social interaction, can only be interpreted, and cannot be understood, without reference to the individual's cultural and historical context (Doolin 1996). The interpretivist approach is able to reflect this notion using interviews to tease out how members of a social group enact their particular realities with meaning, how these meanings, beliefs, and intentions of the members help constitute their social action, and why they act the way they do (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991).

Though the interpretivist approach appears to be stronger than the positivist approach in terms of ecological validity, there are aspects where the positivist approach has an advantage. For example, in contrast with a positivist approach, which often involves data collection over self-completed

questionnaire and data analysis using statistical software (Giannopoulos et al. 2013), interpretivist data collection and analysis is usually much more time-consuming as it includes conducting one-to-one interviews, recording and transcribing each interview, reading through each line in transcripts, as well as the generation of themes and data-theory links (Walsham 2006). When interviews are recorded, a further disadvantage of the interpretivist paradigm is that recording may make the interviewee less open or less truthful, despite confidentiality. The survey approach in the positivist paradigm, on the other hand, may produce honesty by the comparatively concealed nature of responses. Nevertheless, the positivist survey approach is prone to involve missing data with participants leaving out particular questions, subsections, or not completing the questionnaire at all.

Another significant difference between positivist and interpretivist approaches is that the positivist approach often follows data collection procedures with high levels of constraint that allow findings to be generalized to a larger population, whereas interpretivist work draws upon the accuracy of description and creation of taxonomies, not upon the evaluation of how often the variables are repeated (Lin 1998). Instead of being "generalizable," "transferable," and "consultable," findings are expected in interpretivist studies in such a way that similar patterns of behaviors can be learnt (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

When placing the positive and negative aspects of positivist and interpretivist approaches together, it would seem that in the current context the interpre-

tivist approach has merit. That is because a survey approach would make it difficult to investigate the complex and changing social relations, and accordingly, human and power relations that flow from the social categorization process (Bamberger 2000). This is important in terms of our exploration of social psychological theories because many social psychological theories involve situation-specific grouping processes (e.g., Turner 1987; Turner and Reynolds 2010). As these grouping processes may change quickly in different situations, the interpretivist perspective allows us to dig into each specific situation, whereas the positivist perspective tends to concern only generic circumstances.

A case study research method would allow for the description of a set of power-related circumstances from which an understanding of issues can be used to inform other organizations. It would also allow for the illustration of particular aspects of social psychological theories by reference to specific episodes in the case. Moreover, as a case study approach is appropriate for answering the "how" and "why" of power relations (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991), it would help researchers to understand the nature and complexity of the processes taking place.

### Turner's Theory of Power and a Methodology-Focused Review

The SIT (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and SCT (Turner et al. 1987), and later Turner's (2005) Three-Process Theory of Power based on these, have been influential in social psychology in studies of group and power related behaviors. In order to provide a context for the review with a methodological focus,

we will first provide an overview of the theoretical framework combining Turner's (2005) Three-Process Theory of Power with SIT and SCT. The aspects of Turner's theory summarized below serve as the theoretical context in which the positivist and interpretivist approaches will be discussed.

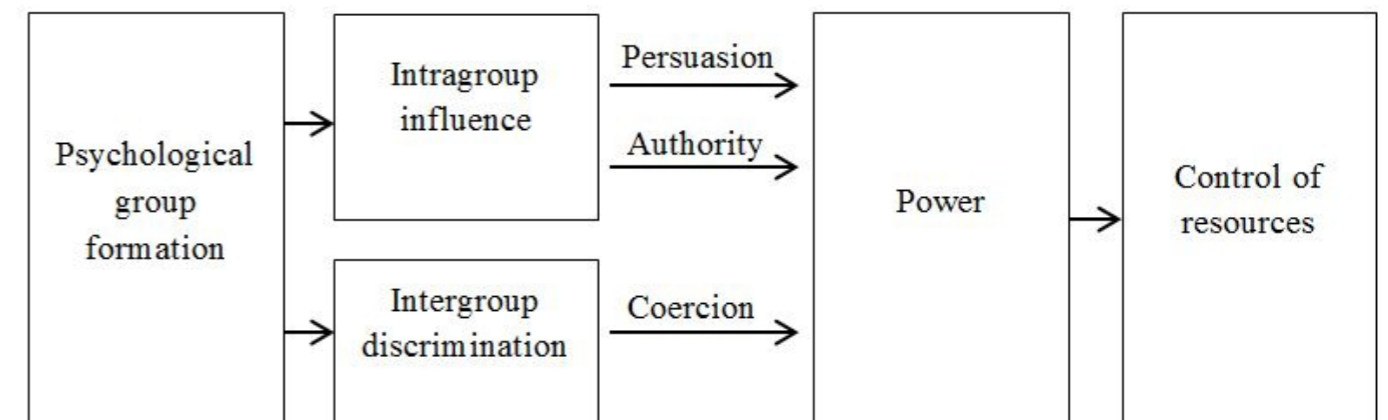
The social identity approach, comprised of SIT (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and SCT (Turner et al. 1987), is the basis of Turner's (2005) Three Process Theory of Power. SIT was formulated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s and the 1980s to introduce the concept of social identity as a way of explaining intergroup behaviors, particularly the discrimination of in-group members ("us") against out-group members ("them") (Tajfel et al. 1971; Tajfel and Turner 1979). In the 1980s, Turner and his colleagues developed SCT to argue that individuals tend to categorize themselves into certain psychological groups in a given context in which a series of values and interpretations are shared (Turner et al. 1987). For example, while a female nurse can be seen as a member of practitioners in a hospital, her identity as a mother may be more relevant and important in the context of her child's school. Hence, this may lead to an individual accepting and behaving in accordance with certain values that are regarded as typical of the category or group. In terms of social influence and power, psychological group members are open to persuasion and influence from other members, particularly highly prototypical members, as they wish to retain their psychological group membership, hence the link to power.

In the mid-2000s, Turner (2005) turned the social identity approach to the concept of power in his

Three-Process Theory of Power. In formulating the theory, Turner rejected the notion common in other social psychological and sociological theories of power that power springs from the control of resources that are valued, desired, and needed by

others (Festinger 1950; Deutsch and Gerard 1955; Kelman 1958). For Turner, power springs from psychological group membership, as indicated in SIT and SCT, not relying on the control of resources (see: Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Three-Process Theory of Power.



Source: Adapted from Turner 2005.

The assumptions of the Three-Process Theory regard power to be exercised through three processes, namely, persuasion, authority, and coercion. Turner (2005) argues persuasive power exercised through a psychological group is a function of the group identity and consensus. People are more likely to be persuaded by intragroup members as they are sharing the same attitudes and beliefs. Authority is power that is legitimated by intragroup norms that have a shared social identity as their basis, conferred by formal agreement or custom inherent in group activities. Coercion is the form of power employed when one does not possess or is not willing to exert persuasion or legitimate authority. Despite being useful in understanding power-related behaviors in

experimental situations with its firm theoretical and empirical basis in SIT and SCT, there as yet is no extant qualitative and interpretive case study using Turner's Three-Process Theory of Power.

A systematic search of journal publications was conducted to locate relevant research applying particular aspects of Turner's Theory of Power and SIT/SCT (Persuasion, Authority, and Coercion) using positivist and interpretivist methodologies. Electronic searches of library databases included: Google Scholar, ProQuest, Sage Journals, and Wiley Online Library. The search algorithm was limited to full-text and references, and composed of the following related terms ("Turner" AND "Social Identity Theory"

OR "Self-Categorization Theory") and combinations of persuasion-related terms ("power" AND "persuasion" AND "influence" AND "shared" AND "in-group"), authority-related terms ("power" AND "authority" AND "leadership" AND "legitimate" AND "prototypical"), and coercion-related terms ("power" AND "coercion" OR "bullying" AND "resistance" AND "out-group"). Terms were simplified where necessary to adapt to particular search engines.

Articles were limited to those that: (a) were peer-reviewed journals; (b) were empirical research articles; (c) were published in social psychology, management and organization, political psychology, and information systems; (d) were published between 2004 and 2014; (e) were in English language; (f) had applied aspects of Turner's Three-Process Theory of Power based on SIT/SCT as the major part of their theoretical framework; and (g) utilized experimental (survey) and case study (interview) research approaches.

Table 2 presents a summary of the results of the review. The original search produced a total of 380 articles. Out of these 380 articles, 19 articles were identified that met the inclusion criteria. These included articles related to: Persuasion (6), Authority (7), and Coercion (6). Out of these studies, most studies (13) utilized experimental, survey, and questionnaire approaches, 5 articles report qualitative case studies (see: Table 2 in bold), and only one article reports a mixed methods approach (see: Table 2 in italics).

Table 2 highlights a number of positivistic approaches that have made important contributions

to theory building and theory testing by discovering causal relationships and predicting patterns of behavior across situations (Amaratunga al. 2002), and that have produced qualitative insights that helped to form the basis for Turner's (2005) Three-Process Theory of Power (experiments fully reported in Turner 1978). While these social psychological laboratory experiments have played an important part in the construction of Turner's theory, they may not be ideal for examining this theory in real-life contexts.

An important limitation of these social psychological experiments, as discussed previously, is the artificiality of the lab (Webster and Kervin 1971). In order to test SIT and SCT hypotheses regarding intergroup discrimination and in-group favoritism, for example, Turner (1978) grouped schoolboys in artificial situations based on extremely simple elements. In both experiments, schoolboys were shown paintings of two artists with grouping based on picture preferences. Relationships between self-other categorization, personal gain, and in-group favoritism were tested based on choices surrounding the distributing of money between self and others. While these experiments were able to discover cause and effect relationships, as well as benefit building, the artificiality of the ready-made groups and set situations, as well as the lack of real social and group context appear to limit the understanding of social behaviors, as students' judgment in the laboratory context does not lead to real-life consequences involving real-life participants. Cicourel (1982) addresses the lack of ecological validity of participants' responses in the situation where the categories are decided by the researcher. That is because it is dif-

icult to interpret the meaning of the participants' judgments vis-à-vis the experiences and knowledge base of a presumed group.

Unlike experiments such as those described above, in which the variation between the attributes of "cases" is caused by the researcher, surveys seek for "naturally occurring" variation between cases (De Vaus 2014). Hence, a positivist survey approach is more likely to involve real social contexts and natural social structures than experiments. However, the survey approach is not without its limitations and problems in terms of exploring Turner's framework.

Thus, it can be seen that although the positivist approach is commonly used in the development of the social psychological theories such as Turner's Theory of Power, SIT, and SCT, there are concerns that can be drawn on its value in understanding the real-life human nature and complexity. We will now discuss the extent of positivist and interpretivist approaches within the context of each aspect of Turner's theoretical framework.

### **In-Group Collective Action, Influence, and Persuasion**

The first process of power (Persuasion), according to Turner (2005), is based on intragroup influence and is a product of shared social identity (Reicher et al. 2012). When an individual accepts and internalizes (or is persuaded to accept) an identity as applying to them, they act as a member of a psychological group. Psychological group membership offers members the potential positive effects of making

sense of the world, and hence reducing uncertainty, as well as support for one's self interest, and potentially (for high status groups at least) self enhancement (Abrams and Hogg 2001). In terms of social influence and power, psychological group members are more likely to be persuaded and positively influenced by in-group members whom they recognize a shared identity with (Haslam, McGarty, and Turner 1996). This forms a basis for in-group collective action and influence, and promotes the exercise of power through persuasion.

While causal relationships can be generated from the simplified elements of experimental design, the lack of relevancy to participants' real-life identities and the lack of group social history could overlook other factors which are likely to affect group identity salience and in-group conformity behaviors. For example, Hornsey and colleagues' (2005) experimental study concerns the relevant real-life identity of participants, however not without bias. In this study, university students were asked to read a letter about one kind of attitude towards government funding for universities, which was written from a university student's perspective, and then rate their agreement and acceptance of the letter author's claim. The findings of collective action and identity-persuasion causality make sense from a social identity perspective. However, as the authors of this experiment note, certain biases (i.e., knowledge bias and reporting bias) undermined their confidence in the veracity of the participants' responses, since the participants' judgments of the effectiveness of the advocate's influence relied on their reading of single letter.

Table 2. Summary of methods utilized in applying the aspects of Turner's theory and SIT/SCT.

ASPECT COVERED	JOURNAL ARTICLE	FOCUS OF TOPIC	RESEARCH AREA	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	PARTICIPANT SELECTION
In-Group Collective Action, Influence, and Persuasion	Hornsey, Blackwood, and O'Brien 2005	Collective language and group identification	Social psychology	Experiment	187 university students participated for course credit
	Schwarz and Watson 2005	Influence of identities in IT-based organizational change	Management and organization	Qualitative case study	10 participants (department staff) involved in a case study
	Robertson 2006	The effect of identity salience in in-group conformity	Social psychology	Experiment	64 university students participated in exchange for monetary payment
	Ullrich et al. 2007	Influence of organizational identification in the franchising industry	Management and organization	Questionnaires	382 respondents from 270 German travel agencies returned their questionnaires
	Wenzel 2007	The effect of self-categorizations in tax commitment	Political psychology	Survey and questionnaire	965 respondents through random sample selection
	Currie, Finn, and Martin 2010	Influence of professional identity and role transition in healthcare	Management and organization	Qualitative longitudinal case studies	48 participants involved in case study interviews
In-Group Leadership, Prototypicality, and Authority	Hogg et al. 2005	Leadership in salient groups	Social psychology	Questionnaire surveys	439 employees of industries completed the first mail-out questionnaire; 128 employees in work groups completed the second questionnaire
	van Knippenberg and van Knippenberg 2005	Leader prototypicality and leadership effectiveness	Social psychology	Lab experiment and questionnaires	846 university students participated in the first three studies (experiments) and 161 primary school staff completed the questionnaires
	Platow et al. 2006	In-group leader charisma	Social psychology	Questionnaire used in experiments	203 and 220 university students participated in the two experiments
	Wenzel and Jobling 2006	Identity-based authority, power, and perceived legitimacy	Social psychology	Experiment and survey	106 university students participated in the experiment and a sample of 4000 survey respondents was drawn from the Australian electoral roll
	Ullrich, Christ, and van Dick 2009	Prototypical leadership, effectiveness, and procedural fairness	Social psychology	Experiment and survey	99 university students participated in the experiment for course credits and 433 employees from different occupations volunteered in the survey
	Willis, Guinote, and Rodríguez-Bailón 2010	Power legitimacy on self-regulation during goal pursuit	Social psychology	Experiments	46 and 60 university students participated in the two experiments for course credits
	Burns and Stevenson 2013	National leadership and national identity in the electoral success or failure of politicians	Social psychology	Qualitative case study	8 participants were approached and recruited through local political organizations
Out-Group Discrimination, Coercion, and Resistance	Melgoza and Cox 2009	Intergroup bias and subtle sexism in a police organization	Management and organization	Survey	159 male police officers from the police force responded in the survey
	O'Brien and McGarty 2009	Intergroup political disagreement	Social psychology	Questionnaires	251 and 155 university students participated in two studies: some as part of their course, some for course credits, and others from different disciplines
	van Dijk and van Dick 2009	Employee resistance and work-based identities in organizational change (i.e., organization mergers)	Management and organization	Quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interview) case study	13 and 10 employees from the two pre-merger organizations
	Miller and Rayner 2012	Self-categorization and workplace bullying in a police service	Management and organization	Interviews	12 participants were recruited from one police force and 7 participants were recruited from a training organization that had links to the police officers
	Tansley, Huang, and Foster 2013	Intergroup dissonance	Information systems	Interpretive case study	25 interviews were conducted with 25 project stakeholders in total
	Fritsche et al. 2013	Group-based control	Social psychology	Questionnaires, survey, and experiment	A random sample of 23 Germans participated in Study 1 (questionnaire); random 82 Germans participated in Study 2 (survey); 105 Austrians, 49 Croatians, and 104 Germans participated in Study 3 (questionnaire); 192 and 112 participants were involved in Study 4 (experiment) and Study 5 (questionnaire)

Source: Self-elaboration.

According to Easterby-Smith and colleagues (1991) and Lin (1998), measurements which concern only general situations in large samples tend to lack in reference to specific contexts and consideration of personal or situational change. For example, Ullrich and colleagues (2007) and Wenzel (2007) used rating scales in their studies examining people's willingness of identifying with their group. Ullrich measured customer orientation among 281 employees using a questionnaire based on four scale items ("I consider myself to be very customer-oriented," "Customer orientation is one of my personal goals," "I enjoy interacting with customers," and "Customer orientation is very important within my job"). Wenzel also administered a questionnaire to 965 participants, asking them to indicate what was important to them in the broad context of tax system. Participants selected from: (a) their individuality, (b) their occupational group, (c) the Australian community, or (d) their income group. This approach could lead to difficulties in understanding which identity positively influences a particular collective action or persuasive behavior as individuals often have multiple identities and self-categories (Turner 1987), and moreover, that influence changes in different situations as the salience of their self-category regarding tax commitment may change over time or depending upon the situation.

The qualitative case study and interview approaches would benefit the understanding of persuasion and identities by focusing on small samples in-depth and over-time to discover the reasons and meanings behind events (Easterby-Smith et al. 1991). Indeed, Schwarz and Watson (2005) and Cur-

rie and colleagues (2010) have demonstrated the usefulness of the qualitative case study approach for examining how group members' identity affected changes in organizational contexts. Through interviews with 10 departmental respondents and observation over 20 months, Schwarz and Watson (2005) reviewed the changes in two groups of employees (management and IT implementation team) in an organization introducing a new information system. Currie and colleagues (2010) interviewed and tracked the experiences of 14 genetics nurses (and 34 other stakeholders) through their role transition over two years to examine influences within and between groups based on their professional identity. While these studies only apply the Social Identity Framework to the understanding of one part of Turner's (2005) framework, they highlight the applicability of the in-depth case study approach in understanding persuasive behaviors through social group identity concerning situational changes.

#### **In-Group Leadership, Prototypicality, and Authority**

The second process of power (Authority) refers to leadership legitimated by group norms, values, and structure (Turner 2005). Turner and his colleagues conceptualize leadership as relative influence and power within a group, where leaders are perceived as relatively more prototypical than other members, and hence more influential within the group (Turner 1991; Turner and Haslam 2001; Reicher, Haslam, and Hopkins 2005). In contrast to persuasion, where in-group members agree with each other based on their shared identity, authority

acts when two in-group members disagree but the disagreement is about group-level matters and the authority hierarchy of the group becomes salient so that the one lower in status tends to go along with the higher-level member in the group (Ye et al. 2014). The difference between persuasion and authority thus lies in whether people are persuaded: *it is a good idea to do so or it is not a good idea, but the right thing is to obey* (Turner 2005).

While a survey or interview approach may utilize participant choice to determine the perception of in-group leadership and authority, a deeper understanding can be gained when this question is event-specific, or the premise is a particular decision made by a highly prototypical member (Turner, Reynolds, and Subasic 2008). This lack of detail is highlighted in 6 of the 7 articles found examining authority-related aspects. For example, Hogg and colleagues (2005) report two survey studies for testing hypotheses derived from the social identity model of leadership. Leadership effectiveness was measured by asking participants to rate how frequently the leader was effective in meeting organization requirements, or how frequently the leader led a group that was effective. However, this understanding of the manager's leadership effectiveness is lacking, for example, if personal or situational factors change, self-conceptions may also change, and then how people perceive, manage, and react to leadership or power (Hogg 2001; Turner and Reynolds 2010).

In the context of exploring Turner's framework, an approach that assumes relatively stable human relationships such as this would limit our

understanding of power relations, particularly in considering of the instability and discontinuity of personal factors or situational factors. More specific decisions and events need to be drawn upon to understand how each self-categorization process affects the acceptance of in-group leadership and authority, and how such an acceptance impacts the success or otherwise of implementing decisions.

Out of the 7 articles highlighted in this section, only one (Burns and Stevenson 2013) outlines a qualitative case study that has addressed this weakness. While Haslam and colleagues' (2011) generic model of leadership outlines an ideal process of leadership effectiveness, the case study approach of interviewing eight leading Irish politicians in Burns and Stevenson (2013) enables an in-depth focus on what politicians actually do in their talk, and how and when politicians construct versions of national identity in order to mobilize the electorate. Given the discursive complexity of national leaders' accounts of political events, Burns and Stevenson's (2013) case study approach was effective and necessary for a more detailed and clearer focus on the role of leadership.

#### **Out-Group Discrimination, Coercion, and Resistance**

Turner (2005) perceives coercion as the third form of power employed when one cannot, or is not willing to persuade, and further does not possess legitimate authority (Simon and Oakes 2006). When the psychological reality based on self-categorization and social identity processes changes, the dynamic transformation from in-group influence to

intergroup coercion can happen (Turner et al. 2008; Turner and Reynolds 2010). The disadvantage of coercion is that it tends to generate mistrust in the targets, and weakens the power of the source itself, by the targets' resistance and reactance to the loss of freedom (Kramer 1999; Turner 2005). Further, it undermines the possibilities for future influence. Therefore, resistance does not exist where influence is effective but only emerge when coercion is perceived to an extent.

Out of the 6 articles included on this aspect, 3 articles report positivistic experimental and survey studies, 2 articles report findings from interviews (interpretivistic), and one article reports a mixed method case study approach (questionnaires and interviews). As our investigation of coercion and resistance involves different views of the phenomena, transformation of attitudes and perceptions, and changes of psychological grouping, the value-free positivist paradigm may have particular limitations in this context (Easterby-Smith et al. 1991).

An example is Fritsche and colleagues' article (2013), which unites the ideas of the social identity approach and Turner's (2005) Theory of Power into a model of group-based control and tests hypotheses derived from the model in five studies using surveys and experiments. The most salient example can be seen in Fritsche and colleagues' (2013) fourth study, in which artificial groups were introduced and participants were asked to write down their thoughts and emotions with regard to a specific "possible" event (e.g., imagine they committed suicide due to an infectious disease). While this experimental approach may have ensured distance between the subjective

bias of the researcher and the objective reality being studied, the lack of real social contexts in the laboratory setting could lead to a gap between participants' "imagined" perceptions and their real perceptions, which may in turn limit the application of a theory. For example, responses might be distorted by the lack of real consequences of decision-making that would otherwise occur in real situations (Ye et al. 2014). Indeed, Turner (1981) himself suggests that the point of their experimental research is more about whether the models they build for explaining behavior can help understand what happens outside the experiments than why people behave as they do in given experiment (Reicher et al. 2012).

Survey questionnaires were administered in Fritsche and colleagues' (2013) other studies: the first two studies involved artificial contexts, and the third and fifth were relating more closely to real-life situations. In the first two studies, participants were asked to read a case report from a newspaper (e.g., a female academic suffered from long-term unemployment) and "imagine" the perspective of the protagonist in the case report to answer some recognition questions (e.g., to what extent are external circumstances, or the female academic herself, responsible for her current situation). In the third and fifth study, participants were asked to record aspects of their life regarding their attitudes and perceptions (e.g., aspects of their life that make them feel most powerful). The controlled nature of these studies includes a focus on a broad level of context as a reference (i.e., their life) and lacks a detailed understanding of other personal and situational factors that form participant responses.

A number of researchers have indicated the value of interviews in explaining resistance and coercive behaviors (van Dijk and van Dick 2009; Miller and Rayner 2012; Tansley et al. 2013). Miller and Rayner (2012) highlight the importance of their interview approach that allowed the interpretation to be attuned to the particular occupational culture so as to discover the hidden (e.g., hurtful jokes) or tolerated "bullying" behaviors, in contrast to the standardized instruments that hold generic lists of behaviors. In Tansley and colleagues' (2013) study, an interpretive case study research design was adapted for examining how the role of work-based identity in an information systems project team enacted the day-to-day relationships with their internal clients. The authors emphasize that the case study method with the interpretative orientation is particularly suitable for inquiries on research phenomena that are dynamic in their creation and fluid in their sense-marking (Walsham 1995). van Dijk and van Dick (2009) also consider interviews to be the most appropriate method whereby organizational members could openly share their views and opinions. However, they took a positivist case study approach. Questionnaires were constructed based on theoretical hypotheses from the theory (i.e., the social identity approach) and pilot research results. As the positivist perspective is premised on the existence of *a priori* fixed relationships within phenomena ready for being tested via hypothetico-deductive logic and analysis (Dube and Pare 2003), a weakness is that it tends to be geared towards "prediction" more than explanation, losing the very dynamics of human relationships and possibly other important factors making sense of the phenomena (Williams 2003). In van Dijk and van Dick's (2009) study, employees identified themselves with their pre-merger organization

and it seemed this level of identity was salient and stable throughout the data collection. This made the positivistic investigation possible and effective with little need to consider other levels of the employees' self-categories. However, in other situations where a finer gradation of self-categorization required consideration, the positivist paradigm can be difficult and interpretation of specific events will be necessary (Tansley et al. 2013).

The focused review outlined above demonstrates a number of potential weaknesses in relation to positivist experimental and survey approaches, that is, when situation-specific grouping processes and power changes need attention. This is particularly noteworthy in studies involving particular political events, and involving complex human relations and unstable power structures where people may feel powerful at one stage, and perhaps less powerful at a different stage. As discussed earlier, an investigation into the reasons behind such a change may be insightful. Thus, we acknowledge the potential for such insight by utilizing an interpretivist case study approach to the exploration of Turner's theory. It is anticipated that this in-depth phenomenological paradigm that focuses on meanings and views of the phenomena can be considered as a helpful alternative way of describing Turner's (2005) Three-Process Theory of Power in real life.

## Conclusion

This paper has reviewed and discussed the methodologies adapted in recent research applying aspects of Turner's (2005) Three-Process Theory of Power and its underpinning social identity framework. The

paper has addressed some important weaknesses of the positivist approach in the context of exploring Turner's framework by comparing and contrasting the positivist approach with the interpretivist approach deployed in these research studies. With the focus on experiments and surveys for the positivist approach and case study methods for the interpretivist approach, it was found out that the positivist approach is flawed in the way that experiments and surveys inevitably have to tailor information to the particular conditions of the experiment or survey question, and thus lack ecological validity (Cicourel 1982). It is of good value to examine the theoretical concepts and mechanisms, for which the positivist instrument provides the basis, by using the interpretivist approach to learn about the everyday activities and beliefs of the members of a group. Outside an artificially constructed experimental environment and the forced-choice nature of the survey, the choice of a case study approach, for example, adds to Turner's theoretical framework by moving the theory into relevant work settings. Further, the interpretivist orientation can contribute to Turner's framework by allowing the reflection and interpretation of the major theoretical aspects within

particular power-related events (Schwarz and Watson 2005; van Dijk and van Dick 2009; Tansley et al. 2013).

The main limitation of this paper was the lack of direct comparison between the two approaches. That is, comparing studies that have used the same theoretical framework and similar data sets where only the methodological approaches were different. Future work should therefore provide a direct comparison between the interpretivist approach and the positivist approach within a similar context and dataset. Nevertheless, the interpretivist case study approach has been highlighted as a necessary and potentially better way of exploring the value of Turner's theoretical framework, specifically the three major aspects: *In-Group Collective Action, Influence, and Persuasion; In-Group Leadership, Prototypicality, and Authority; and Out-Group Discrimination, Coercion, and Resistance*. Future research of looking into these concepts may also find that a full understanding only comes when a combined method is used to enable both the quantitative understanding of participants' work-related self-categories and qualitative support through in-depth understanding of power interplays in a particular political event.

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