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## Introduction

There should be little argument about the proposition that social psychology has made significant contributions to the understanding of international conflict, but also that it has had perhaps less influence on existing diplomatic approaches to addressing this costly phenomenon. The social-psychological approach to analyzing and ameliorating intercommunal and international conflict gained increasing favor in the 1960s and is now more or less an accepted part of the multi-discipline of international relations and the interdisciplinary field of political psychology (Kelman, 1965; Kelman & Fisher, 2003; Mitchell, 1981; Rosati, 2001; Stein, 2001). The approach makes a number of assumptions about the fundamental dynamics of intergroup and international conflict (Fisher, 1990), which can be linked to the nature and expression of international conflict (Kelman, 2007).

First, the social-

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psychology is based on the inductive yield from laboratory experiments, and that the concurrent limitations have likely limited the discipline's contribution to policy development at all levels, including the international (Pettigrew, 1988).

This paper will focus initially on the contributions that social psychology has made in the perceptual and cognitive areas, by drawing attention to various mechanisms, biases and errors that can irrationally feed the escalation process in intergroup and international conflict. Linked to this analysis, consideration will be directed toward heuristics and biases in social judgment and choice that have been identified as



ethnocentrism appear to increase as the distinguishing characteristics of groups are clearer and more marked, for example, in language, manner of dress or skin color. Thus, stronger stereotypes between such groups become filters through which information consonant with the stereotype is perceived and assimilated while contrary information is ignored or discounted (Hamilton, 1979). The pressures of conflict escalation, with its attendant perception of threat, distrust and hostility, likely enhances these distortions.

The positive ingroup side of ethnocentrism also involves perceptual selectivity and distortion, which now operate in the direction of elevating and glorifying the ingroup. According to social identity theory, the self-serving biases that operate here are due to the need for enhanced self-esteem that comes from heightened ingroup distinctiveness and outgroup derogation through invidious comparisons. Simply put, individuals tend to perceive positive behaviors more on the part of ingroup members and negative behaviors more on the part of outgroup members, and even evaluate the same behaviors differently when they are associated with ingroup versus outgroup members ((Pruitt & Kim, 2004). These **self-serving biases** are important in their own right, but gain in significance as conflict escalates, because they contribute to more extreme perceptual distortions such as mirror images.

Processes of causal attribution play an increasingly important role as intergroup conflict escalates over time, and competitive interaction takes the place of neutral, mixed or cooperative interaction. Causal attribution is concerned with the judgments individuals make about the reasons for their own and other people's behavior, that is, how they make inferences about stable characteristics (motives, abilities) from observing actions. Attributions are significant in human interaction, because they tend to affect responses (both emotional and behavioral) to other people's actions. A key distinction is whether attributions are made to internal or dispositional characteristics of the person, or to external or situational factors as behavioral determinants. A common cognitive bias in actor versus observer differences in attribution appears to be that individuals have a tendency to attribute their own behavior to situational causes, whereas the actions of others tend to be attributed to dispositional factors (Jones & Nisbett, 1971). In some ways, this so-called **fundamental attribution error** can be seen as another self-serving bias, especially in situations involving failure or lacking social desirability. When we move beyond general, interpersonal interaction to the level of intergroup relations, a more insidious bias enters in—the so-called **ultimate attribution error** (Pettigrew, 1979). Assuming social categorization and a degree of ethnocentrism, a prejudiced individual will tend to attribute undesirable actions by an outgroup member to dispositional (i.e., group) characteristics, whereas desirable actions will be attributed to situational circumstances. Concurrently, undesirable behavior by an ingroup member will be attributed to situational determinants, while desirable actions will be attributed to dispositional (i.e., ingroup) characteristics. According to Pettigrew, the effect of this cognitive bias will be stronger when there are highly negative stereotypes and intense conflict between the groups. What is happening in this process is that prejudiced individuals are able to confirm their negative expectations and explain away or discount information that runs counter to their outgroup stereotypes. While social-psychological research has demonstrated some support for Pettigrew's assertions, particularly in terms of attributions favoring ingroup members in specific situations, inconsistencies across studies demonstrate that the generic error in attribution is not ubiquitous, and in that light,



not really “ultimate” (Hewstone, 1990). Much of the early attribution research has also been questioned as being highly individualistic, thus identifying a need to invoke ideas from social categorization and intergroup relations in order to develop a broader theory of social attribution (Hewstone & Jaspars, 1982)

As conflict escalates, a series of transformations occur in the orientations and behavior of each party and thereby in their interaction (Pruitt & Kim 2004). One of these changes relates to the motivation of the parties, which shifts from doing well in achieving their goals, to winning over the other party, and finally to hurting the other party. At a middle level of escalation, a competitive and increasingly hostile interaction induces the parties toward further perceptual and cognitive biases. Essentially, this is where negative expectations become increasingly confirmed, mirror images develop, and cognitive dissonance influences parties toward consistent systems of thinking and behaving.

The self-fulfilling prophecy is a type of expectancy effect in which the beliefs, i.e., stereotypes, held with regard to another individual outgroup member lead that person to behave in ways that confirm the stereotype. Such effects were initially studied in educational settings, wherein it coanep-1 (cep)-4 oon

elements (e.g., beliefs, perceptions of behavior) are incongruent (Festinger, 1957). It is proposed that individuals are predisposed to reduce cognitive dissonance through a variety of possible changes, such as modifying one of the elements, adding new elements or changing behavior. Similar conceptualizations, including Heider's balance theory, also identify the need for cognitive consistency as a prime motivator in supporting biases and distortions (Heider, 1958). The initial application of these concepts to international conflict in a comprehensive manner was undertaken by Robert Jervis, whose case analyses emphasized how policy makers assimilated new information into pre-existing beliefs and categories in ways that rendered the information cognitively consistent (Jervis, 1976). The power of these cognitive distortions and confirmatory processes in the direction of an irrational consistency has been supported by further research (Jervis, 1988; Tetlock & McGuire, 1985).

As conflict between antagonists escalates to moderate and high levels, another form of cognitive distortion emerges in the form of reduced complexity of thinking and perceiving as evidenced by changes in communicative acts. In particular, Suedfeld, Tetlock and their colleagues have initiated a line of research on the concept of **integrative complexity**, which is related to the tendency to search for new information, the conditionality versus rigidity of perceptions of the relationship, and the number of options that are being considered. Essentially, integrative complexity measures the degree of differentiation (the number of dimensions used in interpreting information) and integration (the nature and degree of connections among elements) (Tetlock, 1988). Early

At higher levels of escalation, all of the aforementioned misperceptions and biases find their expression in more extreme forms. Each perceptual and cognitive distortion becomes more pronounced, and thus has a larger effect on interaction and escalation. Mirror images, based on an ethnocentric perspective, produce a spiraling effect in which each party's interpretation of the other's difficult or hostile behavior reinforces attributions of aggressive intent and untrustworthiness (Fisher & Kelman, In Press). Mirror images develop beyond the moderately good-bad distinction toward more exaggerated and variegated forms, identified in the work of Ralph White as major forms of misperception, including the **diabolical enemy image**, the **virile self-image**, and the **moral self-image** (White, 1970). The diabolical enemy image embodies a view of the opponent as an evil, monster-like entity that is simple beyond the pale of one's moral domain. The virile self-image sees one's own party as powerful and uncompromising, strength as a virtue, and military superiority as the path to beneficial outcomes, thus linking to a further bias of military overconfidence. The moral self-image exaggerates the good-bad element of the ethnocentric mirror image to the point where one's own party is seen as the defender and arbiter of all that is desirable in the human condition.

The diabolical enemy image finds its expression in the **demonization** of the

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strategies applied automatically, in order to replace the need for detailed information gathering and analysis. Again, the concepts applied to international decision making and conflict resolution come from cognitive social psychology.

The creative work of cognitive psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, which came to provide an alternative to the rational actor or expected-utility theory of decision making, began with an identification of common heuristics used in making judgments under conditions of uncertainty that lead to efficient yet often biased outcomes (Kahneman & Tversky, 1973; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). In general, their work demonstrates how individuals reduce complexity by relying on a limited number of heuristics which provide short cuts to assessing the probability of an event or the value of a quantity. The **representativeness** heuristic involves assigning an entity to a category, such as a stereotype, based on perceived similarity, and then making judgments about the entity on other dimensions, such as probability of occurrence, based on that assignment. This judgment involves a bias to ignore other factors that may affect probability, such as the base-rate frequency or prior probability, and thus violates statistical rules of prediction. The **availability** heuristic leads individuals to estimate the frequency of a class or the probability of an event by how easily occurrences of the entity can be brought into awareness. While availability may actually relate to frequency and probability, it is also related to other factors which bring biases into the judgment process, such as the degree of retrievability of the instances in question. Thus, estimates can be rendered inaccurate. Another heuristic relates to the phenomena of **anchoring** and **adjustment** in which individuals make estimates by starting from an initial value, which is then adjusted to yield the final estimate. The problem is that different starting points lead to different estimates which are biased toward the initial judgment (anchoring), and that attempts to move away from the initial estimate are insufficient (adjustment). Tversky and Kahneman (1974) conclude that although these heuristics are economical and usually effective, they can lead to systematic errors. Lau (2003) comments that these heuristics can be useful in making decisions that don't involve



and to therefore resist movement from the status quo and risk deadlock. Levy (1996) contends that there is a sense in international politics that states appear more willing to maintain the status quo against a threatened loss than to make comparable gains, and it is



pressures toward uniformity, including self-censorship, an illusion of unanimity, group pressure on dissenters, and the use of self-appointed “mindguards” to enforce conformity with the leader’s initial direction (Janis, 1982). The subtle invocation of groupthink produces a range of symptoms of defective decision making, which bear some similarity and extend the treatment of deficiencies in individual-level decision making identified by Janis and Mann (1977). In particular, groupthink results in a poor information search, a selective bias in information processing, an incomplete survey of alternatives, the failure to examine the risks of the preferred choice, a failure to work out contingency plans, and other shortcomings that produce a low probability of success. In his 1982 model, Janis also builds in a number of antecedent conditions or predisposing factors, the most important of which is that the decision makers constitute a highly cohesive group that allows insidious group processes to trump realistic and rational decision making. Additional antecedent conditions include structural faults of the organization, such as insulation of the decision making group, a lack of methodical procedures for decision making, a provocative situational context, such as high stress from external threats, and low self-esteem induced in part by recent policy failures and excessive difficulties in the



resources (especially in situations of relative deprivation) result in the perception of threat, which then increases ethnocentrism and drives invidious group comparisons. RCT also posits that threat causes awareness of ingroup identity and ingroup solidarity, while at the same time causing hostility to the source of the threat.

Theorizing on SIT was initially stimulated by the mere effects of cognitive categorization, which demonstrated that both intraclass similarities and interclass differences tend to be exaggerated, and was extended by the minimal group experiments which demonstrated the even the most trivial and arbitrary of group assignments created intergroup discrimination favoring the ingroup in situations of no conflict of interest (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A series of propositions was then developed to link social categorization and social identity to individual self-esteem and positive identity through the mechanism of self-serving social comparisons with other groups. The motivating force for intergroup discrimination was thus found in the concept of self-esteem, in that a positive social identity created by group formation and enhanced by positive ingroup evaluations and negative outgroup comparisons is seen to enhance the ingroup member's self-concept. SIT thereby links individual-level cognitive variables (categorization effects), motivational variables (need for self-esteem) and emotional variables (attachment to the ingroup) to the social levels of group functioning and intergroup relations. The central point here is that when individuals or groups interact in ways that are related to their respective memberships in social categories, their functioning can only be understood at the levels of group and intergroup behavior (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). At the same time, research on SIT provides stronger support for the ingroup positiveness and favoritism effects than for the outgroup denigration and discrimination ones (Brewer, 1979, 1999), and it appears that competition or conflict between groups (as posited by RCT) is necessary to produce the full effects of ethnocentrism (Brewer, 2007).

Furthermore, it has been pointed out that Tajfel's definition of social identity as part of the individual's self-concept related to group membership is an almost purely individualistic one, focusing on how the person thinks and feels about group memberships (Ashmore, Jussim, & Wilder, 2001). Thus, its scope needs to be defined more broadly in order to increase the relevance to identity-based conflicts at the ethnic, cultural or national level. This is particularly true in protracted intergroup and international conflicts where each side has elements of a national identity which has emerged in a given sociocultural context and has rendered the dispute into a zero-sum game (Ashmore et al., 2001; Kelman, 2001).

Nonetheless, the important role of social identity processes in the causation and maintenance of protracted intergroup and international conflict is now generally accepted in the field (Stein, 2001). Particularly in situations of intractable conflict, threats to identity are seen as playing a pivotal role in the escalation and persistence of the conflict, to the point that the parties unwittingly collude in maintaining the conflict, because it has become part of their identities (Northrup, 1989). The concept of identity-based conflict is typically linked to human needs theory, which posits that when certain essential requirements for human development are denied or frustrated, including the need for identity and its recognition, protracted conflict is the outcome (Burton, 1990). While identity-based conflict is usually associated with ethnopolitical conflict between ethnicities, religions or other culturally distinct collectivities, the point can be made that

such conflicts with their attendant identities also exist at other levels in organizations and

**The Social-Psychological Response:  
Interactive Conflict Resolution and Problem-Solving Workshops**

The foregoing analysis suggests the central role that cognitive, group and intergroup factors play in the escalation and intractability of international conflict. From the analysis of errors, biases and ineffective processes, it appears that human social groups are limited in their capacity to manage intense conflict that threatens their well being, identity and/or existence. In particular, it is clear that the perception of threat plays a key role in escalation toward destructive and protracted impasses. In RCT, threat is a central variable that drives both sides of ethnocentrism, but particularly hostility to the source of the threat, i.e., the outgroup. In derivatives of SIT, threats to identity drive defensiveness, faulty decision making and ov7 (m)m624.28 --11.06 8 --11late tc (t)-2 asi n escaasenatcial08

**Figure 2: Social-Psychological Concepts and Processes in PSWs**

Level and Focus	Concepts/Barriers	Key Processes
Social Perception	Stereotypes Attribution Errors Entrapment	Cognitive Dissonance Reduction Cognitive Complexity Increase
Social Identity	Threats to Social or National Identity	Participant Role Changes Development of Shared Identity Accommodation of Identities
Intergroup Contact	Intergroup Attitudes Discrimination	Implement Facilitative Conditions Reduce Intergroup Anxiety Increase Intergroup Empathy Decategorization and Recategorization

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conflict resolution training, cross-conflict teams, and reconciliation, which bring together members of enemy groups for productive confrontation and engagement that can support conflict de-escalation and peacebuilding efforts.

Although a variety of workshop initiatives to improve intergroup relations were created in the early days of human relations training from the late 1940s onwards, the genesis of the PSW is generally attributed to the creative work of John Burton and Herbert Kelman and their colleagues (Fisher, 1990, 2006). John Burton based his conceptualization on a systems orientated, pluralist approach to international relations, and brought together informal yet high level representatives of parties engaged in international conflict (e.g., Malaysia-Indonesia, Cyprus) for conflict analysis and problem-solving discussions facilitated by a third party panel of academics (Burton, 1969). The role of the panel was to establish a non-threatening and analytic atmosphere (much like an academic seminar) in which the participants can mutually analyze their conflict (with some substantive suggestions from the third party), identify common interests, and create some new ideas to be ultimately fed into the negotiation process. Burton's early work put considerable emphasis on the subjective elements of conflict (misperceptions, miscommunication, unintended escalation), and thus the centrality of improving communication, whereas his later work came to emphasize basic human needs theory as an explanation for "deep-rooted conflict" (Burton, 1990). Herbert Kelman served as a third party panel member in one of Burton's early workshops, and came to see the potential of the PSW as rooted in its social-psychological nature, in that it connected the attitudes and actions of individuals to the wider social system of the conflict. At the theoretical level, Kelman initially provided a comparison between the methodology of Burton and that of Leonard Doob, who had applied methods of human relations training to highly escalated communal and international conflicts with mixed results (Fisher, 1997; Kelman, 1972). In the practical domain, Kelman initially worked with Stephen Cohen to develop a workshop method that brought together "influentials" from the two sides to engage in an exchange of perspectives and an analysis of underlying concerns (needs and fears) that laid the groundwork for then discussing the overall shape of a solution and the directions to achieve it as well as the expected resistances (Kelman & Cohen, 1976).

The nature and characteristics of the PSW have been articulated in a number of treatments by various authors. The following passage is one of my attempts to succinctly capture the essence of the PSW in a descriptive manner (Fisher, 2004) :

Regardless of the label applied, the workshop method evidences a number of essential characteristics (Kelman, 1972; Kelman & Cohen, 1976, 1986). A small group of individuals (usually three to six from each side) are invited by a third party team (usually three to five) to engage in low risk, noncommittal, off-the-record discussions over a period of three to five days in a neutral and secluded setting conducive to a relaxed atmosphere and devoid of intrusions. While the meetings are not secret, they are quiet, that is, held out of the public and media view with clear assurances of confidentiality stressing the non-attribution of comments made in the workshop. The participants are typically influential individuals in their communities who are not in official policy-making roles, but have access to the political leadership. Some variations involve officials, but in a

private, unofficial capacity. The role of the third party is to facilitate the discussions in an impartial manner and to suggest conceptual tools that might be useful to the participants in analyzing their conflict. The objective is to create an informal atmosphere in which participants can freely express their views, while respecting those of the other side, and can move from adversarial de



interactions and systems need to be influenced through workshops in order to help bring about changes that lead to resolution.

There is no doubt that most conflict is over real incompatibilities in resources, values, or power, but it is assumed that all conflicts are a

## Bases of the PSW Rationale in Social Psychology

The assumptions and general rationale of the PSW provide a framework in which to articulate the detailed rationale for effecting individual, interactive and systemic changes that are claimed by the methodology. As a discipline, social psychology is concerned with how the thoughts and behaviors of individuals are influenced by, and in turn influence, the cognitions and actions of others in the social environment. Thus, in its broadest and most applicable form, the discipline is concerned with multiple levels of analysis from the individual to the social system (Fisher, 1982), and concepts and processes from a number of levels can be drawn on to provide some of the rationale for the PSW (Fisher, 1990). The present treatment will focus selectively on concepts and processes from three levels of analysis articulated in the first part of this paper: the individual, the group, and the intergroup.

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problem solving on the conflict. It is likely that a series of workshops is required for participants to seriously shift from their adversarial and unilateral approach to being able to think together and ultimately to act together for their mutual benefit (Rouhana, 1995; Saunders, 1999). One outcome of workshop interaction is that the participants from the two sides begin to differentiate the enemy image, to enter into the other's perspective, and to visualize the possibility of a future involving mutually beneficial coexistence (Kelman, 2001). These changes in roles and the resulting realizations and learnings call for changes in own and other identity. Furthermore, as participants come to understand and indeed identify with members of the other side, they begin to enter into a shared social identity as peacemakers, and they begin to build coalitions across the lines of the conflict which have important implications for transfer effects to the wider communities (Kelman, 1993).

#### Intergroup Contact

At the level of intergroup relations, the primary rationale for the PSW and other forms of ICR comes from a domain of theory and research identified as the **intergroup contact hypothesis** (see Fisher, 1990). Initially expressed comprehensively by Gordon Allport and extended by others, the contact hypothesis postulates the "facilitative conditions" under which contact (i.e., interaction) between members of conflicting groups would have positive effects on intergroup attitudes and relations (Allport, 1954; Cook, 1970; Fisher, 1982). The five facilitative conditions commonly identified are built into the design of PSWs, thus attempting to capitalize on whatever power the contact hypothesis has in affecting attitudes and behavior. However, it is essential that the interaction is perceived by participants to be at the intergroup rather than the interpersonal level in that the individuals from the other side are seen as representative or

competent and dependable persons rather than unstable or irresponsible individuals. In addition, participants are typically invited who cover the political spectrum, but are not extremists who would have problems interacting with the other side and in reconsidering their perceptions and attitudes. The participants typically invited are generally knowledgeable about the conflict, hold independent views with a degree of flexibility, are realistic yet willing to be creative, are well connected in their own community and respected on both sides, and are emotionally mature and resilient in the face of difficult conversations involving confrontation.

Beyond the facilitative conditions of contact, an additional dynamic that provides part of the rationale for both intergroup contact and the positive effects of PSWs interaction is provided through the concept of **intergroup anxiety** which is defined as an unpleasant fear of negative evaluations or consequences as a result of contact ((Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Intergroup anxiety is affected by certain antecedent conditions prior to contact (e.g., stereotypes, poor intergroup relations), and high levels of such anxiety are predicted to reinforce normative or default responses to contact with members of the other group (e.g., cognitive biases, negative emotional reactions). Along with the facilitative conditions, ground rules and agenda for PSWs are intended to help participants moderate their intergroup anxiety, so that it will motivate curiosity and learning rather than rigidification and confirmation of negative attitudes and behavior.

A variety of research in laboratory and field settings over the past fifty years has generally supported the validity of the contact hypothesis, has examined further mediating variables to explain its effectiveness, and has resulted in a number of extended models of intergroup contact, which although initially competing, may in fact be combined in complementary ways (Brewer & Miller, 1984; Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Many of these developments are also linked with SIT, and overall provide further rationale for effectiveness of PSWs and for improving design and implementation of workshop programs, particularly

levels of interaction, and argue that the contact interaction  
 intergroup in order for the generalization of any  
 members beyond the contact setting. Thus, group identities

offered by Hewstone and Brown stresses that contact needs to take place between members of groups who are seen as typical or representative in order for any attitude changes to generalize to the groups writ large. In addition, participants are not influenced to give up or reduce the salience of their existing identities. This is compatible with an extension of the common, ingroup identity model offered by Gaertner and his colleagues termed the **dual identity** strategy, which attempts to maintain the salience of existing identities within the superordinate identity (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993).

By way of further integration, Brown and Hewstone (2005) also acknowledge the importance of interpersonal closeness and friendship, as stressed by Pettigrew (1998), which demonstrates the importance of interpersonal attraction based on similarity that was an original part of the contact hypothesis rationale. Thus, in terms of application to interventions such as PSWs designed to improve intergroup relations, Hewstone and Brown conclude: “Practitioners who can successfully combine interpersonal, intergroup, and common-group elements in this way will, we believe, have a good chance of achieving genuine and enduring reductions in intergroup tensions” (2005, 329). The rationale for PSWs as presented by Fisher (1990) included an interpersonal element, in that mutual and respectful self-disclosure among participants would lead to greater understanding and trust, leading to a cooperative orientation and the development of more veridical and positive attitudes. It is also noteworthy, that in addition to supporting intergroup anxiety as one of the prime mediators in intergroup contact, Hewstone and Brown (2005) also identify empathy among the participants as an important lubricant of attitude change. Again, the genuine and respectful climate of understanding that the PSW seeks to create encourages expressions of empathy among participants, thus fostering attitude change through affective processes identified as important by Pettigrew (1998). As a final integration, Pettigrew (1998) offers a longitudinal model of intergroup contact, which proposes initial contact emphasizing interpersonal interaction and decategorization leading to liking without generalization, an interim phase of contact involving salient categorization by existing identities leading to reduced prejudice with generalization, and a final stage of a unified group based on recategorization resulting in the maximum reduction of prejudice. This sequenced and comprehensive model has similarities to the typical agenda and phases of PSWs, which often start with the sharing of individual perspectives or experiences related to the conflict, move into a period of intergroup

interchange and learning and then to helping (role) and (net) mediation (4dmd)34(2n)29(2a)(1a24(f))B

Kelman, 1965; Pruitt & Kim, 2004). However, the potential gains in awareness and insight must be judged in relation to the nature of theorizing and the predominant method of research that defines the discipline of social psychology, or at least its mainstream expression of experimental cognitive social psychology. Many critics both inside and outside the discipline over the past four decades have decried the simplicity and lack of relevance of both theory and research in the mainstream discourse, and yet this significant domain of scholarly activity has remained largely unchanged over that time period (Cherry, 1995; Hill, 2006; Pancer, 1997). Given the limited space available here, only a quick listing of the major concerns will be provided.

In theoretical or conceptual terms, mainstream social psychology has increasingly gravitated toward concepts, models and theories that focus on individual-level processes at the expense of representing the social world. Thus, individual processes are posited as responsible for behavioral outcomes, rather than variables in the social context, which are typically represented, if at all, by representations in the individual's mind, e.g., attitude referents, perceptions of threat, attributions for behavior. Furthermore, the individual

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