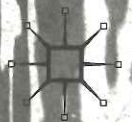


**SOCIAL
PSYCHOLOGY
OF SOCIAL
PROBLEMS**

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THE INTERGROUP CONTEXT



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Extreme Forms of Ingroup Positivity and their Negative Consequences for Intergroup Relations

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A quick review of videos posted on YouTube showed us how some young people in London feel compelled to use violence to protect the honour of their 'endz' (administrative areas defined by different postcodes e.g. SE1 versus NW1), which can be disrespected by the mere presence of inhabitants of other postcode defined areas (e.g. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjP17x-FEKw> or <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCcVs2KAxKk&feature=related>). Also in London, 12-year-old Ben was knifed to death in a fight between two groups of teenagers who identified themselves as 'Greens' or 'Greys' depending on the colour of the rubbish bins on the council estates where they lived. The fight was arranged to establish the group's superiority and Ben is remembered by his gang as a 'fallen soldier'. These examples effectively show how little people need to form an ingroup or 'social' identity and become strongly attached to it. Even such arbitrary cues as the colour of rubbish bins in the area can inspire social identity formation. Moreover, this social identity can

generate strong feelings of ingroup loyalty and devotion that are tied to feelings of hostility and aggressiveness towards *outgroups*. Outgroups are other groups differentiated on the same dimension: a different postcode, colour of rubbish bins, colour of the skin or the colours of a flag. The above examples are not limited to the Greater London area. They illustrate dynamics that on a larger scale can involve ethnic groups or nations. Consider the example of the American Nazi Party (ANP) that preaches pride in American white European heritage and opposes politics securing equal rights of ethnic minorities in the US. In a flyer opposing legalization of Mexican immigrants working in the US the party claims that such immigration ('unstoppable plague') 'destabilizes America's White/Gringo status as a Euro/Western nation' (<http://anp14.com/support/gifs/mexico2.bmp>). The ANP ideological stance emphasizes threat to the desired privileged status of white European-Americans (e.g. see <http://whitehonor.com/white-power/what-does-a-national-socialist-believe/>). In early decades of the twentieth century the Nazis in Germany believed their group was threatened because their right for better living space and pure blood was not properly appreciated by other nations. This belief legitimized the Second World War aggression and the Holocaust (e.g. Adorno, 1951).

William Sumner, in his seminal book *Folkways* (1906) observed the commonness of the reciprocal link between love for an ingroup and derogation of outgroups. He wrote '[t]he relation of comradeship and peace in the we-group and that of hostility and war towards other-groups are correlative to each other' (p. 12). Sumner coined the term ethnocentrism, which he defined elsewhere as '[t]he sentiment of cohesion, internal comradeship and devotion to the in-group, which carries with it a sense of superiority to any out-group and readiness to defend the interests of the in-group against the out-group' (Sumner, 1911, p. 11). In 1929, commenting on the commonness of human aggressiveness, Sigmund Freud repeated the observation that ingroup love and loyalty are bound to outgroup hostility: 'It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness' (Freud, 1961, p. 114).

Empirical studies in social psychology confirm that the conditions that lead people to discriminate in favour of their ingroup and against an outgroup can be quite minimal. The influential social identity theory proposes that ingroup preference is formed very fast, with little external support but with profound consequences for intergroup relations (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The famous *minimal group paradigm* experiments used most petty and arbitrary reasons to divide people into ingroups and outgroups. Perhaps the most trivial was a flip of the coin (note the arbitrariness and pettiness similar to the colour of rubbish bins or postcodes) (Tajfel, 1970, 1978; Tajfel et al., 1971). Regardless of the importance of the reasons for the