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An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict

Henri Tajfel and John Turner, 1979

Why the groups we belong to become part of who we are.

The big idea

Tajfel and Turner argued that part of how we see ourselves comes from the groups we belong to. We sort people into groups, we identify with our own, and we compare it with others. Because our self-esteem is tied to the group, we want it to come out well in that comparison.

The famous example

Social identity builds in three steps.

STEP ONE
Categorise
Sort people into groups

STEP TWO
Identify
Adopt the group as your own

STEP THREE
Compare
Want your group to come out on top

Tajfel's earlier experiments showed people favoured their own group even when the groups were made up on the spot.

Why it matters

It's why fans of a club like Connacht or Leicester feel their team's success as their own, and why a shared identity can carry an underdog a long way.

Featured in
2016 The Year of the Underdog: Connacht and Leicester City

Read the original
Tajfel, H. & Turner, J. C. (1979). An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, 33–47.

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