Contributions of Social Psychology to The Analysis and Resolution of International Conflict

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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-psychological approach is rooted in the philosophy of phenomenology, which stresses the centrality of subjective experience in determining our perception of reality and our responses to that reality. Thus, the perceptions, attitudes, and values of individuals involved in a conflict relationship are important determinants of their behavior toward the other party and their response to the conflict. According to a recent explication of the social psychology of national and international group relations, "… individuals, their thought processes, and the manifestations of those processes in interpersonal interactions, are a fundamental aspect of intergroup and international dynamics" (Dovidio, Maruyama, & Alexander, 1998) (p. 832). In relation to the nature of international conflict, Kelman (2007) maintains that the process is driven by collective needs and fears, the former rendered salient by threats to basic human needs (security, identity, etc.) and the latter by fears of the denial of these needs. Thus, he contends that "subjective forces linked to basic needs and existential fears contribute heavily to its escalation and perpetuation" (p. 65). The implication is that a wide range of perceptual and cognitive structures, processes and biases at the level of individuals, groups, and interacting groups need to be examined in order to fully understand the causation and escalation of international conflict.

Second, a social-psychological approach analyzes perceptual and cognitive processes in the context of group functioning and intergroup relations, which are the domains in which social conflict arises and is pursued. These processes operate differently in the group and intergroup environment than they do in an individual independently responding to stimuli without reference to their social implications. Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues were among the first to stress that behavior in an intergroup context is characterized by the fact that individuals interact with members of other groups in terms of their group identifications (Sherif, 1966). This idea was elaborated in social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which posits that individuals' perceptions and interactions in intergroup contexts are governed by their respective memberships in social categories. SIT provides a series of propositions that link social categorization to individual self-esteem and positive identity by the mechanism of self-serving social comparison with other groups. According to this analysis, the intergroup and international context of social perception and cognition needs to be understood in terms of the formation and existence of social groups, particularly identity groups, which are defined by racial, religious, ethnic, cultural, and/or national

markers and share a common history and a common fate. Individual members identify with such groups in cognitive, functional, and emotional terms, and their membership thus constitutes an important element of their social identity and self-concept. It appears that the mere fact of social categorization, in differentiating among groups, gives rise to the perception of heightened similarities within groups alongside exaggerated differences between groups. As a consequence, the process of group formation and social identity help to plant the seeds of ethnocentrism by producing positive attachments and attitudes toward the ingroup. The full expression of ethnocentrism, involving prejudice toward outgroups as well, seems to require the existence of real conflicts of interest between the groups, which—according to realistic group conflict theory (RCT) (LeVine & Campbell, 1972)—are the necessary conditions for intergroup conflict and all that goes with it, including outgroup prejudice. In other words, incompatible goals and competition for scarce resources result in the perception of threat, which increases ethnocentrism and drives invidious group comparisons. Once ethnocentrism is pushed to a moderate level through the sense of threat and related mistrust, perceptions of intragroup similarity and intergroup difference are enhanced by further cognitive distortions fostering the development of negative stereotypes, mirror images, selective perceptions, and self-serving biases (Fisher, 1990).

Third, a social-psychological approach views the interaction between the parties, in interplay with subjective elements, as fundamental in determining the course and outcomes of international conflict. Interactions between the parties are shaped by their initial and continuing orientations, especially on the dimension of cooperativeness versus competitiveness, and by the communication processes—their openness, accuracy, and complexity—that prevail at all levels of the societies. Kelman (2007) affirms the importance of seeing international conflict as an intersocietal process, rather than simply an intergovernmental phenomenon, thus drawing attention to the significance of processes within each society in relation to their interaction. Concurrently, he contends that we must see international conflict as "*a multifaceted process of mutual influence*, not only a contest in the exercise of coercive power (… and) *an interactive process with an escalatory, self-perpetuating dynamic*, not merely a sequence of action and reaction by stable actors" (p. 64) (italics in the original). Thus, the manner in which an international conflict unfolds, particularly in relation to the nature and dynamics of escalation, is a prime focus of the social-psychological perspective.

Fourth, a social-psychological approach affirms that international conflict can be understood only through a multi-level analysis, ranging from the individual to the social-system level, with special attention to the power of group and intergroup dynamics. According to Dovidio et al. (1998), social psychology has the power to bridge intrapsychic processes, individual behavior, and collective action at the policy level. It is essential, however, to begin any analysis at the level of the phenomenon in question, in this case the international level, and to then blend in concepts and models from lower levels of analysis as they appear to be useful (Fisher, 1990). Similarly, Kelman (2007) cautions that psychological factors must be understood in their context, and therefore their contribution depends on correctly identifying the appropriate points of application. Thus, while the social-psychological perspective can add depth and richness to the analysis of international conflict, it cannot by itself provide a comprehensive theory of the phenomenon. It must also be acknowledged that a great deal of the theory in social

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 compromising the process of decision making relevant to conflict behavior. These insidious individual dynamics and their effects will then be complemented by an analysis of selected group-level factors, identified by the model of groupthink, which further compromise rational and cooperative choices in escalated conflict. In an attempt to bring some organization and synthesis to this treatment, cognitive factors will be related to the level of escalation, specifically in terms of the transformation from low intensity to high intensity conflict as defined by indicators provided by previous analyses (Fisher, 1990; Pruitt & Kim, 2004). Rather than providing a laundry list of biases and errors in a serial fashion, as is the common practice in the literature, this analysis will attempt to identify the levels in the escalation process where certain factors emerge and have their *primary* influence on counterproductive and destructive interaction. This approach will hopefully provide a more integrated, cyclical and systemic understanding of how cognitive and group factors drive the escalation of destructive intergroup and international conflict. An overview of the organization of the chapter is provided in Figure 1 which roughly relates degree of escalation to the individual and group levels of analysis, and thus provides an integrative context for the placement of the concepts and processes to be discussed.

Figure 1: Social-Psychological Concepts and Processes in Relation to Escalation

Degree of Escalation	Individual Level	Group Level
Low	Stereotypes Selective, Distorted Perception Self-Serving Biases Fundamental Attribution Error Bounded Rationality, Heuristics Prospect Theory Effects	Ethnocentrism Realistic Group Conflict Social Identity
Medium	Threat Perception Confirmatory Processes Self-Fulfilling Prophecy Cognitive Dissonance Effects Integrative Complexity Reduction	Ultimate Attribution Error Mirror Images Groupthink
High	Entrapment	Deindividuation, Dehumanization Moral & Virile Self-Images Diabolical Enemy Image Demonization Mutual Victimization

While this treatment accepts the validity and utility of the social-psychological or cognitive approach to understanding international conflict, various limitations and reservations about the approach will be acknowledged. Within the discipline of social psychology, the theoretical yield typically comes with serious concerns about the common research methods of laboratory experimentation and questionnaire usage in terms of questionable validity (Brannigan, 2004; Fisher, 1982; Pancer, 1997). These methods typically provide little or no context, whereas in the real world of international conflict, an exceedingly complex and in part unknowable political and cultural context confronts the participants, particularly the decision makers who must make choices on matters of serious concern, often including their perceived survival. It is very likely that the complexity and pervasiveness of contextual factors attenuates the explanatory power of social-psychological concepts and processes regardless of their intuitive appeal.

Social Perception and Cognition

Mainstream social psychology in North America has largely concentrated on the study of social cognition since the 1950s, supplanting an earlier interest in group dynamics and intergroup relations in organizational and community settings. This emphasis on social cognition complemented earlier work on attitude formation and measurement, stereotypes and related topics, and has come to dominate the discipline for the last half century. However, as noted above, the present interest in social perception and cognition is in terms of how these processes operate in the social and relational environment as opposed to their manner of functioning in an independently operating individual mind simply responding to stimuli or choices fabricated by the researcher, which may or may not have meaningful social referents or context. With this emphasis, the individual level aspects of social perception and cognition are immediately and inextricably linked to group and intergroup processes and structures that define their nature and functioning. The concept of stereotype is a good example, in that it goes beyond the individual level process of categorization to find meaning only in the context of group identities and intergroup relations.

The concept of *stereotype* has a considerable history in social psychology (e.g., Katz & Braly, 1935) with the concept typically being defined as a set of simplified beliefs about the attributes of an outgroup. In this way, stereotypes are aligned with the first of three components usually identified with a social attitude: the cognitive, the emotional and the behavioral. Stereotypes build on the social categorization effect of perceived outgroup similarity, but also incorporate the outgroup derogation side of ethnocentrism, in that the simplistic beliefs typically have negative connotations. Stereotypes abound in the world of intergroup relations at low levels of conflict escalation, and can be relatively innocuous misperceptions of group reality. However, at higher levels of escalation, stereotypes can drive more insidious processes, such as self-fulfilling prophecies and can provide part of the justification for destructive behaviors such as discrimination, dehumanization and ultimately genocide.

Once established, typically through ingroup socialization, stereotypes serve as one of the cognitive structures that drive *selective and distorted perception*, selectivity being a basic process of some necessity in a very complex and fast moving world. Unfortunately, in the intergroup context, the effects of social categorization and

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 was found that teachers' expectations (even bogus ones) about the capabilities of their students were related to the students' subsequent performance, apparently through teachers' differential treatment of the students (Jussim, 1986; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). In the context of intergroup conflict, the stereotyped expectancies that one group holds of another group, for example, as untrustworthy, are communicated through behavior, such as cautiousness and skepticism. These behaviors may then be reciprocated by the target group members, for example, through unwillingness to trust and cooperate, thus confirming the initial views of the first group. In this way, stereotypes are not only confirmed, but strengthened for the next round of interactions. Thus, the pervasive effects of stereotypes on intergroup relations is one of the enduring potential contributions of social psychology to the understanding of intergroup and international conflict (Fiske, 1998, 2002)

The concept of *image* has gained significant currency in the study of international relations and conflict over that of attitude, even though the two can be defined in very similar ways as consisting of cognitive, affective and behavioral components (Scott, 1965). One important application of the concept is the realization that parties often hold *mirror images* of each other, seeing themselves in a similar stereotypical positive light and the enemy in a similarly negative view. A classic study of American and Russian images of each other during the Cold War demonstrated that the Americans' distorted view of Russia was surprisingly similar to the Russians' image of America, for example, each saw the other as the aggressor who could not be trusted (Bronfenbrenner, 1961). Similar mirror images have been documented in a variety of intergroup and international conflicts in different parts of the world, and their significance lies in the effects they have on driving increasingly escalatory behavior by the parties. Thus, a number of commentators argue that the study of images is a valuable avenue to pursue in the study of international relations and foreign policy research, and call for a more differentiated view of images as they affect foreign policy making (Herrmann, 2003; Herrmann & Fischerkeller, 1995).

Many of the perceptual biases and cognitive distortions that afflict parties in conflict can be partly explained through the effects of *cognitive dissonance*, an unpleasant state of tension that is hypothesized to exist whenever any two cognitive

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 research on communicative acts of policy makers (speeches, diplomatic notes) demonstrated that integrative complexity at various points in international crises was lower for a crisis that resulted in war (World War I) than for a crisis that was resolved without recourse to the use of force (the Cuban missile crisis) (Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977). In a similar vein, an analysis of Arab and Israeli policy makers speeches at the United Nations over a thirty year period (1947-1976) showed that integrative complexity decreased precipitously in the months preceding each of the four wars that were fought between Israel and its Arab neighbors (Suedfeld, Tetlock, & Raminez, 1977). Tetlock (1988) has also carried out detailed studies over time of the foreign policy statements of American and Soviet policy makers during the Cold War, and has related changes in integrative complexity to military and political interventions, major agreements and leadership changes. In general, complexity decreased prior to competitive interactions, increased during times of agreement, and also showed a reciprocity effect, in that Soviet complexity increased in relation to American complexity. Clearly, the marker of integrative complexity is tracking a very important characteristic of the cognitive functioning of key individuals engaged in escalation, and as such is implicated in the insidious phenomenon of destructive conflict. However, Tetlock (1988) points out that his results can be interpreted as a result of changes in information processing or in terms of political impression management, in that the communicative acts are designed to manipulate the perceptions of target audiences, for example, to maintain a tough image so the other will make concessions. These competing interpretations are also discussed in a review of a number of notable cases in which a lack of integrative complexity appeared to play an important role, from the American Civil War to the first Gulf War (Conway, Suedfeld, & Tetlock, 2001).

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 enemy, which White determines to be not only the most common, but also an almost universal misperception, in his forty years of studying the most serious conflicts of the past one hundred years (White, 2004). Demonization is also linked to the process of *dehumanization*, in which members of the enemy group are seen as less than human, thus enabling justifying rationalizations for aggressive behavior toward them. Dehumanization is also linked to the misperception of *deindividuation*, in which members of groups see themselves less as individual persons, and experience a loss of personal identity and become submerged in the group's cognitive reality (Festinger, Pepitone, & Newcomb, 1952). The consequence is that members of one's own group or other groups are seen less as individual persons and more as members of a social category (Pruitt & Kim, 2004). In relation to intergroup conflict, this process appears to reduce constraints within groups on aggressive behavior by reducing individual responsibility, and increases hostile actions toward outgroup members who are also perceived less as individual human beings deserving of morally acceptable treatment. The accumulation of all the above images and biases is to cognitively allow for more severe aggressive responses toward members of the enemy group, which in turn, escalates the intensity of the conflict. The *mutual victimization* characteristic of highly escalated intergroup conflicts is in part due to the enabling effects of extreme images and the cognitive biases that go with them.

Also at higher levels of escalation, an insidious cognitive process known as *entrapment* becomes a driver in the intractable nature of the conflict. Entrapment is a cognitive trap in which the parties become increasingly committed to costly and destructive courses of action that would not be prescribed by rational analysis (Brockner & Rubin, 1985). Thus, each party in an escalated conflict pursues its goals by expending more resources than would seem to be justifiable by objective or external standards (Pruitt & Kim, 2004). Analyses of a number of wars in which the United States has been involved, including the current U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, provide illustrations of the power of entrapment. In a related vein, Morton Deutsch has identified the cognitive error of unwitting commitment in his largely cognitive analysis of the escalatory dynamics of what he terms the malignant social process, that is, one which is

increasingly costly and dangerous and from which the parties see no way of extricating themselves without unacceptable losses (Deutsch, 1983). The dynamics behind unwitting commitment are seen to include a more general phenomenon identified as post-decision dissonance reduction, in which an alternative that has been chosen then becomes evaluated more positively in order to increase cognitive consistency (Brehm, 1956). A connection can also be made between entrapment and some of the hypothesized effects of prospect theory, especially loss aversion, which might help explain why parties persist in failing policies much longer than a rational, cost-benefit analysis would prescribe (Levy, 1996) (see below).

Social Judgment, Decision Making and Groupthink

The various biases and errors identified in the processes of information gathering, processing and retrieval automatically and insidiously transfer into the making of social judgments and decisions, whether made individually or collectively. In addition, a number of simplifying heuristics (rules of thumb, short cuts), along with additional biases enter into the processes of social judgment and decision making relevant to international conflict resolution. A large amount of theorizing and research in the social sciences over the past fifty years has raised very serious questions about the validity of the traditional rational actor model which has been championed by the realist approach to international relations. Cognitive social psychology in particular has been at the forefront of bringing forward concepts and evidence that provide a clear alternative or at the least a supplement to the rationality model (Rosati, 2001; Shafir & LeBoeuf, 2002).

Before considering some of the contributions to a more realistic model of decision making in conflict resolution, it is important to make a distinction between judgment and decision making, in that the former involves an evaluation of an entity on some dimension, whereas the latter involves a choice between alternative options (Lau, 2003). We must also distinguish decision making from problem solving, in that the making of choice among alternatives is only one component of the broader set of steps through which problems are analyzed and solutions are developed, implemented and evaluated (Fisher, 1982; Fisher, 1990). A similar yet more complex distinction is provided in an integrated model of problem solving and decision making for conflict resolution in which many different types of decisions are made during a problem solving process to resolve conflict (Weitzman & Weitzman, 2006). Most of the social cognition and judgment work relevant to conflict escalation and resolution has tended to focus on biases and heuristics relevant to instances of decision making rather than the longer and more complex process of problem solving.

Part of the challenge to the rationality model of decision making came from the discipline of social psychology, with Lewin's contention that objective standards for evaluating alternatives were often lacking and Janis and Mann's comprehensive critique based on biased information processing and limited search procedures (Janis & Mann, 1977; Lewin, 1947). In the *Social Psychology of Organizations* (Katz & Kahn, 1966), the rational model, with its ideal characteristics of subjectivity and optimizing, was seen as departing from decision making reality in contrast to the "bounded rationality" and "satisficing" offered by other theorists (March & Simon, 1958; Simon, 1955). In a comment on his work on decision making, Herbert Simon contends that cognitive

psychology describes human capabilities for rational behavior that are very congruent with the paradigm of bounded rationality, in that limitations in computational capacity result in selective, often inadequate searches of possibilities and consequences, which are then terminated prematurely with the discovery of satisfactory rather than optimal options (Simon, 1985).

The application of ideas from social cognition to the study of world politics has in part revolved around issues relevant to decision making and policy making, and has contrasted the rational actor model favored by realism with the behavioral model or the cognitive approach (Rosati, 2001). According to Rosati, the cognitive approach has grown in prominence and sophistication since the 1950s, because it assumes a realistic and complex psychology of decision making, and helps explain how the human mind deals with uncertainty and makes inferences in unstructured and complex environments. Similarly (Lebow, 1981), makes a case for the psychological approach to international decision making by synthesizing and applying the work of Jervis (1976) and Janis and Mann (1977) to questions of war and peace. The groundbreaking work of Robert Jervis made good use of concepts and models of social cognition, particularly cognitive consistency as noted above, to situations of decision making, often of a crisis nature. The press for consistency has the effect of biasing the decision maker toward information that is compatible with existing information and beliefs, thus closing the mind to new and potentially useful but discrepant information or analyses. In addition to assimilating incoming information to existing beliefs, decision makers also engage in insufficient information search and develop a restricted range of options, thus reaching conclusions that they believe will advance their objectives, but which carry significant limitations. In addition, once a course of action is chosen, there is a consistency tendency to more positively evaluate that option, and thus maintain what may be an irrational commitment to it. In contrast to these cognitive limitations of human information processing, Janis and Mann (1977) see motivational problems coming into decision making, in that fatigue in response to overload leads decision makers to inadequately deal with the complexity of the situations they face. In addition, the stress of crises results in threats to the decision makers' self-esteem and sense of social status, which can lead to rigidity and incrementalism in responding to challenging situations. A series of studies indicated that poor quality decision making, largely through the use of simplistic rules of thumb, occurred in approximately 40 % of cases since World War II in which United States decision makers responded to crises that negatively affected U.S. interests and threatened world peace (Janis, 1986). In any case, it is now generally accepted that inadequacies in the human capability for information processing seriously compromise the quality of international decision making, particularly in situations of escalated conflict.

In a review of models of decision making (i.e., the rational choice model versus behavioral decision theory), (Lau, 2003) categorizes the deficiencies that go with bounded rationality as either limitations on the processing of information or limitations on the retrieval of information. In the first instance, the constant overload of stimuli means that factors influencing attention become crucially important, while in the second case, the limitations on memory retrieval mean that one of the assumptions of rational choice, that decision makers' preferences for outcomes are readily available, is not generally true. One of the cognitive mechanisms by which individuals cope with information overload is to use simplified heuristics or short cuts, that is, problem-solving

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 the complete search called for by the rational choice model, and that they thus help solve the problems of bounded rationality. The difficulty is that these simplifications can at times result in poor decisions, even though they represent a desire to make satisfactory decisions with minimal cognitive effort.

Through identifying additional departures from rationality in judgment processes, Tversky and Kahneman have developed both a critique of expected utility theory and an alternative model for decision making under uncertainty and risk identified as *prospect theory* (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Decision making is seen as involving choices among *prospects*, i.e., options or gambles that yield different outcomes which are associated with different probabilities. Based on a series of laboratory experiments in which subjects make choices between alternative prospects, typically involving dollars or lives, Tversky and Kahneman developed a series of propositions that provide a different view of decision making as compared to the rational actor model. Rather than assuming that individuals make choices in reference to their absolute assets, prospect theory proposes that people evaluate alternatives in terms of gains and losses around a reference point, which is typically the status quo. Rather than assuming that gains and losses are valued in a linear manner, the theory proposes in a rather radical fashion based on the experimental evidence that losses tend to be overvalued while gains are undervalued.

Thus, losses are seen as more important than gains, given equal deviations from the reference point, and this leads to the phenomenon of loss aversion, in which the status quo is preferred and current possessions are overvalued (the so-called *endowment effect*). At the same time, the overvaluing of losses and loss aversion, lead decision makers to take greater risks in attempting to avoid losses than in acquiring gains. This tendency is also influenced by the *certainty effect*, by which people underweight probable outcomes and overweight certain outcomes, thus contributing to enhanced risk aversion with sure gains and greater risk seeking with sure losses. Tversky and Kahneman also posit that people generally ignore components that are shared by all prospects, and this leads to inconsistent preferences when different forms of the same choice are offered. Thus, *framing effects* have come to be an important part of prospect theory, in that choice problems framed in terms of gains generally tend to elicit risk aversion while those framed in terms of losses tend to induce risk acceptance (Kahneman & Tversky, 2000).

In terms of the application of prospect theory to international conflict, an initial collective treatment is provided in a special issue of *Political Psychology* edited by Barbara Farnham, in which an introduction to the theory is provided (Levy, 1992a), a set of case studies are analyzed using prospect theory, the political implications of loss aversion are explored (Jervis, 1992), and implications, applications and potential problems with the theory are identified (Levy, 1992b). Levy (1992a) points out that the use of the theory has moved from the application of particular concepts, such as loss aversion and framing, to its use as conceptual structure for case analyses of decision making, such as those in the special issue. Levy (1992b) contends that prospect theory has enormous potential for explaining a considerable range of international behavior, including deterrence, preventive war, and the stability of the status quo, and he has also illuminated some of the implications specific to international conflict (Levy, 1996; Levy, 2000). For example, the stability of the status quo is explained by parties taking the status quo as their reference point, inducing both an endowment effect and loss aversion in which the disadvantages of leaving the status quo are weighted more than the comparable advantages (Levy, 1992b). Obviously, a shared bias in favor of the status quo renders conflict resolution more difficult than expected utility theory would predict. At the same time, Levy (1992b) alludes to numerous examples, including case analyses in the special issue, where states have engaged in risky behavior away from the status quo, ostensibly driven by overvalued losses and loss aversion, in which radical action is seen as necessary to avoid unacceptable losses. Such forces could be especially destabilizing in a situation where both parties in a conflict engage in loss-aversive, risk-acceptant actions in order to avoid unacceptable deterioration in their positions. Furthermore, after suffering losses, prospect theory predicts that states might take excessive risks to recover the losses and return to the status quo, while after making gains, a party may readjust to the new status quo, and be willing to take risks to defend it against new losses (Levy, 2003). All of these possibilities induce instability and uncertainty in interstate interactions which are not predicted by expected utility theory, and which carry serious implications for conflict behavior.

In relation to negotiation as a form of conflict resolution, prospect theory also has deleterious implications based in part on framing effects as well as the endowment effect (Levy, 1992b, Levy, 1996). If parties treat their concessions as losses and concessions from the other party as gains, there is a mutual tendency to overvalue one's concessions,

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 also evident that the domain of international negotiation is littered with impasses and deadlocks in greater proportion than rational choice theory would predict. Prospect theory also suggests that actors see themselves to be in the domain of losses more than an objective observer would perceive, thus accentuating the effects of loss aversion and demonstrating the importance of the framing process, on which the theory has unfortunately been largely silent and on which there is little research (Levy, 1992b, Levy, 2003).

While the implications of prospect theory for the functioning and resolution of international conflict are appealing, and have gained increasing attention and support from case analyses in international relations, there are serious concerns about the external validity of the theory and the research from which it is derived. The hypotheses proposed by prospect theory are based on robust findings derived from individual choices made in simple laboratory experiments, rather than on empirical tracing or analysis of the decisions made by policy makers in highly complex and unstructured situations of choice in which they are in interaction with an adversary (Levy, 1992b, Levy, 2003). It is therefore appropriate to conclude as Levy (1996) does that:

> …prospect theory is a theory of individual decision and that consequently it is incomplete as a theory of international politics. What we ultimately need are theories that explain how individual decisions driven by framing, loss aversion and probability weighting get aggregated into collective decisions for the state through the foreign policy process, and how the decisions of strategically interdependent states interact within the larger international system (p. 192).

The concerns raised by Levy with regard to social-psychological research on prospect theory are readily generalized to most of the findings generated by laboratory research covered in this paper. These potential deficiencies are major contributors to the limitations of applying social-psychological concepts to international conflict resolution, and will be elaborated below.

The social cognitive treatment of processes relevant to decision making have largely focused on the individual level of analysis (e.g., Janis & Mann, 1977). However, social psychologists have also considered the level of small group functioning, and produced conceptualizations supported by research results that are seen as having relevance to group decision making at the intergroup and international levels. Foremost in this domain is the creative and groundbreaking work of Irving Janis on the phenomenon of *groupthink* (Janis, 1972; Janis, 1982). Through analyzing a series of American foreign policy fiascos, including the Bay of Pigs and the Vietnam War, Janis (1972) defined groupthink as a process by which a cohesive and insulated elite decision making group develops concurrence seeking to the extent that it overrides a realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action, thus producing suboptimal outcomes. Janis (1972) initially identified several symptoms of the groupthink syndrome, and in his later work categorized these into three types: 1) the overestimation of the group, including an illusion of invulnerability and a belief it the group's inherent morality, 2) closed-mindedness, including stereotypes of outgroups and collective rationalization, and 3)

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 decision-making task. At base, Janis sees the need for self-esteem as the primary motivator inducing a striving for mutual support through concurrence seeking in order to counter the extreme difficulties and pressures faced by the group. Needless to say, it is likely that a variety of other motivational and cognitive factors contribute to the inadequate decision making process that is captured by the groupthink syndrome.

Janis' model of groupthink has received considerable attention in group processes research and in the crossover literature between social psychology and international relations. However, questions have been raised about its theoretical propositions, and research assessing various connections in the model has generally provided mixed results. Questioning of the initial statement of groupthink was provided in an initial review (Longley & Pruitt, 1980), with a challenge to the causal chain in the model. A number of the points raised were dealt with by Janis in his later formulation, but he did agree that the issue under consideration may affect the emergence of groupthink in that simple or routine decisions may appropriately be met with early consensus seeking. Some initial laboratory results indicated that group cohesiveness may not be capable of producing the identified deficiencies in decision making (Flowers, 1977), while some early applications to real world policy decisions appeared to support the model (Tetlock, 1979). The analysis by Tetlock used content analysis of the integrative complexity on public statements by elite decision makers in contrasting cases of U.S. policy crises judged to be groupthink situations or non-groupthink situations (e.g., Bay of Pigs versus Cuban Missile Crisis). Integrative complexity in groupthink cases was significantly lower, indicating less differentiation of ideas and less integration of ideas relevant to the crisis. However, on a related note, the question has been raised as to how well the non-groupthink cases identified by Janis, particularly the Cuban Missile Crisis, actually used procedures that effectively overcome the forces of groupthink, for example, that of directive leadership (Lebow, 1981).

A recent, instructive review of groupthink theorizing and research is provided by Robert Baron, who also proposes a way of incorporating varying results by modifying and extending the model's propositions (Baron, 2005). He notes that the groupthink model is arguably the most publicized application of psychology to elite decision making,

is accepted as valid in current textbooks, and as such has legitimized academic research on social influence and group processes. Unfortunately, the mixed array of research results has resulted in a great deal of skepticism among scholars who have carefully and comprehensively reviewed the area. From his analysis, Baron concludes that the role of antecedent conditions in producing the symptoms of groupthink and the deficiencies decision making has largely been unsupported by research, and this is particularly true of the primary antecedent of group cohesion. Not only has the link between cohesion and decision quality received limited attention in both laboratory studies and historical analyses, but the results are inconsistent and often contradictory. The other antecedent conditions (e.g., insulation of the group, lack of impartial leadership) fair somewhat better than group cohesion, but in general the appealing prediction of groupthink that these contextual factors were drivers of other elements of the model has by and large not been borne out. Baron's response is to propose that the phenomenon of consensus seeking in groups and the symptoms of groupthink and the deficiencies in decision making are much more common than Janis envisaged, and are not restricted to elite level groups operating in crisis situations. Thus, he develops a *ubiquity model* of groupthink that engages preconditions suggested by social-psychological research on social influence and group processes. In particular, conformity pressures, the suppression of dissent, group polarization in like-minded groups, self-censorship, the illusion of consensus, and invidious stereotypes will produce concurrence seeking and the other symptoms and deficiencies of groupthink in the absence of Janis' antecedent conditions. However, as antecedent conditions, Baron proposes social identification (the group has a social identity), salient group norms (a form of homogeneity), and low self-efficacy (a lack of confidence in achieving a satisfactory outcome), thus reflecting factors which are somewhat related to Janis' antecedent conditions, but are much more strongly based in social-psychological research than observations of elite decision making groups which produced policy fiascoes. Thus, the proposed ubiquity model is more a revision of Janis' model than a rejection of it, and Baron holds out the possibility that the antecedent conditions specified by Janis may increase the likelihood or the intensity of groupthink under certain circumstances. In sum, there is a considerable amount of reality in the phenomenon of groupthink, and regardless of the particular drivers of the process, the deleterious effects on decision making in international conflict continue to be of concern.

Social Categorization and Social Identity

Also at the level of group functioning, the development of social identity theory (SIT) has provided important linkages between the individual and group variables and also a group level context for the operation of individual cognitive and emotional processes (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The creation of SIT occurred partly in reaction to the individualistic nature of mainstream, North American social psychology and also as a response to the crisis of confidence in that vein of social psychology starting about forty years ago that questioned the validity and utility of the enterprise (Fisher, 1982). SIT has been heralded as a complement to realistic group conflict theory (RCT), which posited that real differences in interests were necessary for the causation of intergroup conflict (Brown & Capozza, 2000; LeVine & Campbell, 1972). According to RCT, conflicts of interests in terms of incompatible goals and competition for scarce

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 ethnopolicial 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 communities (Rothman, 1997). Accordingly, Rothman generally contends that:

> Collective identity conflicts are usually intransigent and resistant to resolution. They are deeply rooted in the underlying individual human needs and values that together constitute people's social identities, particularly in the context of group affiliations, loyalties, and solidarity.
>
> …
>
> Identity-driven conflicts are rooted in the articulation of, and threats and frustrations to, people's collective need for dignity, recognition, safety, control, purpose, and efficacy (1997, 6-7).

Rothman (1997) further contends that these conflicts rooted in the protection of group identity involve much higher stakes and are more difficult to resolve than interest-based conflicts derived from competition for resources. Thus, he makes the case for dialogue and problem solving as necessary methods for resolving identity-based conflict, as opposed to negotiation and mediation, which in fact, can exacerbate such conflicts.

Kelman (2001) explores how issues of national identity exacerbate intercommunal or international conflict, with particular reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the ways in which these issues can be addressed through conflict resolution efforts, specifically using the problem-solving workshop. This form of social or collective identity goes beyond the level of individual self-concept and identification (i.e., Tajfel's definition of social identity) to incorporate important elements at the group level (Kelman, 1997b):

> Insofar as a group of people have come to see themselves as constituting a unique, identifiable entity, with a claim to continuity over time, to unity across geographical distance, and to the right to various forms of self-expression, we can say that they have acquired a sense of national identity. National identity is the group's definition of itself as a group—its conception of its enduring characteristics and basic values; its strengths and weaknesses; its hopes and fears; its reputation and conditions of existence; its institutions and traditions; and its past history, current purposes, and future prospects (p. 171).

Kelman (2001) further asserts that the threat to collective identities posed by existential conflict between peoples is a core issue, in that identity is not only a source of distinctiveness and belongingness, but also constitutes the justification for each group's claim to territory and other resources and is bolstered by each group's national narrative. Thus, the national identity of the outgroup becomes a threat to the ingroup, leading to a zero-sum struggle over not only territory, but also identity, in that acknowledging the outgroup's identity becomes tantamount to jeopardizing or denying one's own. The mutual denial of identity therefore creates serious obstacles to conflict resolution, in that all issues are rendered existential ones—matters of life and death—and as such are non-negotiable.

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 overreaction that feed the escalation process to new levels of intensity and intractability. Ultimately, the identity of the enemy is by its very nature a threat to not only the identity of the ingroup but to its very existence. Thus, any strategies or methods directed toward conflict de-escalation and resolution must contend with the challenging question, among many others, of how to reduce the level of perceived threat between the antagonists.

Any positive change in the level of escalation of destructive conflict requires new forms of communication and interaction that challenge existing mirror and enemy images, misattributions, self-fulfilling prophecies, and the biased processes that feed them. There is a need for a different form of interaction to counter and reverse the dynamics of the conflict (Kelman, 2007). In particular, interactive conflict resolution (ICR) and its prototype, the problem-solving workshop (PSW), are specifically designed to provide new information and forms of interaction that can counter existing cognitions and interaction patterns (Fisher, 1993, 1997, 2006; Kelman, 1986, 2002). The challenge is then for these new learnings and relationship qualities to be transferred to the levels of political decision making and public discourse.

These social-psychological methods and the challenges they face in bringing about conflict resolution are the focus of the following sections. In elaborating the rationale for the PSW, this section will draw on the concepts and processes discussed above with two exceptions. There will be no application of social judgment processes, mainly prospect theory, or decision making, particularly groupthink, as these areas of theory and research have not been directly linked to the use of the PSW to de-escalate and resolve intergroup or international conflict. Most of the other topics covered above will find expression in the articulation of the rationale for PSWs. In addition, an area of theory and research on the phenomenon of intergroup contact will be used to provide the main part of the rationale for PSWs at the level of interaction between conflicting groups. Figure 2 presents an overview of concepts and processes that are drawn on to provide the rationale for the objectives and effectiveness of PSWs.

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

The Problem-Solving Workshop

The PSW as a form of ICR is an innovative and relatively recent creation of Western, applied social science that is based in the principles of the multi-disciplinary field of conflict resolution (Fisher, 1997). The method brings together unofficial yet influential representatives of parties, usually identity groups or states, engaged in destructive and protracted conflict, for informal small group discussions facilitated by an impartial third party team of skilled and knowledgeable scholar-practitioners. The objectives are to develop a shared analysis of the conflict and to create options or directions that might help lead the parties out of their impasse. The method was pioneered at the domestic level through the intergroup problem-solving interventions of Robert Blake and Jane Mouton in organizational settings, and at the international level through the efforts of John Burton and his colleagues, who brought together high level representatives of states or communities engaged in conflicts that had resisted official mediation efforts (Blake, Shepard, & Mouton, 1964; Burton, 1969).

As other facilitated methods of interaction between members of adversaries have developed, the PSW is recognized as one of a number of forms of ICR, defined broadly as "facilitated face-to-face activities in communication, training, education, or consultation that promote collaborative conflict analysis and problem solving among parties engaged in protracted conflict in a manner that addresses basic human needs and promotes the building of peace, justice and equality" (Fisher, 1997, 8). However, the term 'interactive conflict resolution' was initially coined to refer to small group methods that bring together members of conflicting groups in facilitated, face-to-face interaction with an emphasis on communication to increase understanding, rather than negotiation to reach an agreement. Thus, in the first instance, ICR was defined in a focused way to captures the essence of the problem-solving workshop, that is, as "involving small group, problem-solving discussions between unofficial representatives of identity groups or states engaged in destructive conflict that are facilitated by an impartial third party of social scientist-practitioners" (Fisher, 1993, 123). Since then, the term has expanded to include a number of other forms of interaction that are directed toward understanding the conflict between the parties and helping to de-escalate it toward resolution (Fisher, 2006). Hence, the PSW now stands alongside other expressions of ICR, including dialogue,

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,
> noncommital, 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 debate to a joint analysis of the conflict and the creation of problem solutions that might help address it. Following agreement on ground rules, the third party provides a rough agenda for the sessions, starting with an initial exchange of perceptions, to an analysis of the attributions, interests and needs underlying incompatible positions and escalatory interactions, to the application and development of insights and models of understanding, to the creation of ideas for peacebuilding and resolution, and finally to considering the constraints and resistances to these options (387).

The goals of PSWs thus involve multiple desired objectives at different levels, from increasing understanding and improving intergroup attitudes among participants, to improving the relationship between the parties, to positively affecting the political discourse on the conflict in both parties, and ultimately to contributing ideas to negotiations and policy making in dealing with the conflict that will assist in its resolution. In most treatments, the third party is seen as playing a central facilitating and diagnosing role in the workshop process, although there are some differences of opinion on how much knowledge the third party should have regarding the conflict and how much they should bring their substantive knowledge to bear in the discussions. There is also some divergence on the identity of the third party as to whether they need to be impartial in terms of their identity or whether they can be composed of a balanced team with connections to both sides of the conflict. With regard to the participants, there is also a situation of variance, in that some approaches seek high level officials or advisors coming in unofficial capacity (e.g., Burton), while others look for unofficial yet influential individuals who have the ear of the leadership and are respected on both sides of the conflict (e.g., Kelman). In either case, as noted above, the participants are also serving in an intermediary role in that they provide linkages between people on the other side and their own opinion leaders and decision makers. This intermediary role as boundary persons has been given little direct attention in the PSW literature.

Assumptions and General Rationale of PSWs

Although the PSW method did not originate solely in the discipline of social psychology, much of its potential power to influence the course of conflict, particularly destructive intergroup conflict, lies in its social-psychological assumptions and principles (Fisher, 1990, 2007; Kelman, 1992; Kelman & Cohen, 1986). Some of these assumptions relate to the connections between the nature of human social conflict and social-psychological concepts and processes (Fisher, 1990), while others relate more to the nature of international relations and international conflict (Kelman, 2007), while others are specifically connected to the workshop structure, process and content (Kelman, 1992; Kelman & Cohen, 1986). The focus here is on how the nature of conflict perceptions,

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 mix of objective and subjective factors, and that both of these sets must be addressed for resolution to occur. It is further assumed that subjective factors play a more influential role as conflict escalates to higher levels of intensity, thus increasing the relevance of methods that address subjective elements (Fisher & Keashly, 1991). Therefore, PSWs focus on a range of perceptual and relationship factors such as misperceptions, misattributions, self-serving biases, unwitting commitments, mistrust, miscommunication, adversarial interactions, self-fulfilling prophecies, and unmet human needs for security, identity, and distributive justice, all of which can be important factors in causing and escalating the conflict.

It is also assumed that authentic and constructive face-to-face interaction is necessary to confront and overcome the many distorted and invalid cognitive elements and to change the adversarial orientations and patterns of interaction that characterize destructive conflict. As Kelman (1992) contends:

> Workshops are designed to promote a special kind of interaction or discourse that can contribute to the desired political outcome. … the setting, ground rules, and procedures of problem-solving workshops encourage (and permit) interaction marked by the following elements: an emphasis on addressing each other (rather than one's constituencies, or third parties, or the record) and on listening to each other; analytical discussion; adherence to a 'no-fault principle; and a problem-solving mode of interaction. This kind of interaction allows the parties to explore each other's concerns, penetrate each other's perspectives, and take cognizance of each other's constraints. As a result they are able to offer each other the needed reassurances to engage in negotiation and to come up with solutions responsive to both sides' needs and fears (p. 85).

In relation to this kind of interaction induced by PSWs, it is further assumed that the facilitative and diagnostic role of an impartial and skilled third party is essential to elicit and maintain problem-solving motivation, to support accurate and respectful interaction, to create a mutual analysis that transcends biased narratives, and to assist in the creation of directions and options that will help to de-escalate and resolve the conflict (Fisher, 1972). Essentially, the role of the third party is to facilitate productive confrontation between the participants, whereby they focus directly on the issues in the conflict as they see them, and then work together to develop strategies to move out of their impasse.

Social psychology is characterized in part by a focus on how individuals are connected to social systems, and in this vein, it is assumed that individual changes in perceptions and attitudes that occur as a result of participation in a PSW must be transferred to the social system in question for any effects on the conflict to be realized. Individual participants as intermediaries can influence public opinion and policy making in their respective collectivities in many ways, through the roles they enact (e.g., advisor, journalist, academic) and through their carrying of information to public constituencies (writings, speeches) and to various decision makers (negotiators, policy makers, leaders). Thus, the process of transfer, by which individual changes come to influence the social system, is a central concern of the PSW methodology.

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.

Social Perception and Cognition

At the level of individuals, numerous processes of social perception and cognition, including the formation and change of attitudes, can be seen as playing important roles in the causation and escalation of social conflict, particularly between different identity groups at the international. Thus, the PSW method posits that in order for de-escalation and resolution to occur, influential individuals must come to better understand the other side in terms of its modal perceptions, attitudes, intentions and strategies, as well as the elements of interaction, especially processes of escalation, that have brought them to their current state of destructive and protracted conflict. The driving proposition is that the provision of new information to the participants in the context of an authentic and respectful social climate will affect their cognitions, feelings and orientations relevant to members of the other party.

The concept of attitude is usually defined as an individual's tendency to evaluate and respond to a social object in a consistently favorable or unfavorable way and is seen as consisting of cognitive, affective and behavioral components (Fisher, 1982). PSWs are designed to increase the accuracy and complexity of the cognitive component, the positiveness of the affective component, and the cooperativeness of the behavioral orientation toward members of the other party (Fisher, 1990). Particular attention is focused on the misperceptions and stereotypes relevant to the other party as a group, which are problematic in their own right, but which also drive more insidious processes such as self-serving biases and self-fulfilling prophecies that feed escalation. Contrary to the usual communication and interaction between members of conflicting groups, the PSW provides a setting in which open and authentic interaction provides increasing amounts of direct information that contradicts the erroneous and simplistic misperceptions and stereotypes held by participants on both sides (Fisher, 1999). Even though enemy images are highly resistant to disconfirming information, the facilitated interaction of the PSW focuses directly on perceptual differences and enables participants to differentiate the image of the other (Kelman, 1992). Differentiated images and changed attitudes can lead to less distortion in perception and greater complexity in thinking that support a more balanced and cooperative approach to future interactions, including negotiation and policy making (Fisher, 1989). The dynamic that is posited to drive these attitudinal changes is cognitive dissonance, that is, an unpleasant tension due to incongruence between incoming information and existing cognitive elements—

perceptions, attitudes, stereotypes. Although dissonance can be reduced in other ways than attitude change, for example, by assimilation of incongruent information to existing beliefs, the genuine nature of direct interaction is a powerful element of PSWs that is difficult for the receiver to discount. At the same time, the genuine and largely positive interpersonal interactions within the respectful climate of the PSW allows participants to acquire greater appreciation of their enemies as reasonable human beings with whom they share many commonalities, thus building trust and reducing the sense of threat that drives many negative and insidious cognitive and emotional reactions.

Another cognitive mechanism of much importance in conflict is that of causal attribution, the process by which one infers causation about the behavior of social actors. In situations of social conflict, attributions appear to be negatively affected by at least two errors as defined in the first part of this paper. The fundamental attribution error is a tendency to judge the actions of an observed other as caused by personal dispositions, rather than situational factors. The ultimate attribution error involves making personal attributions for undesirable actions of an outgroup member, while making situational attributions for desirable actions. Both of these tendencies feed off of and also reinforce stereotypes in a consistent manner. Cognitive consistency in conflict is further maintained because negative actions by enemy actors tend to induce negative attributions (Berkowitz, 1994). In the mutual conflict analysis engendered by the PSW, the common attributions that participants make as members of their conflicting groups are identified and held up for scrutiny in the eyes of the targets of these attributions, and judgments are challenged and alternative explanations provided. Thus, the complexity of the attributional analyses is increased, specifically away from dispositional attributions and toward situational factors in a systemic field of multiple causation. In particular, participants come to see how the dynamics of conflict escalation have been fueled by mutually contentious strategies of increasing and reciprocal intensity, with each party making difficult choices to defend its interests (Fisher, 1999). Thus, simplistic attributional analyses are challenged by a more complex and veridical interpretation, and the resulting cognitive dissonance moves the participants toward these more credible explanations (Berkowitz, 1994). The widening sense of realization does not condone destructive transgressions, but does reveal the other party's contentious behavior as understandable as one's own under the circumstances.

Stereotypes and misattributions are basic cognitive misconstructions that underlie more complex and serious cognitive distortions, such as mirror images, self-fulfilling prophecies and dehumanization, which occur at higher levels of conflict escalation as noted above. Furthermore, as conflict becomes protracted, parties are liable to become victims of the insidious cognitive process known as entrapment, in which they become increasingly committed to costly and destructive courses of action that depart from prescriptions of rational calculation (Brockner & Rubin, 1985). Again, it is likely that this process is driven in part by cognitive consistency, in that post-decision dissonance reduction renders the chosen courses of action more positive and therefore more acceptable (Brehm, 1956). The analytical and respectful climate of the PSW, with participants in the role of academic seminar member and conflict analyst, has the potential for closely examining the strategies and actions of the parties in terms of these underlying processes, thus shedding light on how normal human beings can come to engage in irrational and atrocious behaviors toward each other. Given that participants

are seldom if ever central decision makers in their respective parties, it is expected that they have the necessary distance from destructive policies to be able to engage in such an analysis and evaluation, particularly under the norms of the PSW, such as exploratory discussion and non-attribution of statements.

Social Identity

At the group level of analysis and interaction, the power of social categorization and social identity structures and processes to influence intergroup interaction is now largely acknowledged, as articulated in the first part of this paper. Aspects of identity thus become factors in the escalation of intergroup and international conflict and especially in its intractability at high levels of escalation. However, the good news is that the nature of intractable identity-based conflicts is not immutable, because mutual adjustments in collective identities are possible, particularly through the dialogue and analysis engendered by the PSW method (Kelman, 2001). Initially, it needs to be recognized by participants on both sides that identity is not inherently a zero-sum issue, such as the division of territory. As Kelman notes: "…it is in fact not the case that A's identity can be recognized and expressed only if B's identity is denied and suppressed" (2001, 194). In fact, although identities are based in authentic elements of the group's history, culture, grievances, aspirations, and so on, they are social constructions, and as such, are open to change through learning. In the PSW, participants can come to realize that accommodating to the other's need for identity does not deny the core of one's own identity, and that "negotiation" of identities is possible in that expressing one identity does not require the negation of the other identity. In particular, elements can be added to or taken away from each identity in ways that do not destroy the core of that identity. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example, it was possible through the land-for-peace formula to have both sides accept territorial limits to their national identities through sharing the land, rather than requiring all of it to express their national identity. Similarly, the mutual recognition between the PLO and Israel (achieved through the Oslo talks, but discussed in numerous previous PSWs) involved the acceptance of the other who had previously been defined as antithetical to the self. Thus, through an unofficial process of authentic interaction, participants are able to explore and invent ways of accommodating their group identities, and this can help support the painful compromises required in negotiations.

In the minds of the participants who enter into the PSW situation, the accommodation to the other's identity and the changes in one's own identity likely begin with the change in role expectations that occur during the workshop. Initially, participants come in part to represent the perspective and narrative of their side to the third party and the participants from the other side. At the same time they are encouraged and influenced through the ground rules, the analytical climate, and the interventions of the third party to listen carefully and respectfully to the statements of the other side. Essentially, the method is designed to influence participants away from an adversarial and argumentative approach to a reciprocally cooperative and analytical one (Fisher, 1972). According to Tony de Reuck, who was a member of John Burton's original facilitating panels, the intended shift in roles is to divest participants of their inhibitions as adversaries and have them engage as conflict analysts and then as partners in problem solving with the panel and the participants from the other side (de Reuck, 1983). Thus, all the participants come to develop a new, integrated group in which they collaborate in mutual analysis and joint

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 typical of their group and are responded to as such as opposed to being seen as exceptional members of their group. With regard to the first facilitative condition, the PSW provides for a high degree of *acquaintance potential*, in that interaction is informal and personal, so that participants can get to know each other as persons rather than as stereotypical role incumbents from the other group. Second, PSWs bring together participants of *equal status* in terms of markers such as education, prestige and power in their respective societies. Often, invitations are extended to matched pairs from the two groups who share professional or sector backgrounds, such as education, business, or politics, thus allowing for informed and finer judgments of status level to occur between the paired individuals, who can also build on their common interests and identities. Third, the ground rules and controlling interventions of the third party are intended to support *social norms* that call for respectful, honest and open interaction, while at the same time, the typical institutional support for PSWs from an academic or non-governmental base signals informal and exploratory (i.e., noncommittal) interaction. Furthermore, tacit approval is often sought from selected institutions in the participants' societies, so that their home base is encouraging them to engage in constructive and productive interaction. Fourth, the problem solving and peacebuilding nature of PSWs provides a *cooperative task and reward structure* which involves participants in functionally important activities (e.g., mutual diagnosis of the conflict, joint construction of options for resolution) directed toward common goals. This engagement of participants is also seen to help build a collaborative atmosphere in the workshop that will support attitude change in positive directions. Finally, *the characteristics of the individuals* invited to PSWs need to involve

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, the expectations, 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 the effectiveness of PSWs and for improving the design and implementation of workshop programs, particularly of an extended nature.

Hewstone and Brown (1986) stress the importance of the distinction between the interpersonal and intergroup levels of interaction, and argue that the contact interaction needs to be characterized as intergroup in order for there to be generalization of any attitude changes to outgroup members beyond the contact setting. Thus, group identities need to remain salient during the interaction. In contrast, Brewer and Miller (1984) argue for a reduction in the salience of social identities, so that interpersonal relations will lead to greater personalization of outgroup members and also greater differentiation among them, thus reducing the power of social categories and their attendant stereotypes. This approach has been labeled as the *decategorization* strategy for improving intergroup relations, and links to the high acquaintance potential of the contact hypothesis. In contrast again, Gaertner and Dovidio (2000) in their *common, ingroup identity model* propose to redraw category boundaries, so that both ingroup members and outgroup members are included in a superordinate identity, thus reducing biases in both directions. This *recategorization* strategy has shown utility in reducing biases in laboratory settings, but the extent to which these changes generalize to intergroup relations outside the laboratory and the degree to which individuals can relinquish their existing identity are less clear (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). The *integrated model of intergroup contact*

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 form participants into a common group of analysts and problem solvers and ultimately into a cadre of peacebuilders across the lines of the conflict, who maintain their primary group identities at the same time they take on superordinate identity committed to peaceful resolution. It appears from the advances in intergroup contact research and theorizing over the past fifty years, that the theory of practice of PSWs was on the right track all along.

Limitations of Social-Psychological Theory and Research: Constraints on Application?

The conceptual and analytical yield of social-psychological research for the understanding and amelioration of intergroup and international conflict may appear to be considerable, as outlined in a number of applications over the years (Fisher, 1990;

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 variables of interest are largely cognitive, at the expense of motivational or emotional drivers that might be important in influencing human behavior (Pancer, 1997). Thus, the locus in many theories (e.g., cognitive dissonance, attribution, prospect theory) is isolated individuals responding to a highly restricted social world that is represented solely by information provided by the researcher, who then draws the theoretical conclusions. In addition, most theories of social cognition are time limited, that is, restricted to single, one-shot situations or experiences, as opposed to a series of interrelated events or interactions over time which would be much more representative of social discourse. Thus, most concepts are not interactional but unidirectional, specifying the cognitive drivers and resulting behaviors of a single individual presented with a 'social' situation. In summary, one can say that most social-psychological theorizing lacks a systems perspective, in which a diversity of variables interact over time in order to produce multiple outcomes that have relevance to the real world. There are very few exceptions to this norm, such as my own eclectic model of intergroup conflict (Fisher, 1990) and Peter Coleman's work on a dynamical systems model of social conflict (Coleman, Vallacher, Novak, & Bui-Wrzosinska, 2007).

On the methodological side, the vast majority of research results in mainstream social psychology are produced in the university laboratory or classroom, where research assistants "run" willing undergraduates through experimental manipulations engineered by the use of different instructions in the lab or different forms of a questionnaire in the lecture hall. The latter form of manipulation has become more popular, probably owing to the criticisms of the use of deception in social-psychological research, and also possibly because it is a more efficient method for constructing a large sample of subjects. In any case, laboratory experimentation has been criticized as artificial, simplistic and as lacking relevance to real world behavior and questionnaire research is not far behind (Fisher, 1982; Fisher, 1987). This problem of low external validity is compounded because the vast majority of lab experiments do not provide a social context or environment (much like the resulting theories) which represents the social side of social-psychological reality. The design of the research is typically limited to a very small number of variables (often two in interaction related to one or more dependent variables), and the experimental manipulations are typically mild in comparison to their real world

analogs (e.g., threat, deprivation) in order to meet ethical obligations regarding the welfare of subjects. When questionnaire manipulations and measures are used, their validity is also of questionable magnitude and relevance. Again, as with the resulting theories, the time-limited research paradigm is based on brief, one-time encounters in which an individual responds to a highly controlled social situation engineered by the researcher to produce a hypothesized effect which is usually highly predictable based on previous research and/or everyday observation. Perhaps it is best to see this line of work not as experiments that test causative relationships among variables, but primarily as demonstrations of common sense principles and effects that the researcher has captured in a pure and simple form. Finally, mainstream social-psychological research is highly restricted in terms of its subject population, which is comprised largely of young, largely middle class American college students who are rewarded for participation with academic credit or financial payment. In fact, one assessment demonstrated that only 13 per cent of studies in the field in a given year were completed with adult participants outside of the university setting (Sears, 1986). The difficulties of generalizing from the restricted paradigm of academic research in social psychology are abundantly apparent and cause for continuing concern, particularly in applying the results to the complex and challenging domain of international conflict.

Conclusion

The application of social psychology to international conflict analysis and resolution demonstrates a rich history of transfer from one discipline to another. The incorporation of social-psychological concepts and processes has largely driven the so-called cognitive revolution in the study of world politics. These contributions have primarily been related to perceptual and cognitive variables and to the domains of choice and judgment at the individual level. Less attention has been directed to communicative and interactive processes at the interface between contending parties, although the study of escalation processes mines this vein more productively. At the group level, theorizing related to crisis decision making and the groupthink phenomenon have helped to construct a sobering picture of how policy making groups can operate in ineffective and deleterious ways. The limitations of academic, social-psychological research in laboratory and classroom settings are well known within the discipline and by some commentators in international relations. Nonetheless, the concepts and processes of interest seem to carry a moderate degree of face validity, even though the external validity of the paradigm of study in social psychology has been questioned. The response within international relations has been to look for case study analyses to illustrate if not demonstrate the applicability and utility of the concepts. More sophisticated methods, including content analysis, process tracing and comparative case analysis, would be very useful in continuing to assess the importance of social-psychological theorizing for the study of international conflict.

In terms of the application of social-psychological knowledge to practice, the PSW as the prototype of ICR is the primary beneficiary of the analysis developed in this paper, and is also the main carrier of social-psychological assumptions and principles into the domain of action. Social-psychological theory supported by research provides many areas to focus on in implementing PSWs, and at the same time a rationale for why certain

forms of communication and interaction between contending participants should lead to changes in their perceptual and cognitive structures and their behavioral orientations to the other party. Sensitivity to this myriad of concepts and processes at the individual, group and intergroup level can help practitioners of PSWs design workshops, sessions and interactions that respectfully challenge the inaccurate and self-serving gestalt that each side of an intractable conflict develops to support its unilateral and destructive strategies. In addition, the facilitative forum of the PSW can then provide a means by which contending parties can jointly create ideas and options for moving out of their abyss to a shared future of sustainable peace. The bottom line is that effective conflict resolution at the intergroup and international levels will not be achieved until the subjective factors and relationship qualities that distinguish destructive interaction from constructive relations are given their full due in both analysis and problem-solving efforts. The continuing application of social psychology is essential to this enterprise.

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