Where To From Here for the Psychology of Social Change? Future Directions for Theory and Practice

Emina Subašić
Australian National University

Katherine J. Reynolds
Australian National University

Stephen D. Reicher
University of St. Andrews

Bert Klandermans
VU University

For a vibrant and viable psychology of social change it is necessary to examine its place and contribution to the societal processes it seeks to understand, explain, and (potentially) affect. In this article, we first consider the impact that research and theorizing on social change (should) have and related issues of how we communicate about our work (and to whom) and dilemmas around researchers being active participants in the change process. Second, we consider emerging trends in the field and comment on meta-theoretical and "meta-methodological" issues in going forward, including the interaction *between individual and society, having theoretical models of the person that allow us to account for such an interaction, as well as rethinking our methodology and ways of "doing" psychology to better reflect people's experiences of mobilization and participation. In line with the proposed rethinking of our theories and methods, the final section introduces a new paradigm for investigating the nexus of social change and leadership dynamics. The overall aim of the article is to reflect on key questions and dilemmas facing the field and provide some starting points for debating and shaping its future.*

Nowhere else in political and social psychology is engagement with the outside world more pertinent than for the study of social change, and nowhere else is it as central to examine whether what we do and how we do it enables or impedes such engagement. In considering the future of political psychology—and focusing in particular on the psychology of social change—two distinct and interrelated questions emerge. The first question is about the intersection of what we do as researchers and the "outside world" that we seek to understand and explain. What is the nature and extent of our impact and engagement with the world in which social change takes place? How do we disseminate and communicate about our work and who is our audience? Should we be active participants in social change processes—and can such engagement be avoided given what we "do"?

The second question is related to the first and might at first glance seem more inward looking. It concerns the nature of our theories and methods that for many define their work and the extent to which they are attuned to the processes that we are seeking to understand and explain. Whether or not the theories and methods correspond with the social reality of what we study also has implications for engagement with the broader community.

In this article, we start by raising questions about the impact that research and theorizing on social change in our view should have. We also raise related issues of how we communicate about our work and to whom. As part of this discussion, we consider a familiar dilemma between actively participating in the change process versus "merely" seeking to better *understand* its psychological aspects. Second, we take stock of the emerging trends in the field and comment on core meta-theoretical and "meta-methodological" issues in going forward. The final section focuses on the intersection between the dynamics of social change and leadership as a paradigmatic shift towards understanding both agency and mobilization in social change contexts.

The article is not meant to be a detailed review of the field (for recent reviews of this kind see, for example, Haslam & Reicher, in press; Subašić, Reynolds, & Turner, 2008; Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009a, 2009b; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). The aim here is to reflect on key questions and dilemmas facing the field and provide some starting points for a vibrant debate about its future. Before doing so, and given the complex nature of the "social change" concept, it is worthwhile clarifying what aspect of social change is in focus here.

That we live in a constantly changing world is to state the obvious. Rapid technological advances have radically changed many aspects of human life, particularly in the global context, and brought about drastic changes in economic, political, and social relations. Viewed in this way, social change may seem almost a by-product of our pursuit of other goals and interests—to borrow from John Lennon, it is something that happens while we are busy making other plans.

Yet social change is also actively sought through collective mobilization and action. It takes place as a result of human agency and intention to affect a given social environment based on the view that existing social conditions or relations are untenable. Over the last few decades such mobilizations have shaken the world time and again. Regimes (in the Soviet Union, in Southern Africa, in Southern Europe) that we once thought we would never live to see the end of have crumbled to dust. Even as we write, the Arab world is in convulsions and the changes that began in Tunisia and Egypt seem unlikely to end there. The illusion of solidity (immutability) and continuity and endless social reproduction is not an empirical fact. It is rather one of the props that those in power use to maintain their dominance. As academics, then, it is all the more important that we don't fall prey to this illusion ourselves. Any approach which seeks to ignore change—either conceptually or practically—will necessarily be deficient.

Of course, there are a number of ways of orienting to the issue of change. One is to consider how people *respond* to extant and ongoing social change (e.g., de la Sablonnière, Tougas, & Lortie-Lussier, 2009). Our focus here, however, is on the *emergence* of social change through collective mobilization and action—in particular, how such mobilization is achieved through a psychological redefinition of who "we" are and who "we" want to be.

The Psychology of Social Change and the World: Impact, Engagement, Communication, Participation

There are ongoing debates in political and social psychology—and social change research in particular—about the impact that our work has, or should have, beyond the discipline. There are frustrations both with how little influence our work seems to have but also about the misinterpretation and misuse of our findings. These are contradicting views—we either have no impact and thus abuse is not an issue, or we do have an impact and then abuse *is* an issue. Whether or not we believe

that psychology *is* having an impact, we *want to* have impact. Not every psychologist is both a scholar and an activist, but nobody wants to do research that is useless, pointless, and irrelevant. If nothing more noble motivates us, the bottom line is that research that does not speak to issues that concern society will remain largely unfunded.

Through not engaging effectively with others inside and outside our field, a space is created for other disciplines and ideas to do so. Our influence and our very presence are thereby likely to wane. What is more, if we don't go out and actively engage with others, some of them may seek us out and make use of our research. But those who have the resources and the time to seek out our books and reports and articles are likely to be the more monied, more established, and more powerful. By default our lack of proactive engagement actually means that the impact and the benefit of our work will be for the haves and not the have-nots.

In many ways, then, we don't have much of an option as to *whether* to have impact. Rather, the questions facing us are *who* we have impact upon and *whether* we have the kind of impact that we envisaged or hoped for. It therefore makes sense to harness whatever impact we may be having on the world—whether through scholarship, activism or both—and give it purpose and direction.

One concern should be how and to what extent we should communicate to "outside" audiences and who these audiences may be. Also, it is often debated whether or not we, as psychologists, have a responsibility not only to disseminate our work, but to be a part of change processes and active participants in achieving the kind of society that we believe in. Is direct engagement in social change processes (e.g., through activism) antithetical to scientific integrity or does it facilitate and enrich scholarship? Through the knowledge that such real-world involvement brings, perhaps there is readiness to question the extent to which our theories and methods are attuned to the social reality of group life—and therefore inherently relevant, veridical, and capable of impact or not.

Three interrelated ways of having "impact," then, seem prominent: (a) *communicating* our ideas in a way that resonates beyond the discipline to maximize the extent to which the relevant theories and findings are available to and being used by those with practical intentions (e.g., activists, politicians, policy makers), (b) impact through *direct engagement* with social and political activism to "be the change" we want to see in the world (e.g., joining a protest group or social movement), and (c) the more basic objective of better *understanding* the psychological aspects of social change. The third point acknowledges that "impact" as agents of change through direct engagement may not be the objective of all social change scholars. Indeed, striving to *understand* the process of change better is a worthwhile objective in itself provided that the theories and models that guide such an inquiry speak to the reality of social and political processes involved in social change. The focus in this section is on "impact" through communication, engagement, and participation and associated dilemmas, while the third point is discussed in detail in the sections to follow.

First, then, is it worthwhile asking what are we doing to disseminate what we have learned to those who use or should use our knowledge? How can we better communicate and engage with different audiences (e.g., policy makers, activists, oppressed or disadvantaged groups), and what are some of the obstacles to such engagement? Communication per se is important as even the best ideas communicated poorly will be of little use to those beyond our discipline. Equally, however, the most relevant, veridical, clearly communicated, and applicable insights will be ignored, questioned, and opposed depending on how they are seen to "fit" particular political objectives and agendas. It may therefore be worthwhile to be mindful of the politics inherent in what we do and the power relations that our practices challenge or perpetuate.

A related question concerns the nature of "audiences" that our discipline can or should engage with. Who are the intended or unintended "end-users" for our research and ideas? Are they policy makers or politicians? Activists or disadvantaged and oppressed minorities of some form? Should those driving social change or countering such change (e.g., political apparatchiks, activist groups, journalists) have a greater presence in political psychology forums such as conferences and this

journal? One argument is that in addition to other academics, we as psychologists have a responsibility to communicate with politicians and policy makers whose decisions impact on all our lives and also to enable those with limited resources and access to "strategic advice" to mobilize widespread support for their cause.

Orienting our research to the more applied policy domain—including partnerships with relevant policy bodies to examine a particular research space (e.g., how to enhance tolerance and social cohesion in a multicultural society)—forces a reexamination of the usefulness of our ideas to "outside" audiences. As such, it is one useful tool for sharpening the theoretical and empirical messages to resonate with those who are interested in the ideas and their application, but unfamiliar with the nuanced and jargon-laden debates that often fuel social change research in the first place. Crossing the policy divide has served other fields well (e.g., behavioral economics), increasing their worth in the minds of policy makers and funding bodies. Beyond the benefits to the discipline, though, this approach makes it more likely that policy makers tasked with addressing social problems that are also core topics in political psychology (e.g., intergroup conflict, racism and other forms of prejudice, disadvantage, discrimination, and injustice) are armed with the strongest advice and evidence available (e.g., having both economic and group-based strategies at their disposal to affect change in attitudes and behaviors that concern society). Successfully translating the relatively abstract ideas into the field takes patience, ingenuity, and creativity. But it also produces work that is alive with meaning and relevance beyond our leafy campuses and lavish conference venues (e.g., Paluck, 2009).

But engagement is not a one way street. It is not just about *teaching*. It is also worthwhile considering what psychology can *learn* from those who directly experience or participate in processes that we study and theorize about. It is through such engagement—an ongoing dialogue with people in the "field" who should be able to understand and in some ways apply our ideas—that the ideas and approaches themselves may be refined and resonate better with a range of audiences. From the perspective of community social psychology and liberation psychology (e.g., Montero, 2005, 2009), for example, the distinction between the researcher and those oppressed by particular social structures and processes is redefined so that both are agents of change. Within this perspective, the psychologist is an external agent of social change who is working together with those directly affected by disadvantage or injustice as internal agents to problematize, denaturalize, and ultimately challenge oppression (Montero, 2000, 2009). Lewin (1946) also argued that a central function of intergroup relations research is to lead to action and that "Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice" (p. 35). Inspired by Lewin's notion of action research, *participatory* action research involves a dialogue between internal and external agents through which consciousness is mobilized towards change, with the recognition that the main ground for action is each person's thoughts (Montero, 2009).

There are significant structural obstacles to such engagement, however, that concern what "we" as a discipline value and consider as evidence of worthwhile research and theorizing. In many countries, academic status (or even survival) depends upon assessment processes where the gold standard is publication in high impact journals and little else counts for much. Even where this is not the case, there are strong cultural norms which endorse these standards (see Cialdini, 2009) and which view communication to nonacademic audiences as something less important or even—especially where one communicates through the media—as a betrayal of our values and a form of "dumbing down." If academics are to spend more time on engaging with these broader audiences it is important to challenge these structures and these values.

It is important, then, to stress not only the social value of engagement but also its intellectual value. Indeed, arguably the greatest intellectual achievement is not to publish in arcane disciplinary journals read by people who share our perspectives and our assumptions. It is to develop our ideas to the point where they are clear enough, systematic enough, and meaningful enough to engage and

persuade those members of the general public who share our curiosity about the nature of the social and political world. Perhaps the greatest accolade is not to be a keynote at an international conference but to enthral a class of school students. It is certainly the more challenging task.

It is all very well to make these points, however, and the more established scholars may well have accumulated the credit which allows them to deviate somewhat from established norms without endangering themselves (Hollander, 1958)—or changing the norms. Things are very different for those in their early careers for whom deviation (and any reduction in their number of high-impact journal articles) may result in failure to get a job, failure to get tenure and hence failure to have an academic career. It is therefore the responsibility of those who are more senior as much as (if not more than) those who are more junior to address what sort of work gets in our journals, what sort of contribution secures the prizes of our associations, and what we value in our academic worlds.

The stakes are high if we take the view that political psychology is weaker if the very work we should be doing to make our contribution "alive in the world" is inconsistent with the structures of the discipline itself. But it is equally important to acknowledge that there are large risks associated with becoming involved in real-world issues. Most obviously, we risk losing our credibility, our authority, and even our funding if we come to be (or be seen as) politically partisan (Pettigrew, 2008).

One simple retort, which we have intimated already, is that we are always inescapably political. That failing to make an explicit choice is making an implicit choice for the status quo since we are established, funded, and maintained by existing social structures, and it is the existing order which accesses and uses our work. So the issue isn't whether we are political or not, but whether we want to make our politics explicit. Equally, let us not overdo the costs of activism. There are clearly areas where involvement would go with the grain of mainstream principles (and hence not provoke their resistance) even if there is a striking failure to implement those principles (and hence activism is necessary). An obvious example has to do with racial injustice (Durrheim & Dixon, 2004; Sears, Van Laar, Carrillo, & Kosterman, 1997).

As Pettigrew (2008, p. 80) argues, partisan does not equal bias and being unscientific—if we are passionate about such injustices, we should want to understand their true character, as effective remedies require an accurate understanding of the problem. Indeed, it is possible for scholarship to be facilitated and enriched by activism. Engagement with those in the "field" may provide both opportunities for application but also a more nuanced and contextualized insight into the social change process, in turn enriching our theoretical and empirical efforts. Altogether, engagement in this area serves to elevate the profile and the standing of our discipline.

Even in the absence of direct political engagement on the part of researchers, though, efforts to *understand* social change have political implications through our theories and methods. One question that we consider below is whether our theories and methods themselves enable (or prevent) us to "do" research that is relevant and *potentially* engaging in the first place. So, having considered the issues of communicating effectively with a range of audiences and engaging with social change processes in a more direct manner, a more fundamental question concerns the very theories and methods that currently inform the psychology of social change.

The Psychology of Social Change of the Future: What It Takes and Do We Have It?

If we are to have a productive dialogue with practitioners (policy makers, activists, etc.) we need a shared understanding and conceptual clarity about what social change entails psychologically. With consensus about the possibility and the process of change comes the possibility of developing new insights about why and when change happens—and also why and when it does not. Within social and political psychology, social change—and in particular collective mobilization for change—has been one of the most vibrant areas of inquiry. It is worthwhile discussing briefly where the field is at right now before making suggestions for possible future directions. There are already extensive and recent

reviews of the social change research and theorizing (e.g., Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2008, 2009; Haslam & Reicher, in press; Subašić, Reynolds, & Turner, 2008; Thomas et al., 2009a, 2009b; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2007; van Zomeren et al., 2008; Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2008; Wright, 2009). For current purposes we will simply point out some broad and promising directions that have emerged within the field to help orient the discussion of its future.

One consistent finding has been that social identity processes are central to social change both when it comes to collective mobilization and collective action (see van Zomeren et al., 2008 for a recent meta-analysis; see also Reicher, Spears, & Haslam, 2009 for an analysis of the social identity theory as a model of social power and social change), but also other forms of change in intergroup relations such as enhancing social harmony and prejudice reduction (e.g., Dovidio et al., 2008; Wenzel et al., 2008). In addition, it is becoming clear that these minority- and majority-oriented (respectively) aspects of social change need to be considered together (e.g., Subašić et al., 2008); for example, as efforts to reduce prejudice and enhance tolerance between groups also tend to thwart willingness to challenge inequality and injustice on the part of vulnerable groups who are disadvantaged by the status quo (e.g., ethnic minorities; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). There has also been a growing recognition of the role of group-based emotions and efficacy in collective behavior oriented towards social change and novel theoretical models have emerged to highlight the intersection of identity, emotion, efficacy, and collective action (Thomas et al., 2009a, 2009b; van Zomeren et al., 2008).

Within community social psychology (and Latin American liberation psychology in particular), a related trajectory of ideas is being developed centred on the concept of relatedness. Building on Freire's (1970) work, these researchers start from the premise that it is through dialogue and emerging relationships with others that consciousness can be mobilized for action. Through this process, people start to question and criticize the conditions of injustice and oppression hitherto considered "normal" and legitimate. Akin to the idea of "cognitive alternatives" as precursors of social change (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this work also argues that when critical consciousness is mobilized, people move away from the uncritically accepted version of "reality" towards considering the possibility of transforming their lives (Montero, 2009).

While these are important developments, it is important to recognize that they cannot simply be grafted on to our discipline as simply another of the many topics that we study. Rather, it is important to recognize that they have important theoretical and methodological implications for the way in which we do our business in general.

The first, and core, issue has to do with the way in which we conceptualize our object of study. The critical point is to recognize that, while the object of our study is individual behavior, the level upon which we seek to explain that behavior necessarily involves organizational, structural, and ideological factors. Our task is to understand how the psychological field of the individual is structured by the social (Lewin, 1947) and how, as a consequence, the actions of individuals constitute (and reconstitute) society. It follows that we can never explain social phenomena by looking at individual psychology in a vacuum (see Tajfel & Israel, 1972). Rather we must always ask how psychological processes are constituted through and operate in social context. In the words of Turner and Oakes (1986), our field is concerned with the psychological aspects of society.

More than this, though, an ability to explain social change (or even to account for the possibility of social change) depends upon an analysis of the relationship between the individual and the social context which does not assume the primacy of either. What we do is evidently shaped by social norms, by institutional possibilities and institutional constraints. But equally, we can act—act *together* that is—to alter norms, institutions, and even whole social systems.

Rather than a *sum* of independent if coexisting individuals, social structures and processes are a *product* of the individual mind and the social world epitomizing each other. The psychology of social change studies individual cognition, emotions, and behavior, but also how people collectively

create and solve the problems of society. Nowhere is the interaction between an individual and society more ubiquitous than in the area of social continuity and change. Equally, nothing reminds us more clearly of the need for an interactionist meta-theory of the human subject than the study of social change.

The second issue flows directly on from this. Clearly, change is not ubiquitous. Most of us live in stable social systems which endure our whole life long. It is certainly important to study this stability and to pay as much attention to how continuity is achieved as how change comes about. What we must not do, however, is begin to take continuity for granted, to essentialize and eternalize it and thereby to rule out the very possibility of change.

At a general level, this viewpoint seems to be gaining ground. Over the last 30 or so years there has been a slow revolution in the scientific model of the person. This revolution has occurred in psychology but also related fields of neuroscience and biology (e.g., epigenetics) and has direct implications for the question of whether political psychology can help address major global challenges. Put simply, biological and psychological systems that for a long time were deemed to be stable, static, and "set in plaster" at an early age are being found to be more malleable. Furthermore, there is greater recognition that a person's immediate social context and the way it is subjectively understood has an important role in explaining physiological, cognitive, and behavioral responses (e.g., self-categorization-in-context, situated cognition; for a review see Reynolds et al., 2010)

Such evidence of malleability emerging from multiple domains challenges "us" in political psychology to reflect on how theory and research in this field address the issues of continuity and change. For example, many would agree that responding to global challenges requires social mobilization and collective action, as well as widespread change to people's ideas, theories, ideologies, attitudes, and practices. Here, however, is the catch. At a more specific level, often these same people endorse theoretical models of social and psychological functioning that not only do not focus on such processes of "change" but do not allow for change full stop (Turner & Reynolds, 2003).

To reiterate (for the point is critical): if as a field we accept that social change is possible, then our models must not naturalize and embed social stability at the expense of social change and vice versa. We have discussed elsewhere the usefulness or otherwise of stability-oriented approaches as explanations of social change (see Subašić et al., 2008; Turner & Reynolds, 2003) and will only summarize the argument here. Briefly, locating the basic causes of social stability and dominant-subordinate relations in an asocial way at the level of evolution, genes, and personality, for example, ignores contemporary intergroup forces that shape psychology and behavior and produce change (e.g., identification, participation, radicalization, mobilization). It is very different to analyze the ways in which dominant groups produce social stability by the development of legitimating and justifying belief systems (part of which may indeed be the idea that human nature precludes change). Viewing stability as a product of evolutionary drives is in contrast to placing the explanatory emphasis on the strategies used by dominant groups to create legitimacy and naturalize a social order that is advantageous to them. The latter opens the way to understanding how these systems can be undermined and hence change can be brought about.

The social identity perspective in social psychology (in which we incorporate social identity theory and self-categorization theory) is focused on explaining power, the emergence of (il)legitimacy, and social change. This perspective tells us, first, that we often define ourselves as members of a social category (I am a woman, a liberal, a catholic, a football fan, etc.), that our perspectives, understandings, and actions are shaped by the groups in terms of which we define ourselves (for recent reviews see Haslam, Ellemers, Reicher, Reynolds, & Schmitt, 2010a, 2010b; Klandermans, Sabucedo, & Rodriguez, 2004; Reynolds et al., 2010; Turner & Reynolds, 2010) and that acting together as group members empowers us to impose our perspectives even against the resistance of others (Haslam & Reicher, 2011; Reicher & Haslam, in press).

A key implication of this perspecive, then, is that social change is bound up with a psychological change in our sense of who "we" are—a change from thinking of ourselves individually to thinking of ourselves collectively, but also a change in our understanding of the group's position. It is when we think this position to be illegitimate and we consider a better position to be achievable (through the availability of cognitive alternatives and perceptions of instability) that changes in the reality of social relations become possible.

The third issue, though, is that it is hard to envisage how psychology can contribute to understanding how people "make their world anew" as long as we continue to treat human beings as perceivers rather than doers, as passive rather than active, as observers rather than makers of the world. Perhaps we have a tendency to view people as passive because of the ways in which they are rendered passive in our research. Consider the prototypical psychology study. Individuals will be brought to a laboratory where they are presented with carefully designed stimuli and asked to respond, most usually by a tick on a piece of paper or a key press on a computer keyboard. It is a strangely silent and isolated world. People are not allowed to talk to each other for fear of compromising the independence of their data for statistical analysis. Less and less are they allowed to interact with each other (Haslam & McGarty, 2001), and there is less attention to behavior (Moreland, Fetterman, Flagg, & Swanenburg, 2010). They certainly are not allowed to challenge the terms of the study itself or question the ways in which response measures are framed. If they do try, theirs will be treated as missing data and they will be written from the history of the study.

So all in all, people can only gaze and comment upon a world made by others. It is a world they played no part in making and which they certainly cannot make anew. And this enforced passivity is then reflected in theoretical models which treat human beings as perceivers and which treat human understanding as a matter of how we deploy our internal cognitive resources to make sense of a world which preexists "out there."

How different this is to what happens outside the laboratory in the world of social and political practices. Take, for instance, one of the issues that is central to social psychology and to politics: the inequalities and hostilities and conflicts between different groups. In a globalizing world, this is increasingly expressed through encounters between settled populations and migrants—especially those of different ethnic backgrounds. To suggest that people respond through a process of quiet and lonely contemplation would be quite bizarre. The reality is that wherever we go we are assailed by different voices telling us about what is happening and what it means and how we should respond. Headlines scream at us from the papers telling us that immigrants are swamping us. Politicians declaim to us from our televisions and radios, activists shout at us from street corners, fellow employees debate with us in the workplace. The process of sense making and responding is loud and it is communal. What we do depends upon what community prevails: how we define our selves and our self-interest and hence which of the many voices speaks to us because it speaks for us.

The study of racism provides a case example of these points. In more prosaic terms, racism is not a process of perception; it is a process of mobilization (Reicher, 2007; Reicher, Haslam, & Rath, 2008). By creating and vilifying a "them," racism also creates and mobilizes particular meanings and expressions of who "we" are and who "we" want to be. It is not only a matter of what sort of world we see but of what sort of world we want to make. It is not a cognition of the present but a future-oriented practice. And what is true of racism is true of almost any issue on which we take a position: certainly our party political positions, our approach to environmental issues, our economic preferences. . . . The paradigm through which we need to address human social understanding is one of mobilization rather than of perception.

The Political Solidarity Model recently employed this paradigm to provide a novel analysis of social change (Subašić et al., 2008). It draws attention to social influence relations between those

currently in positions of authority or leadership (e.g., the dominant group), those "power minorities"[1] seeking to challenge authority and gain influence (e.g., a subordinate group), and the "silent majority" as the audience being mobilized (e.g., third parties). This work demonstrates how authorities and power minorities are involved in the task of mobilizing the majority—the one in support of social stability, the other in support of social change. It illustrates how stability and change are interdependent processes so that as a movement for change gains momentum, the status quo is more difficult to maintain. It also shows how there is an asymmetry between the two, such that existing authorities have "incumbency benefits" (not least, greater control over the means of communication) that can make it difficult to hear alternative voices for change (Subašić et al., 2008).

But perhaps what is most important about a mobilization approach and the Political Solidarity Model in particular is that it recognizes that the transformations in self-understanding which are so essential to the change process depend upon the ways in which people select between different influence sources. Change, that is, is dependent upon identity, which, in turn depends upon who we listen to and regard as our leaders. Centrally, though, rejecting those who seek to maintain the status quo in dominant-subordinate relations is not enough for "third party" mobilization—a shared identity that transforms who "we" are needs to emerge with those vying to lead "us" towards change. Let us, then, consider these relationships in a little more detail.

Social Change, Social Identity, and Leadership

We have stressed that movements for social change are contingent (a) upon people achieving a shared identity with shared norms and values, and (b) upon the development of belief systems about the social world which make change both justifiable and viable. The former is necessary for people to transcend interpersonal differences, to develop a sense of solidarity, and to act together in a coordinated and effective way (Subašić et al., 2008). The latter is necessary to ensure that group members devote their combined efforts towards challenging the status quo and confronting the power of dominant groups. Thus solidarity and conflict are two sides of the same coin. "We" must act together in order to overcome "them" (see also Klandermans, van de Toorn, & van Stekelenburg, 2008).

To understand how social change can occur, then, it is necessary to understand how the necessary collective self-definitions come about. But this still begs the question of what leaders must do in order to be successful in transforming identities (which is the same as saying what leaders must do in order to be effective; Reicher, Haslam & Hopkins, 2005). The social identity analysis of leadership and power is oriented to precisely this quandary. In this view, others "like us" play an important role in shaping and potentially changing the psychology of the person—they have influence over our thoughts, feelings, and actions. When people are considered to be "us" rather than "them," there is an expectation that "we" ought to agree and respond in the same way (in reactions, judgments, attitudes, and behavior; e.g., Turner, 1991). It is through such shared social identity that others influence "who we are" and "what we do" (e.g., Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011; Turner, 2005; Turner & Haslam, 2001; Turner, Reynolds, & Subašić, 2008).

Being able to shape and create shared understandings of "who we are" and "what we do" (and to do so better than others) both defines leadership success and provides an analysis of power (Turner, 2005). The foundation of power is getting others to carry out one's will, and it rests on group identity and the influence processes which flow from it. In this model, the traditional understanding of power as the ability to bring about compliance through one's capacities to provide positive and negative outcomes (i.e., coercion) is argued to be the weakest form of power. It reveals a lack of

---

[1] We use the term "power minority" here in line with Tajfel (1978) to signify that the numerical dimension is less central to the "minority" experience, so that numerical majorities can also be "power" minorities.

genuine ability to influence through group identity and serves to reinforce a sense of "us" and "them," weakening opportunities for real power to emerge in the future (e.g., Subašić, Reynolds, Turner, Veenstra, & Haslam, 2011).

Leaders, then, will be effective to the extent that they are able to represent themselves as "one of us"—through aligning their own biographies with the defining features of the group, by stressing the compatibility of their own values and beliefs with those of the group, by locating their own aspirations in the aspirations of the group. But important as this is, it is but one of several identity-based criteria against which a leader will be judged (see Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011).

Leaders additionally need to be seen to "act for us"—that is, their actions must be seen to be for the group interest rather than for either themselves, for a particular section of the ingroup, or (still worse) for the outgroup. This, perhaps, is why the Roman emperor Cinncinatus is still held up as a model leader (and had a city named after him): Cinncinatus had no desire for power or glory; he left his farm to save Rome and once he had served his people, happily went back to rural obscurity.

Leaders also need to "craft a sense of us"—that is, they must not only define themselves in order to fit an existing definition of the group. They can also work on the definition of the group identity in order to make themselves and their policies central to the realization of group aspirations. In Scotland, say, the recently victorious Scottish National Party defined Scots as a proud and independent people humbled by dependence on England in the United Kingdom and needing independence to recover the glory of their true nature (see Reicher & Hopkins, 2001).

Finally, leaders need to "make us matter." They must turn aspirations to realities and demonstrate their visions to be viable. The emphasis again, is not simply on being or on representing but also on doing. Identities are not just beliefs, they are visions of how the world should be organized—and an identity which cannot be realized is simply useless.

At the intersection of leadership and social change, the same audience will be exposed to multiple would-be leaders all trying to define their identities in different ways. As a number of authors have recognized, the standard paradigm of influence and change in our society is not one where a single source is seeking to engage an audience. It is one where different sources are vying to engage the same audience and, if these sources seem ostensibly to be arguing with each other, they never have any hope of swaying their rival but merely of recruiting those who listen in (e.g., Mugny, 1982; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Subašić et al., 2008). When Bush argued with Gore or Obama with McCain, neither believed the other would abandon their party line. Rather, both were aiming to gain the allegiance of the same electors. The achievement of such allegiance is the holy grail of politics. It explains why identity is so contested, and why so many aspirant leaders vie to define our identities.

Not only are there multiple leadership alternatives seeking to convince us of who we are and what we should do (i.e., seeking to represent, craft, act for, and make "us" matter)—leaders are also confronted with (or have a role in creating) divided "followerships." Whether a leader downplays or emphasizes division between groups—and along which dimensions—has profound implications both for intergroup relations (e.g., whether there is conflict or cooperation), but also for consolidating or challenging power relations within a group (Subašić & Reynolds, 2011). Those who want to challenge a system of dominant and subordinate relations need to redefine intergroup boundaries so that those seeking to preserve the status quo become "them" rather than "us." In contrast, those who want to consolidate authority need to define themselves and the relevant "majority" of followers as part of a common ingroup (e.g., "we" Americans)—something that is often achieved by creating and/or excluding a particular outgroup (typically ethnic, racial, or national; Gagnon, 2006; Reicher, Hopkins, Levine, & Rath, 2005; Subašić, Reynolds, & Turner, 2011).

Further, leaders for continuity and the status quo (who are often conservative) generally define existing dominant-subordinate relations as legitimate or else natural and inevitable (social dominance theory and system justification theory, for example, provide useful insight into these strategies

for entrenching dominance). In contrast, leaders for change generally seek to mobilize the view that the status quo is illegitimate and contingent. The two positions are interdependent in the sense that the success of one construction will serve to undermine the leadership of those advocating the other (e.g., Subašić et al., 2008; Turner & Reynolds, 2010; Turner et al., 2008). Social change becomes *possible* once people start to question whether the status quo is in "our" best interests and whether those seeking to preserve it share "our" values and goals. Just because people begin to question or even challenge the status quo, however, it does not mean that change "we can believe in" will be achieved. Therefore, we need to ask who has the power to shape what values, goals and beliefs define who "we" are (not) and what "we" do, but also how and why such power changes hands.

In part, this is because collective mobilization is not confined to movements for social change. The status quo is often (re)actively and just as vigorously defended. Countermobilization, though, is not the mirror image of mobilization for change. It builds on existing systems of authority and shared identity between leadership and particular "followerships." In contrast, mobilization for change involves not only the severing of such preexisting allegiances, but also the emergence of an alternative and viable vision for who "we" are—a social identity that simultaneously marginalizes proponents of the status quo as "them" while aligning the rest of "us" with a change agenda (Subašić et al., 2008). But, among the different alternatives for change, some will emerge as visionary, while others will be dismissed as "out of touch" or "too radical" for the kind of future that "we" aspire to.

Taken together, then, in understanding social continuity and change it is important to understand the emergence of group identity (and sense of "us") and the maintenance of its ongoing legitimacy in the eyes of group members. The tension between who has influence and why and whether common or sectarian interests prevail are central to the perceived legitimacy of a social system and therefore to the dynamics of social change. It is also necessary to understand how identification with leadership and the legitimacy of dominant-subordinate relations erodes with the emergence of cognitive alternatives and the development of an oppositional stance (e.g., Haslam & Reicher, 2011; Subašić et al., 2008; Turner & Reynolds, 2010). Along with such developments, there will be a loss of influence by the established leaders and authorities and increased identification with those that best capture the momentum for change (e.g., Subašić, Reynolds, 't Hart, Reicher, & Haslam, 2009; Turner & Reynolds, 2010; Turner et al., 2008). One challenge for research and theorizing in this domain is to explain more precisely which of the many voices for change will capture "our" imagination and why.

Concluding Remarks

The arguments above all speak to central questions of social change as currently understood and studied within political and social psychology. They also raise questions that concern the field more broadly. For example, what is the nature and extent of the impact that psychology is having on "making" the world anew and how such impact can best be harnessed? There are also calls to reexamine our models of the person and the social world, but also the methods used to study people's understandings and actions in the world. New paradigms are proposed that focus on mobilization, the variable nature of the self and the centrality of leadership and social influence in understanding social and psychological change.

Three domains emerge from this discussion as possible arenas for further (inter-) disciplinary discussion, challenge and change. The first concerns how we can communicate more effectively with a range of audiences beyond the discipline to ensure our work is accessible, engaging and relevant. Secondly, while there are many real and difficult tensions in becoming involved in social change movements, it is also worthwhile to consider the possibility that, far from being detrimental to our scientific judgement, such engagement may enrich and further our insights. Finally, we have a responsibility to provide robust, scientifically informed theory and research that recognizes both the reality and possibility of social change and thereby enhances understanding of this process.

Our article has made a few suggestions for how we move forward and has raised many more questions. It is not meant to settle matters but rather to open up a vibrant, constructive, and critical debate as to how we make our discipline and our world anew. To conclude, then, we need a social and a political psychology that is attuned to how people make their futures. One of our key claims throughout this article is that abstention on this issue is not an option.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

REFERENCES

Cialdini, R. B. (2009). We have to break up. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 4*, 5–6.

de la Sablonnière, R., Tougas, F., & Lortie-Lussier, M. (2009). Dramatic social change in Russia and Mongolia: Connecting relative deprivation to social identity. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 40*, 327–348.

Dovidio, J. F., Gaertner, S. L., & Saguy, T. (2008). Another view of "we": Majority and minority group perspectives on a common ingroup identity *European Review of Social Psychology, 18*, 296–330.

Dovidio, J. F., Gaertner, S. L., & Saguy, T. (2009). Commonality and complexity of "we": Social attitudes and social change. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 13*(1), 3–20.

Durrheim, K., & Dixon, J. A. (2004). Attitudes in the fiber or everyday life: The discourse of racial evaluation and the lived experience of desegregation. *American Psychologist, 59*, 626–636.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Gagnon, V. P. (2006). *The myth of ethnic war*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Haslam, S. A., Ellemers, N., Reicher, S., Reynolds, K. J., & Schmitt, M. T. (2010a). Social identity today: The impact of its defining ideas. In T. Postmes & N. R. Branscombe (Eds.), *Rediscovering social identity: Core sources*. New York: Psychology Press.

Haslam, S. A., Ellemers, N., Reicher, S., Reynolds, K. J., & Schmitt, M. T. (2010b). Social identity tomorrow: Opportunities and avenues for advance. In T. Postmes & N. R. Branscombe (Eds.), *Rediscovering social identity: Core sources*. New York: Psychology Press.

Haslam, S. A., & McGarty, C. A. (2001). A 100 years of certitude? Social psychology, the experimental method and the management of scientific uncertainty. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 40*, 1–21.

Haslam, S. A., & Reicher, S. D. (2011). Beyond conformity: Revisiting classic studies and exploring the dynamics of resistance. In J. Jetten & M. J. Hornsey (Eds.), *Rebels in groups* (pp. 324–344). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Haslam, S. A., & Reicher, S. D. (in press). When prisoners take over the prison: A social psychology of resistance. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*.

Haslam, S. A., Reicher, S., & Platow, M. J. (2011). *The new psychology of leadership: Identity, influence and power*. New York: Psychology Press.

Hollander, E. P. (1958). Conformity, status and idiosyncrasy credit. *Psychological Review, 65*, 117–127.

Klandermans, B., Sabucedo, J. M., & Rodriguez, M. (2004). Inclusiveness of identification among farmers in the Netherlands and Galicia (Spain). *European Journal of Social Psychology, 34*, 279–295.

Klandermans, B., van de Toorn, J., & van Stekelenburg, J. (2008). Embeddedness and grievances: How immigrants turn grievances into action. *American Sociological Review, 73*, 992–1012.

Lewin, K. (1946). Action research and minority problems. *Journal of Social Issues, 2*, 34–46.

Lewin, K. (1947). Group decision and social change. In T. M. Newcomb & E. L. Hartley (Eds.), *Readings in social psychology* (pp. 330–344) New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Montero, M. (2000). Participation in participatory action-research. *Annual Review of Critical Psychology, 2*, 131–144.

Montero, M. (2005). Relatedness as a basis for liberation. *International Journal of Critical Psychology, 8*, 61–74.

Montero, M. (2009). Methods for liberation: Critical consciousness in action. In M. Montero & C. Sonn (Eds.), *Psychology of liberation* (pp. 73–92). New York: Springer.

Moreland, R. L., Fetterman, J. D., Flagg, J. J., & Swanenburg, K. L. (2010). Behavioral assessment practices among social psychologists who study small groups. In C. R. Agnew, D. E., Carlston, W. G. Graziano, & J. P. Kelly (Eds.), *Then a miracle occurs: Focussing on behavior in social psychology theory and research* (pp. 28–56). New York: Oxford University Press.

Mugny, G. (1982). *The power of minorities*. London: Academic Press.

Paluck, E. L. (2009). Reducing intergroup prejudice and conflict using the media: A field experiment in Rwanda. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 96*(3), 574–587.

Pettigrew, T. F. (2008). Reflecting on core themes in intergroup research. In U. Wagner, L. R. Tropp, G. Finchilescu & C. Tredoux (Eds.), *Improving intergroup relations: Building on the legacy of Thomas F. Pettigrew* (pp. 283–303). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Reicher, S. (2007). Rethinking the paradigm of prejudice. *South African Journal of Psychology, 37*(4), 820–834.

Reicher, S. D., & Haslam, S. A. (in press). Change we can believe in: The role of social identity, cognitive alternatives and leadership in group mobilization and social transformation. In B. Wagoner, E. Jensen, & J. Oldmeadow (Eds.), *Culture and social change: Transforming society through the power of ideas*. London: Routledge.

Reicher, S., Haslam, S. A., & Hopkins, N. (2005). Social identity and the dynamics of leadership: Leaders and followers as collaborative agents in the transformation of social reality. *Leadership Quarterly, 16*(4), 547–568.

Reicher, S., Haslam, S. A., & Rath, R. (2008). Making a virtue of evil: A five-step social identity model of the development of collective hate. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 2*(3), 1313–1344.

Reicher, S. D., & Hopkins, N. (2001). *Self and nation*. London: Sage.

Reicher, S., Hopkins, N., Levine, M., & Rath, R. (2005). Entrepreneurs of hate and entrepreneurs of solidarity: Social identity as a basis for mass communication. *International Review of the Red Cross, 87*(860), 621–637.

Reicher, S. D., Spears, R., & Haslam, S. A. (2009). The social identity approach in social psychology. In M. Wetherell & C. Y. Mohanty (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of identities* (pp. 45–62). London: Sage.

Reynolds, K. J., Turner, J., Branscombe, N. R., Mavor, K. I., Bizumic, B., & Subašić, E. (2010). Interactionism in personality and social psychology: An integrated approach to understanding the mind and behaviour. *European Journal of Personality, 24*, 458–482.

Sears, D. O., Van Laar, C., Carrillo, M., & Kosterman, R. (1997). Is it really racism? The origin of white Americans' opposition to race-targeted policies. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 61*, 16–53.

Simon, B., & Klandermans, B. (2001). Politicized collective identity: A social psychological analysis. *American Psychologist, 56*(4), 319–331.

Subašić, E., & Reynolds, K. J. (2011). Power consolidation in leadership change contexts: A social identity perspective. In P. 't Hart & J. Uhr (Eds.), *How power changes hands: Transition and succession in government* (pp. 174–190). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan

Subašić, E., Reynolds, K. J., 't Hart, P., Reicher, S. D., & Haslam, S. A. (2009). Leadership, social identity and the dynamics of influence in intergroup relations: A new understanding of social continuity and social change. Unpublished manuscript, Australian Research Council Discovery Project Application, Australian National University.

Subašić, E., Reynolds, K. J., & Turner, J. C. (2008). The political solidarity model of social change: Dynamics of self-categorization in intergroup power relations. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 12*(4), 330–352.

Subašić, E., Reynolds, K. J., & Turner, J. C. (2011). How leaders can redefine intergroup relations to shape ingroup identity and consolidate power. Unpublished manuscript, Australian National University.

Subašić, E., Reynolds, K. J., Turner, J. C., Veenstra, K., & Haslam, S. A. (2011). Leadership, power and the use of surveillance: Implications of shared social identity for leaders' capacity to influence. *Leadership Quarterly, 22*, 170–181

Tajfel, H., & Israel, J. (1972). *The context of social psychology*. London: Academic Press.

Tajfel, H., (1978). *Social psychology of minorities*. London: Minority Rights Group.

Tajfel, H. & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Thomas, E. F., McGarty, C. A., & Mavor, K. I. (2009a). Aligning identities, emotions and beliefs to create commitment to sustainable social and political action. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 13*(3), 194–218.

Thomas, E. F., McGarty, C. A., & Mavor, K. I. (2009b). Transforming apathy into movement: The role of prosocial emotions in motivating action for social change. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 13*(4), 310–333.

Turner, J. C. (1991). *Social Influence*. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Turner, J. C. (2005). Explaining the nature of power: A three-process theory. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 35*(1), 1–22.

Turner, J. C., & Haslam, S. A. (2001). Social identity, organizations and leadership. In M. E. Turner (Ed.), *Groups at work: Theory and research* (pp. 25–65). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Turner, J. C., & Oakes, P. J. (1986). The significance of the social identity concept for social psychology with reference to individualism, interactionism and social influence. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 25*, 237–252.

Turner, J. C., & Reynolds, K. J. (2003). Why social dominance theory has been falsified. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 42*(2), 199–206.

Turner, J. C., & Reynolds, K. J. (2010). The story of social identity. In T. Postmes & N. R. Branscombe (Eds.), *Rediscovering social identity: Core sources* (pp. 13–32). New York: Psychology Press.

Turner, J. C., Reynolds, K. J., & Subašić, E. (2008). Identity confers power: The new view of leadership in social psychology. In J. Uhr & P. 't Hart (Eds.), *Public leadership: Perspectives and practices* (pp. 57–72). Canberra: Australian National University E-Press.

van Stekelenburg, J., & Klandermans, B. (2007). Individuals in movements: A social psychology of contention. In B. Klandermans & C. Roggeband (Eds.), *The handbook of social movements across disciplines* (pp. 157–204). New York: Springer.

van Zomeren, M., Postmes, T., & Spears, R. (2008). Toward an integrative social identity model of collective action: A quantitative research synthesis of three socio-psychological perspectives. *Psychological Bulletin, 134*(4), 504–535.

Wenzel, M., Mummendey, A., & Waldzus, S. (2008). Superordinate identities and intergroup conflict: The ingroup projection model. *European Review of Social Psychology, 18*, 331–372.

Wright, S. C. (2009). The next generation of collective action research. *Journal of Social Issues, 65*(4), 859–879.

Wright, S. C., & Lubensky, M. (2009). The struggle for social equality: Collective action versus prejudice reduction. In S. Demoulin, J. Leyens & J. F. Dovidio (Eds.), *Intergroup misunderstandings: Impact of divergent social realities* (pp. 291–310). New York: Psychology Press.