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Expanding social identity theory for research in media effects:

Two international studies and a theoretical model

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Abstract

In this paper we propose that Tajfel's (1979) social identity theory (SIT) and self-categorization theory (SCT, Turner, Brown & Tajfel, 1987) is a relevant and helpful theoretical groundwork to explain selective exposure to media content in general and to entertainment media in particular. It is hypothesized that gender and national identity have a significant effect on selective exposure to entertainment series when being salient. Two international quasi-experimental studies have been conducted, the first study in the U.S. and Germany (N = 419) and the second in Great Britain and Germany (N = 154). As expected, participants rated series that feature protagonists of their own sex higher with regard to entertainment and intention to watch than those that featured protagonists of the opposite sex. However, national identity did not have the effects expected. Participants from all three countries gave similar ratings to series produced in their home-country as those produced abroad. The use of SIT is discussed in terms of what processes of the theory are of particular importance to explain media related behavior and how to empirically apply the theory in media effects research to make it work. A two-process model of SIT in media effects research is suggested: the process of social comparison is amended with a much simpler process of searching for similarities.

Key Words: Social Identity Theory, SIT, Social categorization theory, SCT, Media Effects, Selective Exposure, Gender, Nation, Culture

Zusammenfassung

Im vorliegenden Beitrag werden die Theorie der sozialen Identität (Tajfel, 1979) und die Theorie der sozialen Kategorisierung (Turner, Brown & Tajfel, 1979) als theoretische Grundlage zur Erklärung der Medienselektion vorgeschlagen. In zwei Quasi-Experimenten wurde die untersucht, ob die Geschlechtszugehörigkeit beeinfluss, ob Probanden lieber unterhaltende TV Serien mit Protagonisten des eigenen Geschlechts oder des anderen Geschlechts sehen. Des Weiteren wurde untersucht, ob die nationale Identität beeinflusst, ob Probanden lieber unterhaltende TV Serien im TV sehen, die im Heimatland oder im Ausland produziert wurden. Die erste Studie wurde in den Vereinigten Staaten (U.S.A.) und Deutschland durchgeführt (N = 419), die zweite Studien in dem Vereinigten Königreich (U.K.) und Deutschland (N = 154). Die Ergebnisse weisen darauf hin, dass Probanden Serien mit Protagonisten des eigenen Geschlechts bevorzugen. Die nationale Identität hatte jedoch nicht den gewünschten Effekt. Die Probanden aller drei Länder bewerteten ausländische Produktionen besser als die Serien aus ihrem Heimatland. In der Diskussion und als Ergebnis der zwei Studien wird ein Zweiprozess-Modell der Medienselektion vorgeschlagen, das einerseits Prozesse der sozialen Identität und andererseits Prozesse der Ähnlichkeit als Ursachen der Medienselektion definiert.

Key Words: Theorie der sozialen Identität, SIT, Social categorization theory, SCT, Medienselektion, Unterhaltung, Geschlecht, Kultur, Nation

Expanding social identity theory for research in media effects: Two international studies and a theoretical model

Research in media effects as well as ratings and shares suggest that the media people select are related to the social groups to which they belong: most people are interested in television news referring to their home country rather than to far-away countries they might not know (Adams, 1986; Zaharopoulos, 1990). Also, audiences tend to watch entertainment programs that feature protagonists of their own gender (Oliver *et al.*, 2000) or ethnicity (Waisbord, 2004; Zillmann et al., 1995). Students prefer shows with younger characters, whereas the elderly prefer characters of their own age (Harwood, 1997, 1999). We can assume that similarities between the people depicted in the media and those people consuming it are a key element to its success. As an approach to explain this phenomenon the social-psychological social identity theory (SIT) has been suggested (Blumler, 1985; Harwood & Roy, 2005; Palmgreen *et al.*, 1985; Reid *et al.*, 2004).

SIT says that people categorize themselves and others in different groups and that they evaluate these groups (Tajfel, 1978, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). With the aim to reach a positive social identity, they tend to overemphasize the advantages and the superiority of the in-group. Although Tajfel's (1979) SIT has been used in media effects research before, it is far from delivering a solid and applicable theoretical groundwork. Previous research has encountered a number of limitations (Harwood, 1997, 1999; Zillmann et al., 1995). To complement the research that has been done, two quasi-experimental studies will be presented that were conducted in the U.S., Great Britain and Germany. Both were aimed at

showing whether audiences' national or gender identity guides them to select particular entertainment television series. Especially, the role of salience – as suggested within social categorization theory (SCT) - and subjective importance of group membership was focussed. However, the studies to be presented were not able to fill in all gaps. Results are ambiguous in that not all group-memberships seem to guide entertainment choices. This was also the case in previous studies on the subject matter (Harwood, 1997, 1999; Tarrant *et al.*, 2001; Zillmann et al., 1995). Given the problems with applying SIT to media effects, we will suggest adaptations of the theory to accommodate it to the realities of media and selective exposure. As a result of these considerations an expanded theoretical two-process model of SIT in media effects research will be suggested. Processes apply to different kinds of media offerings.

In the following, we start our discussion of SIT´s potential benefits to explain media choices by providing a brief summary of its assumptions. SCT will also be addressed. We will then give an overview of recent theoretical and empirical approaches to explain selective exposure with SIT and SCT. Based on the results of our two studies, we finally discuss how SIT could be expanded to explain media choices and propose a preliminary theoretical two-process model of SIT in media effects research.

Social Identity Theory and Social Categorization Theory

SIT, as first proposed by Tajfel (1978; Tajfel, 1979) and Tajfel and Turner (1979), aims at explaining individual cognitions and behavior by refering to group processes. The basic phenomenon observed is that people attempt to establish

positive self-esteem by showing solidarity with their in-group and discrimination against out-groups. In particular, studies on the "minimal group paradigm" - illustrating that even random assignment to different groups led people to favor their in-group and discriminate their out-group (Tajfel *et al.*, 1971) – laid the ground for SIT.

Tajfel´s (1979) definition of a group is rather broad. He specified that groups do not have to consist of people who personally know each other, but that even remote similarities like being a female member of a specific company might qualify as a relevant group membership. As long as a cognitive component (knowing about the group membership), an evaluative component (positive or negative evaluation of group membership) and an emotional component (positive or negative emotions associated with the group membership and its evaluation) is given, the group might become relevant in terms of building a social identity.

Tajfel (1978) specified four underlying principles of SIT: social categorization, social comparison, social identity and self-esteem. Social categorization refers to the fact that we categorize people into groups to simplify our understanding of the world and to structure social interaction. Group categorization results in differences between categories (interclass differences) being accentuated and differences between members within the same category (intraclass differences) being underestimated or restrained.

If social categorization has taken place, social comparison is likely to be triggered. As within Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison, Tajfel (1979) assumes that we need to compare our opinions and abilities with others – in this case on a group level. In order to be able to conduct social comparisons, people not only search for information on the out-group but are also interested in learning facts

on the in-group. The outcome of social comparisons largely determines our social identity and self-esteem.

Social identity, then, is defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). Since people aim at maintaining positive social identity, they strive for positively discrepant comparisons. These can be achieved either by 'social mobility' in terms of leaving inferior groups or by adhering to the belief structure of 'social change'. Additionally, 'social creativity' might be employed in terms of the redefinition of the value associated with the low status criterion, focusing on additional dimensions of comparison, or comparison with a different group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg & Abrams, 1988).

Several amendments have been made over the years that are of special importance for the present study: SIT already suggests a fundamental individual motivation for self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1982). The need for positive self-esteem is seen as the major motivation for social categorization and social comparison (Turner *et al.*, 1979). Abrams and Hogg (1988) attempted to clarify the role of self-esteem within SIT: Their first corollary that succesful intergoup discrimination will enhance self-esteem has largely been supported (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). The second corollary, on the other hand, that low or threatened self-esteem will motivate intergroup discrimination has yielded relatively little evidence. Lately, the importance of self-esteem as the predominant motive for social identity processes has been questioned. Hogg and Abrams (1990) state that "[w]hile it clearly does play an important role, self-esteem may be one of a number of

motives and effects of different forms of group behavior. Possibly more fundamental is some form of self-evaluative motive" (p. 46).

Further, especially when applying SIT to selective exposure it seems to be necessary to take amendments into account that have been proposed within SCT (Turner et al., 1987). Self-categorization theory does not differentiate four processes but makes the point that categorization and comparison processes occur simultaneously. Simultaneously, it is suggested that effects known from SIT are more pronounced when the categorization is salient, important and of immediate relevance to the individual (Hogg & Abrams, 1988, 1999; Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963). One crucial aspect of the theory is the idea that categories under question have to be salient to have an impact on subsequent behavior (Oakes, 1987). This notion of 'psychological salience' differs from 'stimulus salience' the latter being defined as some situational cue reminding of a group membership and functioning as a causal antecedent of psychological salience – e.g. in terms of an explicit reminder that a person belongs to the group of women (Oakes, 1987). Oakes (1987) suggested that psychological salience occurs when social categorization is accessible <u>and</u> best fits the information available. Accessibility is determined by the relative centrality or importance of a group membership and by its current emotional or value significance to a person. The fit of a categorization is defined as the degree to which observed similarities and differences between people correlate with the expected social categories (Oakes *et al.*, 1994).

It can be summarized that in order to achieve higher order goals such as self-esteem, people want to develop a <u>positive</u> social identity. To do so, they show different behaviors that might also be observed in the context of media selection and reception. In fact, social identity has long been proposed as a plausible theoretical

background for identity related gratifications in the uses-and-gratifications approach to understanding media usage (Blumler, 1979). Specifically, Blumler (1985) stated that within media research "[...] little attention has been paid to the social group memberships and affiliations, formal and subjective, that might feed audience concerns to maintain and strengthen their social identities through what they see, read and hear in the media" (p. 50). In the following section we summarize and discuss the few empirical studies that used SIT as a frame of reference for understanding media choices.

Explaining Selective Exposure with SIT

SIT can be applied to media effects studies either to explain how social identity guides television viewing motivations (Harwood, 1997, 1999; Mastro, 2003; Zillmann et al., 1995) or to explain how the media affect social identity (Duck *et al.*, 1999; Duck *et al.*, 1998; Morton & Duck, 2000; Tarrant et al., 2001).

Within this paper we will focus on SIT to explain media preferences and choices. It seems crucial to media research to better understand the 'identity' variable in users' motivation (Blumler, 1985). First of all, ratings and shares clearly show that viewers prefer to expose themselves to media content that features people belonging to their 'in-groups'. Numerous studies show that audiences tend to select programs presenting media characters similar to themselves (Greenberg & Atkin, 1982; Knobloch *et al.*, 2005; Oliver et al., 2000; Waisbord, 2004). Be it gender, culture, age or profession, all kinds of categories have been investigated and almost unequivocally show the search for similarities. Furthermore, media content is designed to accommodate the needs of a diversified audience. Almost all

kinds of groups are represented in the media and have 'their' special television program, magazine or radio broadcast to find information on their in-group (Harwood & Roy, 2005). The media market seems to have adjusted to the motive of meeting people of the same kind. These phenomena might – and have been – interpreted as reflecting one of the basic ideas of SIT: the fact that we search for in-group information. However, we do not know exactly whether this might be the only or decisive process guiding media choices and what the underlying processes are.

The main idea behind using SIT to explain selective exposure is that audiences choose media fare in concordance with certain group memberships. The process can be depicted as follows: While picking a program on television, the belonging to certain group categories (such as women or men) becomes salient to the viewer. The motive to watch the program might be triggered because social comparison with characters of the out-group is possible. With the motive to attain a positive social identity, the viewer tunes in to the program and evaluates his own group as well as the out-group based on the program. Thus, the motivational aspect adressed in SIT lies in the aim of the viewer to evaluate the in-group positively, reach positive social identity and attain goals such as positive self-esteem or self actualization.

Harwood (1997, 1999) addressed the question of whether people seek entertainment reflecting characters of their in-group. Additionally, he assumed that identification with the in-group strengthens selective exposure to media characters belonging to one's in-group. In a secondary study, Harwood (1997) employed a content analysis to code fictional, prime-time television shows with regard to the age of all characters with speaking roles. He combined the results with the Nielsen ratings of these shows and could show that young (0-20 years old), middle aged

(21-60 years old), and older (over 60 years old) viewers prefer shows featuring lead characters of their own age. In another study, Harwood (1997) manipulated short descriptions from television-viewing guides (TV guides) considering the protagonists' age, and he asked students to rate how often they might choose to view the show. A significant relationship between the protagonists' and recipients' age was shown for six of the twelve shows. In a corollary study, Harwood (1999) tried to replicate these results. However, the age group identification was not associated with preferences for shows featuring protagonists of their own age, and only weak correlations could be yielded between age group identification and age identity gratifications in particular (such as "I like watching people of my own age"). Also, a rather weak relationship between self-esteem, age identity, and viewing behavior was found. To summarize, there is a preference for characters of one's own age that can be observed in ratings and shares, but the role of identification with the own age group as a possible prerequisite for selective exposure itself is not determined.

Zillmann et al. (1995) exposed African-American and white high school students to music videos featuring popular rock, nonpolitical rap and radical political rap. They hypothesized that African-Americans would enjoy radical political rap, which articulates African-American defiance, more than the other genres, because rap considers the ethnicity of African-American performers and themes, and because it affronts agencies of power that oppress African-Americans. The authors hypothesized that whites would not appreciate this music genre (Zillmann et al., 1995). In terms of SIT, listeners prefer music favoring the in-group. As expected, African-American students enjoyed rap more than rock and Whites enjoyed rock

more than rap. The authors also investigated the music's effect on self-esteem, but no significant results were yielded in this respect.

Tarrant, North and Hargreaves (2001) set out to analyze whether self-esteem can be shown empirically to serve both as a motive for media selection and as an effect of the specific choices. First, they investigated whether self-esteem influences intergroup-discrimination and second, whether intergroup-discrimination influences self-esteem. The authors interviewed British high-school students concerning their preferred music. Results show that participants associated the in-group (classes of their own school) with positively stereotyped music (pretest-rated), whereas they associated the out-group (students from other schools) with negatively stereotyped music. Low self-esteem before the experiment was related with stronger intergroup-discrimination, but, intergroup-discrimination did not lead to higher ex-post self-esteem.

In the studies reported it is not clear under which circumstances group membership leads to selective exposure – especially since the salience of the group membership and the identification with the group has neither been manipulated nor assessed. We can assume that the categories under investigation have been meaningful to the participants because the categories under investigation such as age, ethnicity and the school visited should be of high centrality to the self-concept. However, salience has not been manipulated and there were no questions checking if the categories under question were salient at all and whether the group in question actually was important for the viewer.

In the studies that will be presented in the following paragraphs, gender and nationality as natural categories of high centrality and emotional value were chosen and salience was manipulated. Both studies were designed to investigate, whether

viewers from different countries with salient national identity evaluate television series that have been produced in either their home country or another country differently and if viewers with salient gender identity prefer programs featuring protagonists of their own or the opposite sex. It is assumed that people with salient national or gender identity are choosing entertainment television programs according to these group categories.

H 0: The mere belonging to social categories such as gender and nationality does not influence program choices to and positive evaluation of entertainment television series.

H 1a: Subjects with salient gender identity rate entertainment series featuring characters of their own gender better than series featuring characters of the opposite gender.

H 1b: Subjects with salient national identity rate entertainment series produced in their home-country better than series from a foreign country.

It can be assumed that in-group categories that people evaluate positively affect cognition and actions more that categories that are considered less important.

H 2a: Subjects who evaluate their in-group pertaining to gender better (high ratings in collective self-esteem), rate entertainment series featuring characters of their own gender better than series featuring characters of the opposite gender.

H 2b: Subjects who evaluate their in-group pertaining to nationality better (high ratings in collective self-esteem), rate entertainment series produced in their home-country better than series coming from a foreign country.

Method Study 1: U.S. and Germany

Overview

Two quasi-experiments were taken out on behalf of six paper-pencil questionnaires. The first experiment was following a 2 (male/female) x 2 (gender salient/not salient) design. Similarly, the second design was a 2 (nationality: German/nationality: U.S.-American) x 2 (nationality salient/not salient). Both designs were based on the same sample, but analysed separately. Six questionnaires have been filled out by six different groups: (1) U.S. American men with salient gender identity, (2) U.S. American women with salient gender identity, (3) U.S. Americans with salient national identity, (4) German men with salient gender identity, (5) German women with salient gender identity, (6) Germans with salient national identity. Questionnaires differed in terms of the manipulation of salience in the introduction (for exact words see below in the paragraph 'procedure'). The content and chronology of the questionnaire was basically the same for all six groups. For the first design (hypothesis 1a), answers from all men and women were analysed. For the second design (hypothesis 1b), answers from U.S.-Americans were compared with Germans.

Participants

The study was conducted in 2002 as a quasi-experiment based on a paper pencil survey. A total of 464 university students in a large U.S. Midwestern city and a Northern German city agreed to fill out questionnaires. Questionnaires were completed in introductory classes to communication, sociology and business administration. Students that were not German or U.S.-American citizens were excluded from analyses to ensure the category of nationality was clearly defined.

The final sample consisted of 419 participants (49 % U.S. and 51 % German). Fifty-seven percent of the participants were women and 36 percent were men. The average age was 23. Both Germans and U.S.-Americans watched television for approximately two hours a day ($M_{U.S.}$ = 2.0; M_{GER} = 1.9), entertainment series were tuned in more frequently by U.S. Americans ($M_{U.S.}$ = 5.6 hours/week) than by Germans (M_{GER} = 2.4 hours/week).

Measures

Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Items from "Collective Self-Esteem Scale" were used to assess evaluation of one's own social identity. The authors state that their "collective self-esteem scale attempts to assess individual levels of social identity based on their memberships in ascribed groups pertaining to gender, race, religion, ethnicity and socioeconomic class" (p. 304). The scale allows insight into the participants' affiliation with their in-group. Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) predict that high collective self-esteem individuals will be more likely to increasingly valuing attributes possessed by the in-group. The original 16-item scale was cut down to eight items to reduce redundancies among items and keep the questionnaire short (for items see appendix[i]). Responses are made on a 7-point Likert-type scale (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree").

Dependent measures were the rating of entertainment television series in terms of intention to select the series ("Would you like to watch this series on television?", scaled on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 5 between "would not enjoy it at all" and "would enjoy it a lot") and how entertaining they were perceived ("Does this series sound entertaining to you?" scaled between 1 "not entertaining at all" and 5 "very entertaining"). An index of both answers was computed.

Procedure

Six different questionnaires were administered in which participants were asked to evaluate short descriptions of entertainment series. In Germany as well as in the U.S. either the social category of men, women or the nationality were made salient. Salience was manipulated by introducing the questionnaire as follows: "Producers try to predict the television viewers' interests as successfully as possible. This is not always easy, especially since [women/men/U.S.-Americans/Germans] are interested in a variety of programs. There are considerable differences between the viewing preferences of [Germans/women] and [U.S. Americans/men]. This survey tries to find out some more about [female/male/U.S.-American/German] viewers' wants and needs." In the first part of the questionnaire ten short descriptions of entertainment television-series were presented. Descriptions varied systematically concerning genre (comedy, hospital, crime, cop and mystery), gender of protagonists and country of origin (Germany and U.S.) (see appendix). In order to ensure comparability those series featuring female protagonists within the questionnaire for women featured male protagonists in the questionnaire for men (and likewise origin was swapped for Germans/Americans). Participants were asked to evaluate the series according to their wish to watch it and to how entertaining they thought the series would be on a five-point Likert scale. The second part of the questionnaire contained scales on collective self-esteem, media use and sociodemographics.

Results

Four indices of the evaluation of entertainment series were computed: (1) evaluation of series with female protagonists ($\underline{M}$ = 2.73, $\underline{s}$ = .71), (2) with male protagonists ($\underline{M}$ = 2.69, $\underline{s}$ = .69), (3) series of German origin ($\underline{M}$ = 2.66, $\underline{s}$ = .71) as well as (4) of U.S.-American origin ($\underline{M}$ = 2.75, $\underline{s}$ = .68). Genre, gender and nationality of the series in the short descriptions were systematically varied throughout groups to avoid systematic effects of genre on the evaluation of the series. Indices were computed according to the appearance of female vs. male protagonists and according to the location where the series was said to have been produced. In the Appendix (see Table 7) you will find the Design for the U.S.-American sample as an example. For instance the first indice for this sub-sample was computed by summing up the evaluations of the series 1,4,5,7 and 9 as these were featuring a female character.

In the first hypothesis (H 0) it was stated that no significant differences in evaluation of entertainment television series will occur, if social categories are not salient. T-tests for paired groups were computed, results for both hypotheses can be found in table 1 (gender) and table 2 (nationality). As expected, no differences in the rating of entertainment series featuring female or male protagonists were found for male participants. Contrary to assumptions, women rate entertainment television series featuring female protagonists better, even if their social identity as a woman was not made salient in the first place. The nationality has the opposite effect on ratings, if national identity is not salient: U.S.-Americans prefer German series and vice versa (table 2). The null hypothesis can only partly be confirmed in terms of gender (for men) and has to be rejected in terms of nationality.

Table 1: *Evaluation of entertaining tv series with protagonists of different gender*

	M (s)		T	df	p	Cohen's d
	female prota-gonists	male prota-gonists				
Men	2.49 (.713)	2.53 (.748)	-.36	50	n.s.	-0.055
Women	2.95 (.708)	2.81 (.682)	2.23	84	< .05	0.201
Men – salient gender identity	2.41 (.676)	2.66 (.638)	-4.01	99	< .001	-0.380
Women – salient gender identity	2.86 (.621)	2.67 (.669)	3.58	151	< .001	0.294

Table 2: *Evaluation of entertaining tv series with different countries of origin*

	M (s)		T	df	p	Cohen's d
	U.S. series	German series				
U.S. Americans	2.81 (.681)	2.94 (.631)	-2.51	114	< .05	-0.198
Germans	2.71 (.618)	2.31 (.593)	7.10	136	< .001	0.661
U.S. Americans w/ salient national identity	3.00 (.727)	2.97 (.707)	-.434	98	n.s.	0.042
Germans w/ salient national identity	2.42 (.589)	2.49 (.709)	-.898	66	n.s.	-0.107

The first hypothesis stated that salient group categorization such as gender and nationality influence the evaluation of entertainment television series. It was expected that participants of either gender prefer series depicting characters for their own gender (H 1a) and that participants from the U.S. and Germany would rate entertainment series better that have been produced in their home-country (H 1b). As expected, a salient gender identity makes men and women prefer entertainment series with characters of their own gender (table 1). However, Germans rate series

that have been produced in their home-country as highly as series from the U.S.. Similarly, U.S.-Americans rate series produced in the U.S. and in Germany alike (table 2). Thus, hypothesis one was confirmed for gender, but not for nationality.

In Hypothesis 2 it was assumed that the relationship between social category and rating of entertainment television series is influenced by the evaluation with one's social group (collective self-esteem). In a preliminary analysis inter-item consistency of the collective self-esteem scale was checked. It was sufficient with α = .75. A collective self-esteem score was computed for each respondent, with a possible range from 1 to 7. Scores were separated using a median split separating people high and low with regard to collective self-esteem within the six groups. Within all groups people with high- and low self-esteem differed significantly in collective self-esteem (p <.001). Men and women who evaluated their in-group positively (high collective self-esteem) should prefer watching series with protagonists of their own gender more than those giving worse evaluations (H 2a). U.S.-Americans and Germans who rated high in collective self-esteem should prefer series from their own country (H 2b). Results are shown in tables 3 (gender) and 4 (nationality). Hypothesis 2 cannot be confirmed. Only one result (women rating female series, see table 3) goes in the expected direction.

Table 3: *Evaluation of series by subjects rating low and high in collective self esteem (cse) with salient gender identity*

subjects' gender	gender of protagonist	M		T	df	p
		low cse	high cse			
female	female	2.74	2.98	-2.41	147	< .05
	male	2.66	2.67	-.10	147	n.s.
male	female	2.27	2.54	-2.03	97	< .05
	male	2.55	2.77	-1.74	96	n.s.

Table 4: *Evaluation of series by subjects rating low and high in collective self esteem (cse) with salient national identity*

subjects' home country	series' country of origin	M		T	df	p
		low cse	high cse			
U.S.A.	U.S.	2.31	2.52	-1.43	60	n.s.
	Germany	2.21	2.70	-2.83	60	< .01
Germany	U.S.	2.83	3.15	-2.17	94	< .05
	Germany	2.85	3.08	-1.56	94	n.s.

The data are striking in the respect that all participants with high collective self-esteem rate entertainment series they are asked to evaluate better than participants with low collective self-esteem. Possible reasons for this outcome will be discussed in the next section.

Discussion

The results partly met expectations considering the influence of salient gender identity on the evaluation of entertainment series. Men and women with salient gender identity evaluated series featuring characters of their own gender better than series featuring the opposite gender. For women, though, it did not seem to be necessary to render gender identity salient: the preference for series featuring female characters already showed in the non-salience condition. However, national identity did not have the expected effects on the evaluation of series. U.S. Americans as well as Germans rate foreign entertainment fare better than series from their home-country. And participants from either country with salient national identity did not make a difference at all. They rated series coming from their home-country as highly as they rated foreign programs. The lacking influence of national identity may be caused by the audiences' different experiences with international television. Approximately 69 percent of the overall fiction that is broadcast in Europe per year was produced in the U.S. (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2003). And although the ten most successful entertainment series in Germany and many other European countries are 'homegrown' and ratings of international series never surpass those of domestic products (IP Deutschland, 2002), there certainly is experience with, and appreciation for, U.S. American media culture. In contrary U.S.-Americans have basically no experience with German television series. They might have seen films such as "Lola rennt" that basically have nothing in common with Germany's television programming. For that reason, the main goal of the second study will be to analyze two countries whose audiences have equal experiences with each others' entertainment fare and have an imagination of what television programming of the other country looks like.

Collective self-esteem, which is basically a positive evaluation of the in-group, did not influence participants' ratings of series in the expected direction. It was expected that participants who hold high appreciation for their in-group also evaluate media content dealing with in-group issues higher. However, the data reveal that people with high self-esteem rated all series better, not only the ones reflecting their in-group. The negligent effects of collective self-esteem correspond to other studies in the field (Harwood, 1999). The results might be a methodological artifact caused by acquiescence tendency. Another explanation might be that people with high self-esteem are interested in all kinds of information on the category, regardless of whether they reflect characteristics of the in-group or the out-group. The short descriptions of the programs do not indicate whether the in-group will be depicted favorably. Hence, it might contain information for all people belonging to the social category.

Method Study 2: Great Britain and Germany

In the second study a sample in Great Britain and Germany was investigated, because both countries equal each other in terms of the hours of fictional programming that is broadcast from the other country (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2002). The data was gathered in large universities in Southern Great Britain and Northern Germany in 2003 and 2004. Measures and procedure were the same as with the first study and will not be repeated here.

Participants

176 students agreed to complete the questionnaires. Students that were not German or British citizens were excluded from analyses to ensure the category of nationality was clearly defined. The final sample consists of 154 participants (56 % Great Britain and 44 % German). There were 64 percent female and 36 percent male participants in the sample. The average age was 23 years. Both, Germans and Britains watched television for approximately one and a half hours a day ($\underline{M}_{UK}$ = 1.4; $\underline{M}_{GER}$ = 1.6), entertainment series were tuned in more frequently by the British ($\underline{M}_{UK}$ = 3.7 hours/week) than by Germans ($\underline{M}_{GER}$ = 3.2).

Results

In a preliminary analysis four indices considering the evaluation of the entertainment series were computed: (1) evaluation of series with female protagonists ($\underline{M}$ = 2.73, $\underline{s}$ = .69), (2) with male protagonists ($\underline{M}$ = 2.65, $\underline{s}$ = .71), (3) series of German origin ($\underline{M}$ = 2.63, $\underline{s}$ = .75) as well as (4) series of British origin ($\underline{M}$ = 2.63, $\underline{s}$ = .75). Genre, gender and nationality of the series' short descriptions were systematically varied throughout groups. For that reason, indices were computed according to the appearance of female vs. male protagonists and the location of origin (see plan of manipulations in Appendix)

In the null hypothesis for study one it was stated that the mere belonging to social categories such as gender and nationality does not influence the rating of entertainment television series. As expected, women equally evaluate series with female and male protagonists, however, men rate series with male protagonists better, even when their gender identity is not salient (see table 5). Like in the first study, Germans as well as Britons rate foreign entertainment better (table 6). Thus,

the hypothesis can only partly be confirmed for women and has to be rejected for nationality.

Table 5: *Evaluation of entertaining tv series with protagonists of different gender*

	M (s)		T	df	p	Cohen's d
	female prota-gonists	male prota-gonists				
Men	2.44 (.708)	2.66 (.654)	-3.05	55		-0.323
Women	2.71 (.662)	2.64 (.643)	1.18	95		0.107
Men – salient gender identity	2.32 (.700)	2.65 (.747)	-4.58	43		-0.456
Women – salient gender identity	2.70 (.661)	2.67 (.671)	.43	53		0.045

Table 6: *Evaluation of entertaining tv series with different countries of origin*

	M (s)		T	df	p	Cohen's d
	British series	German series				
Britons	2.78 (.684)	2.97 (.744)	-3.42	67		-0.266
Germans	2.50 (.600)	2.36 (.648)	2.05	83		0.224
Britons – salient national identity	2.80 (.750)	2.93 (.758)	-1.24	22		-0.172
Germans – salient national identity	2.46 (.599)	2.70 (.630)	-2.03	30		-0.390

The first hypothesis assumed that salient group categorization such as gender and nationality affect evaluation of entertainment television series. Results show that men (table 5) as well as Germans (table 6) with salient social identity are more interested in exposing themselves to entertainment series that refer to their social category. In contrary, women and Britons do not choose entertainment

according to their in-group characteristics. Subsequently, hypothesis one can only partly be confirmed. Men with salient gender identity rate entertainment series better that feature male protagonists, and German participants with salient national identity evaluate homegrown entertainment better than foreign fare.

In a preliminary analysis inter-item consistency of the collective self-esteem scale was checked. It was sufficient with $\underline{\alpha}$ = .67. A collective self-esteem score was computed for each respondent, with a possible range from 1 to 7. Scores were separated using a median split into people with high- and low self-esteem. However, unlike in study 1 no significant differences between people with high- and low self-esteem could be found and for that reason, results will not be reported in detail here.

Discussion

As in the first study, the effects of group-memberships on the evaluation of entertainment series were not as clear as expected. Although for men it could be shown that they prefer media content with male protagonists, this relation was already observable when gender identity was not rendered salient (similarly as with women in the first study). An explanation for this might be that within some of the descriptions (see example for the short description given in the section 'procedure') gender identity was rendered salient merely by mentioning in-group as well as out-group.

Also, the hypotheses concerning national identity could only partly been confirmed. Although countries (Germany and Great Britain) were selected that have mutual experience with entertainment series from the other country, only one out of four results confirms expectations: Germans with salient national identity rate home-grown entertainment series better than the British. The altered sample did not

improve results. Yet, it is striking, that in both studies participants from Germany, Great Britain and the U.S. prefer foreign series if their social category was not made salient. This does not correspond with media shares indicating a strong preference for national products. However, the student sample might be a special crowd and rather open-minded considering international programming. Also, the short-descriptions demand a high amount of imagination from the participants. Short descriptions are not adequate substitutes for the viewing experience, and it is very likely that participants are not able to imagine what a series would realistically look like. Moreover, manipulations of nationality might have been too subtle since it was not mentioned within the descriptions (such as "three girls sharing an apartment in London" versus "in Berlin") but simply by mentioning the origin of production at the end of each short-description.

The results on collective self-esteem in the second study resemble those obtained in the first study and a similar explanation is liable. Either, results reflect an acquiescence tendency, or all series seemed interesting for both groups, because the short-descriptions left open, if the in-group was presented rather positive or negative and therefore supposedly contained information for either group.

Towards a Theoretical Model of SIT in Media Effects Research

Based on the two international empirical studies described in this paper and previous research on the subject matter, a number of experiences can be deducted that meet in an expanded view of SIT in media effects research. Firstly, it was shown that even social categories that are salient and of utmost importance to the viewer do not naturally determine evaluation and programme choices. The

relationship between group-membership and media-related behaviour was empirically unverifiable. The reason why nationality in our study and age in Harwood's studies (1997, 1999) did not yield the expected results might be caused by the fact that these social categories did not trigger social comparison in the first place and therefore did not lead to processes of social identity. In contrary, Zillmann et al. (1995) could show that African-Americans enjoy radical political rap more than whites. The authors yielded significant effects because the media stimulus they were using offered the possibility for social comparison. Rap articulates African-American defiance, considers the ethnicity of African-American performers and themes, and affronts agencies of power that oppress African-Americans and thereby offers a possibility for social comparison. In fact, in the other studies there wasn't even an out-group defined by the stimulus material. It is likely that participants complied only partly with the requirements made by SIT (Hinkle & Brown, 1990). Viewers might have internalized the social categories under question as a part of their self-concept and the out-group might be relevant in terms of similarity and proximity, but the material did not allow social comparison. The evaluation of short-descriptions of media entertainment usually just addressed the social category, no references to the out-group were made. Within our study, this is most apparent for nationality: series descriptions did not indicate German girls interacting with U.S.-American girls (see example for short-description in the section "procedure"), rather nationality is varied only by giving the origin of production – which might not be relevant to readers in terms of their in- or out-group definition.

Moreover, the issue of lacking in-group and out-group accentuation within entertainment television programming should be discussed in practical terms. As a matter of fact, nationality is rarely made salient by the depiction of an out-group in

entertainment series, nor is nationality an issue within successful series (with the exception of few programs such as Fawlty Towers). Thus, it is questionable whether SIT is able to explain that people prefer to watch homegrown television material. Alternatively, one can hypothesize that viewing socialization or habituation to specific production styles might play a role. Also, from a social psychological point of view, people favor products and objects that are said to be favored by members of their in-group (Fleming & Petty, 2000). Thus, the thoughts people have when they encounter a new object and form an attitude toward it can depend on people's own group membership and how important it is to them. That is, attitudes can serve an identity or self-expression function.

It might also be of relevance that in previous research studies, the in-group has been addressed, but was not clearly depicted in a positive way (Harwood, 1997, 1999; Tarrant et al., 2001). In order to become useful in terms of SIT, media content has to give the viewer a chance to make favorable comparisons and, more importantly, gather information presenting the in-group in a positive light. If positive information on the in-group wasn't derivable from the short description, no tendencies in accordance with SIT assumptions can be detected.

The meaning of identification with the in-group in terms of high collective self-esteem is yet unsettled. Harwood (1997, 1999) showed in his studies that identification with age is high in audiences of different generations, but he could not unambiguously link age identification with selective exposure. Also, in the two studies presented in this paper, participants who put high value on the in-group and rate high in collective self-esteem evaluated both series featuring the in-group and the out-group better than people with low collective self-esteem. High collective self-esteem might increase the evaluation of all kinds of programming dealing with the

social category (gender or nationality). Dealing with the in-group (e.g. female or German characters) is not a prerequisite here. This underscores the idea that there is an affinity to a series because the social category is addressed and because participants recognize similarities between their in-group and the characters in the television program, but presumably no processes of social identity took place.

Another important experience of our studies is that salience of the social category is not a prerequisite for evaluation and subjective choice. Participants whose category has not been made salient rate media entertainment related to their in-group as positively as do participants with salient social identity. As discussed before, this might be due to the fact that relevant in- and out-group are mentioned within some of the descriptions.

These observations and experiences meet in a number of ideas to expand SIT for media effects research. Media entertainment does not generally favor certain groups while totally disrespecting the associated out-groups. But there certainly are scenes within television series or shows that allow for social comparison. Therefore media entertainment can be 'used' in terms of SIT in very different ways. Consequently, two different processes of selective exposure in terms of SIT can be differentiated (see figure 1).

In the first process selective exposure takes place based on similarity and dissimilarity judgments. Media content is stimulating salience, social categorization takes place, but no social comparison is possible, because no out-group is depicted. Viewers might expose themselves to a series, because they find characters similar to themselves. In that case the belonging to in-group and out-groups respectively does not make a difference. Drawing a sharp line between these groups would not make sense. Most entertainment series might be designed to appeal to certain

audiences, but they are certainly not made to discriminate others. At most, viewers are attracted by these series because their in-group is looked upon favorably and to a lesser extent because the out-group is degraded. It can be assumed that higher-order motives that are usually fulfilled by processes of social identity such as self-esteem, self-enhancement or self-actualization, are not achieved in the first place. Within this process, identification with the in-group should increase selective exposure to all kinds of material.

Within the second process, selective exposure is guided by the chance to reach a positive social identity by finding support for the in-group characteristics and by discriminating the out-group. Media content or short-descriptions in a TV guide stimulate salience, social categorization and the material allows for social comparison. Hence, identification with the in-group should increase the selection of material that depicts the in-group in a positive way and decrease selective exposure to material that derogates the in-group.
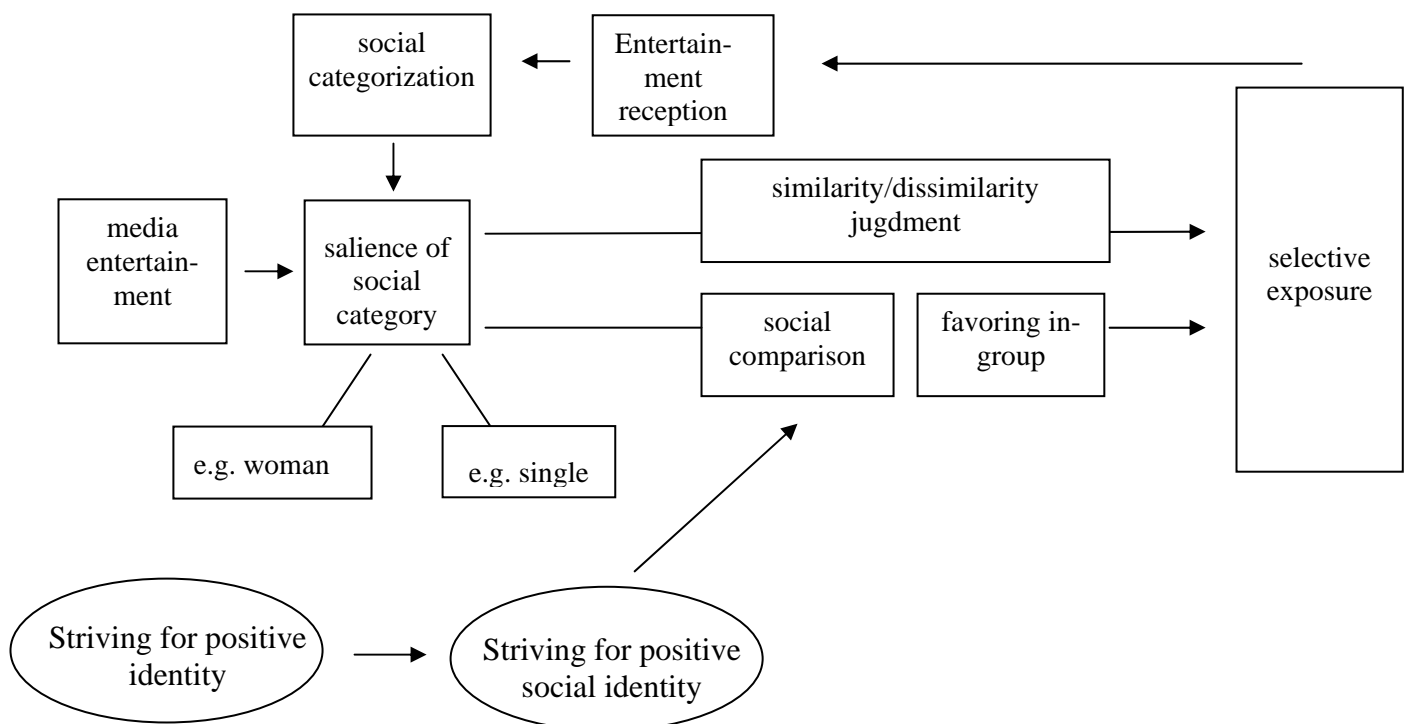
Figure 1. *Two-Process Model of SIT in Media Effects Research*

The two processes shown can be situated before or during media reception, given that recipients make choices to either to stay with a program or to switch. The model starts with recipients of entertainment content making their choices (see box labeled 'Media Entertainment'). As an example, consider a woman who wants to pick an entertainment program on television. She either browses the channels or looks at the short-descriptions in the TV guide. By doing so, certain social categories she belongs to (such as young, urban, female, and single) will become salient because some shows (such as "Sex and the City" or "Ally McBeal") fit to these categories. For her, the shows potentially offer the opportunity to watch members of her in-group and to compare herself with out-groups. The mere

depiction of her social category might lead to selective exposure (process 1). Given that she has the motive to attain positive self-esteem and positive social identity, she might select a show, because her in-group (such as female single) is depicted in a rather positive way. Also, the story offers content that might discriminate the out-group (e.g. married women or men). The woman's goal to reach positive distinctiveness might be met and she will pick the show, because of this promising outcome (process 2). Consequently, her social identity will be strengthened, because a positive evaluation of the in-group takes place during media reception. For both processes, a redefinition of the categories' characteristics might take place and succeeding media choices will be influenced by this experience.

The two-process model is suggested to explain why viewers prefer media content depicting people belonging to their in-group. Within the model, SIT is considered a theoretical groundwork for two processes with different implications and range. For further empirical work we suggest clearly differentiating between both processes by offering different kinds of stimulus material and measuring what processes are passed through.

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Appendix

Items taken from the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990).

1. I often regret that I belong to the social group I do.

2. In general I am glad to be a member of the social group I belong to.

3. Overall, my social groups are considered good by others.

4. In general others respect the social group I am a member of.

5. Most people consider my social group, on the average, to be more ineffective than other social groups.

6. Overall, my group membership has very little to do with how I feel about myself.

7. The social group I belong to is an important reflection of who I am.

8. In general, belonging to social groups is an important part of my self image.

Series descriptions used in the questionnaire (version for women; in men´s version gender is permuted)

Series 1: She is just trying to pursue her studies in politics. But she has supernatural powers, which drag her into a mysterious world, where her help is needed.

Series 2: Two young police officers, Alex and Max, are the unbeatable team in a large city's hectic police station.

Series 3: The lawyer just started his job in a small firm. In his new position he is not just active in the courtroom , but also working on criminal cases.

Series 4: An attractive agent is working undercover to discover terrorists and public enemies. Part of the game involves fighting for her own life.

Series 5: She does a great job as a physician. But apart from her work in the ICU she has to face other challenges. Her son's serious heart condition and her divorce are just some of them.

Series 6: Working for an international company he has to go to a hicktown and rebuild its failing subsidiary. Funny situations occur as the small town's inhabitants try to resist.

Series 7: The women's jailhouse is not just a punishment for crime, but also a school of crime. Hence, the lives of prisoners and their wards are criminally linked.

Series 8: Emergency Response Team AK 11 is well known throughout their section. The three male specialists risk their lives for the sake of their patients.

Series 9: Three girls sharing an apartment, facing the day-to-day trials of growing up and confronting the funny sides of their relationships with guys.

Series 10: Forensic pathologists unlock the secrets of mysterious crimes. It's good that these fathers have lives outside of work.

Table 7: *Design of the questionnaire for the U.S.-American sub-sample in study 1*

No. of series	Genre	Questionnaire 1 (gender/female salient)		Questionnaire 2 (gender/male salient)		Questionnaire 3 (nationality salient)	
		gender of protagonist	series' country of origin	gender of protagonist	series' country of origin	gender of protagonist	series' country of origin
1	Mystery	F	FRG	M	FRG	F	FRG
2	Cop	M	US	F	US	M	US
3	Crime	M	FRG	F	FRG	F	US
4	Cop	F	FRG	M	FRG	F	FRG
5	Hospital	F	US	M	US	M	FRG
6	Comedy	M	US	F	US	M	US
7	Crime	F	US	M	US	M	FRG
8	Hospital	M	FRG	F	FRG	F	US
9	Comedy	F	FRG	M	FRG	F	FRG
10	Mystery	M	US	F	US	M	US

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