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**SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND INTERGROUP
RELATIONS IN GENDER DOMINATED OCCUPATIONS**

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has found that men and women have quite different experiences of working in opposite gender dominated occupations. The effect of societal status on the processes that occur in gender dominated occupations often results in negative outcomes for women and positive outcomes for men. The study aimed to explore the attitudes and beliefs of individuals working in gender dominated occupations. It focussed specifically on how people who work in gender dominated occupations react to their group's position as a numerical majority or minority and the groups' attitudes towards their situation. Social Identity Theory (SIT, Tajfel & Turner, 1979) was adopted as a guiding framework for the research.

The sample for the study consisted of male and female volunteers working in gender dominated occupations. 110 male and female nurses and 97 men and women working in two male dominated occupations (engineers and prison officers) participated. To achieve the aims of the study specific areas of SIT were measured. The areas included identification with the gender group, how prominent gender and occupation were in the self-concept, and whether gender was used as a basis for categorisations of others. Also measured were perceptions of the status of the groups and beliefs about how fair and open to change the intergroup situation was. In addition, perceived acceptance of the ingroup and acceptance towards the outgroup, beliefs about changing the groups' position and the support or rejection of outgroups' beliefs were measured. The following specific measures were used: the Spontaneous Self-concept, the Gender Salience Scale, and Hinkle, Taylor, Fox-Cardamone and Crook's (1989) measure of group identification. SIT makes specific predictions about how beliefs about the intergroup situation and identification with the group are related to social change beliefs.

Results showed that gender affected choice of social change beliefs for achieving positive distinctiveness, with men being higher on social mobility beliefs, and women higher in social creativity and social competition beliefs. Engineers were higher in social mobility beliefs and social creativity beliefs than nurses. Status also affected

social change beliefs with low status groups being more likely to choose social competition strategies than high status groups.

Women showed less support for social competition and social creativity beliefs in the outgroup than men. Women showed more support for social mobility beliefs in the outgroup than men. Nurses showed less support for social mobility beliefs in the outgroup than engineers. Nurses had lower social competition (maintaining status) beliefs than did engineers. Status also affected support of the outgroup's social change beliefs. The low status group showed higher support of social mobility beliefs in the outgroup than the high status group, and higher social competition beliefs than the equal and high status groups. The equal group showed less support for outgroup social competition than did the high status group.

The results of regression analysis showed that gender was the best predictor of ingroup social mobility beliefs and ingroup social competition beliefs. Gender also was the best predictor of attitudes towards outgroup social mobility beliefs and ingroup social competition (to maintain status) beliefs. Gender identification was the best predictor of ingroup social creativity beliefs, and support for social creativity beliefs in the outgroup. Legitimacy beliefs were the best predictor of support or rejection of the outgroup's social competition beliefs.

The results of this study highlight the importance of using an approach that explores the different variables that predict each social change belief rather than focussing on the relationship between identification and differentiation as previous studies have done.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstractii

Acknowledgments.....iv

Table of Contentsv

List of Tablesviii

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background.....1

1.2 Overview of the Current Study..... 5

Chapter 2: Gender Dominated Occupations and Tokenism

2.1 Introduction.....7

2.2 Tokenism7

2.3 Male Dominated Occupations-
Engineers and Prison Officers19

2.4 Female Dominated Occupations- Nurses.....25

2.5 Chapter Summary28

Chapter 3 Social Identity Theory

3.1 Overview of SIT29

3.2 SIT and Gender Relations.....32

3.3 Social Categorisations.....35

3.4 Social Identity38

3.5 Salience of Identities47

3.6 Psychological Distinctiveness.....57

3.7 Social Comparison Processes59

3.8 Beliefs about the Intergroup Situation61

3.9	Social Change Belief Systems	
	– Achieving Positive Distinctiveness	72
3.10	Social Change Belief Systems	
	-Maintaining Positive Distinctiveness	80
3.11	Chapter Summary	86
Chapter 4	Research Themes and Hypotheses	
4.1	Introduction.....	88
4.2	Gender Identity	88
4.3	Identity Salience.....	88
4.4	Beliefs about the Intergroup Situation	90
4.5	Social Change Belief Systems	
	– Achieving Positive Distinctiveness	91
4.6	Social Change Belief Systems	
	-Maintaining Positive Distinctiveness	93
Chapter 5	Method	
5.1	Overview.....	96
5.2	Participants	97
5.3	Materials	99
5.4	Design and Procedure	122
Chapter 6	Results	
6.1	Gender Identity	125
6.2	Identity Salience	131
6.3	Beliefs about the Intergroup Situation	139
6.4	Social Change Belief Systems	
	- Achieving Positive Distinctiveness	146
6.5	Social Change Belief Systems	
	-Maintaining Positive Distinctiveness	166

Chapter 7	Discussion	
7.1	Gender Identity	186
7.2	Identity Salience.....	192
7.3	Beliefs about the Intergroup Situation	197
7.4	Social Change Belief Systems – Achieving Positive Distinctiveness	203
7.5	Social Change Belief Systems – Maintaining Positive Distinctiveness	213
7.6	Conclusion	221
References	223
Appendix A	239
	Questionnaire One – Female Nurses.....	239
	Questionnaire Two – Male Engineers.....	262
Appendix B	Social Change Belief Items	280
Appendix C	Items used in the Main Study.....	287
	Male Ingroup Measure	287
	Male Outgroup Measure	289
	Female Ingroup Measure	292
	Female Outgroup Measure.....	294

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Predicted Relationships between Identification and Social Change Beliefs	93
Table 2	Predicted Relationships between Acceptance and Social Change Beliefs	95
Table 3	Internal Consistency Alphas of the Gender Identification Scale (Main Study).....	104
Table 4	Factor Loadings for the Gender Identification Scale (Main Study).....	106
Table 5	Internal Consistency Alphas for the Gender Salience Scale (Main Study).....	108
Table 6	Internal Consistency Alphas of Social Change Beliefs (Pilot Study).....	113
Table 7	Ingroup Social Change Beliefs Internal Consistency Alphas (Main Study).	115
Table 8	Outgroup Social Change Beliefs Internal Consistency Alphas (Main Study)	115
Table 9	Factor Loading for Social Change Beliefs Male Ingroup Measure (main study)	118
Table 10	Factor Loading for Social Change Beliefs Male Outgroup Measure (main study)	119
Table 11	Factor Loading for Social Change Beliefs Female Ingroup Measure (main study)	120
Table 12	Factor Loading for Social Change Beliefs Female Outgroup Measure (main study)	121
Table 13	Outgroup Social Change Beliefs Internal Consistency Alphas for Extracted Factors (Main Study)	122
Table 14	Ingroup Social Change Beliefs Internal Consistency Alphas for Extracted Factors (Main Study)	122

Table 15	Mean Gender Identification Scores (for each sample).....	127
Table 16	Mean Gender Identification Scores for Each Status Group	128
Table 17	Mean Gender Identification Scores for Majority and Minority Groups.....	129
Table 18	Correlations between Gender Identification and other variables (total sample)	130
Table 19	Free Answers on Gender Identification	131
Table 20	Mean Identity Salience Scores for each Sample	133
Table 21	Mean Identity Salience Scores for Each Status Group	132
Table 22	Mean Identity Salience for Minority and Majority Groups	134
Table 23	Correlations between Gender Salience and Occupational Salience.....	134
Table 24	Paired Sample T-Test results for Gender and Occupational Salience.....	135
Table 25	Gender Salience Means for Outgroup Present and Outgroup Absent	135
Table 26	Correlations between Gender Salience and Other Variables	137
Table 27	Free Answers on Gender Salience	138
Table 28	Distribution of Respondents in their Beliefs about the Intergroup Situation.....	140
Table 29	Beliefs about the Intergroup Situation held by Majority and Minority Group	141
Table 30	Perceptions of Legitimacy and Stability for Each Status Group....	142
Table 31	Mean Acceptance Scores for Each Sample	143
Table 32	Mean Acceptance Scores for Each Status Group	144

Table 33	Mean Acceptance Scores for Minority and Majority Groups.....	147
Table 34	Mean Ingroup Social Change Beliefs for Each Sample.....	148
Table 35	Mean Ingroup Social Change Beliefs for Each Status Group.....	150
Table 36	Mean Ingroup Social Change Beliefs for Minority and Majority Groups.....	151
Table 37	Correlations between Gender Identification Scales and Ingroup Social Change Beliefs (total sample).....	152
Table 38	Correlations between Gender Identification Scales and Ingroup Social Change Beliefs (men and women).....	154
Table 39	Correlations between Gender Identification Scales and Ingroup Social Change Beliefs for Each Status Group	156
Table 40	Correlations between Gender Identification Scales and Ingroup Social Change Beliefs for Majority and Minority Groups.....	157
Table 41	Mean Ingroup Social Change Beliefs fro Legitimacy and Stability Beliefs	159
Table 42	Correlations between Acceptance and Ingroup Social Change Beliefs (total sample)	160
Table 43	Correlations between Acceptance and Ingroup Social Change Beliefs (men and women)	160
Table 44	Correlations between Acceptance and Ingroup Social Change Beliefs for Each Status Group	162
Table 45	Correlations between Acceptance and Ingroup Social Change Beliefs for Majority and Minority Groups.....	163
Table 46	Standardized Regression Coefficients between Ingroup Social Change Beliefs and Predictor Variables.	164
Table 47	Strategies used to Improve the General Situation for the Ingroup.	165
Table 48	Reactions of the Outgroup to Social Change Strategies	166
Table 49	Mean Outgroup Social Change Beliefs for each Sample.....	168

Table 50	Mean Outgroup Social Change Beliefs for Each Status Group	170
Table 51	Mean Outgroup Social Change Beliefs for the Minority and Majority Groups.....	173
Table 52	Correlations between Gender Identification Scales and Outgroup Social Change Beliefs (total sample).....	172
Table 53	Correlations between Gender Identification Scales and Outgroup Social Change Beliefs (men and women).....	173
Table 54	Correlations between Gender Identification Scales and Outgroup Social Change Beliefs for each status group.....	176
Table 55	Correlations between Gender Identification Scales and Outgroup Social Change Beliefs for Majority and Minority Groups.....	177
Table 56	Mean Social Change Beliefs for Legitimacy and Stability Beliefs	181
Table 57	Correlations between Acceptance and Outgroup Social Change Beliefs (total sample).....	178
Table 58	Correlations between Acceptance and Outgroup Social Change Beliefs (men and women).....	180
Table 59	Correlations between Acceptance and Outgroup Social Change Beliefs for each Status Group	181
Table 60	Correlations between Acceptance and Outgroup Social Change Beliefs (majority and minority groups).....	182
Table 61	Standardized Regression Coefficients between Outgroup Social Change Beliefs and Predictor Variables	184
Table 62	Social Change Strategies Used by the Outgroup	185
Table 63	Best Predictors of Ingroup Social Change Beliefs.....	212
Table 64	Best predictors of Outgroup Social Change Beliefs	220