



## Social identity and the dynamics of leadership: Leaders and followers as collaborative agents in the transformation of social reality

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### Abstract

Traditional models see leadership as a form of zero-sum game in which leader agency is achieved at the expense of follower agency and vice versa. Against this view, the present article argues that leadership is a vehicle for social identity-based collective agency in which leaders and followers are partners. Drawing upon evidence from a range of historical sources and from the BBC Prison Study, the present article explores the two sides of this partnership: the way in which a shared sense of identity makes leadership possible and the way in which leaders act as entrepreneurs of identity in order to make particular forms of identity and their own leadership viable. The analysis also focuses (a) on the way in which leaders' identity projects are constrained by social reality, and (b) on the manner in which effective leadership contributes to the transformation of this reality through the initiation of structure that mobilizes and redirects a group's identity-based social power.

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## 1. Introduction

In May 1840 Thomas Carlyle delivered a series of influential lectures on ‘Heroes and Hero Worship’. In the first of these lectures, ‘The Hero as Divinity’, he wrote that “Universal history, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here”. He went on “We cannot look, however imperfectly, upon a great man, without gaining something by him. He is the living light-fountain, which is good and pleasant to be near. The light which enlightens, which has enlightened the darkness of the world” (Carlyle, 1840, p. 3). In this lecture Carlyle expresses a core strand of western thought that can be traced back as far as Plato (380bc/1993): a glorification of the human will and a fascination with those figures whose will appears to set them apart from the mass.

In reviewing the historical trajectory of such ideas, Lindholm (1990) charts a lineage which progresses from John Stewart Mill’s notion of the genius whose pleasures are of a higher order than the animalistic gratifications of the majority (Mill, 1975), through Nietzsche’s ‘superman’, who would let nothing—especially not compassion—stop him satisfying his appetites (Nietzsche, 1977), to Le Bon’s notion of the hypnotic crowd leader (Le Bon, 1895/1947) and Weber’s concept of charisma (Weber, 1921, 1947). From this field, Weber emerged as a seminal figure in the study of leadership and as the high priest of rationalism—prophesizing that the future of humanity would lie in an inexorable advance of instrumental rationality (*zweckrationalitat*) and institutional routine. However, it was not a future he viewed with equanimity. He wrote: “The routinized economic cosmos . . . has been a structure to which the absence of love is attached from the very root . . . . Not summer’s bloom lies ahead of us . . . but rather a polar night of icy darkness and hardness” (Weber, quoted in Lindholm, 1990, p. 27). Only charismatic prophets could save society from such a fate, but their time, he thought, was almost gone.

Of course, events surrounding World War II proved Weber right about the polar night, but they also showed him to be spectacularly wrong about the role that charismatic leaders would have to play in historical progress. For, far from saving the masses from darkness, charismatic dictators created the gloom. A core problem with Weber’s analysis lay in a conception which *counterposed* the will of the leader to that of the rest of the population. According to his view, leaders need agency because masses lack it and hence heroic leadership is required in order to save the masses from themselves.

It is clear, though, that the dictators themselves saw the masses as a material to be used (and abused) in the service of the leader rather than vice versa. Both Hitler and Mussolini articulated this through a strikingly similar conception of the leader as an artist. An insight into this emerges from an interview that the German journalist Emil Ludwig conducted with Mussolini in 1932. In this Mussolini described how:

When I feel the masses in my hands, since they believe in me, or when I mingle with them, and they almost crush me, then I feel like one with the masses. However, there is at the same time a little aversion, much as the poet feels towards the materials he works with. Doesn’t the sculptor sometimes break the marble out of rage, because it does not precisely mold in his hands according to his vision? . . . Everything depends upon that, to dominate the masses as an artist (cited in Falasca-Zamponi, 2000, p. 21).

In a similar vein, Hitler described himself as an artist who created history through his domination of the masses where they themselves were incapable of creation. As Susan Sontag wrote of Nazi Germany “never before was the relation of masters and slaves so consciously aestheticized” (cited in Spotts, 2002, p. 54).

Having witnessed its destructive potential, in the post-war period, attraction to strong leaders was viewed with horror. Thus what Weber had viewed as a cure for social ills came to be seen as an extreme form of dysfunctionality. Now a plethora of clinical studies diagnosed such leaders as suffering variously from psychoticism (Bion, 1961), paranoid delusions (Halperin, 1983), narcissistic personality (Kohut, 1985) and, more particularly, borderline personality disorder (Lindholm, 1990; Waite, 1977). More generally, the focus on the autonomy of leaders was gradually replaced by an emphasis on the contextual constraints upon them. However, the problem with such approaches was that they did not restore balance by according agency to the people as well as to their leaders but rather by removing it from both. According to this view, leaders were now prisoners either of their pathological desires or of the situation, but the masses were still dupes.

Bearing in mind the issues raised by this literature, those interested in matters of leadership face a series of moral and intellectual dilemmas (Reicher & Haslam, *in press-b*). Can we celebrate effective leadership without running the risk of promoting tyranny? Must the agency of leaders necessarily be opposed to that of followers? Can we explain how leaders are able to transform people's thinking and behavior without denying the ability of people to think for themselves?

In seeking to address such questions, in this article we argue that the agency of leaders and followers does not constitute a zero-sum game. Rather, in line with a social identity approach to leadership (e.g., Haslam, 2001; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a; Turner, 1991; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003a), we consider them to be interdependent in such a way that leaders and followers both actively rely on each other to create the conditions under which mutual influence is possible. To be more specific, we argue, first, that the return to an emphasis on the creative and transformational aspects of leadership (inspired by Weber's early work) is welcome and overdue. Indeed, sidestepping these aspects ignores the very elements that make leadership socially and intellectually significant. Second, we suggest that the impact of leaders on followers must be addressed in the context of their joint involvement in a social categorical relationship. It is this mutual identity-based relationship which both enables and constrains the practice of leadership and which provides the basis for overcoming the traditional opposition between the leader and the led. Third, however, we argue that existing social identity models of leadership need to be developed in order to account for the active manner in which (a) leaders seek to shape identities and (b) followers respond to these attempts. Fourth and finally, we suggest that the balance between autonomy and constraint in leadership is a dynamic process that unfolds over time.

In order to illustrate and promote these ideas, a balanced understanding of leadership must be based on methods that can address the temporal development of interactions. As we have argued elsewhere (Haslam & McGarty, 2001), over time, social psychological inquiry has increasingly tended to ignore interactions between people and has become particularly reluctant to explore the development of such interactions. One recent exception, however, was the BBC Prison Study (Haslam & Reicher, 2002; Reicher & Haslam, *in press-a*)—an 8-day study of 15 participants who were randomly assigned to either a high- or a low-status group within a closed institutional environment (as guards or prisoners in a specially constructed 'prison').

The overall aim of the study (which was televised as a series of four BBC documentaries: *The Experiment*; Koppel & Mirsky, 2002) was to investigate the ways in which people respond to a system of inequality. It took the form of an experimental case study which was intended to test hypotheses derived from social identity theory concerning the conditions under which people identify with their groups and act collectively in order to challenge existing status relations (for a full report of the study, see Reicher & Haslam, *in press-a*). However, one aspect of these collective processes that was of

particular interest (and which is most pertinent to the present article) concerned the process of leadership and the way in which this relates to the development of social identity over time (Haslam & Reicher, 2005). Accordingly, while we will support the theoretical claims in this article using a wide range of empirical sources, we will use evidence from the BBC study in order to illustrate specific facets of leadership and the ways in which they inter-relate. Before doing this, however, let us start with a brief consideration of the current emphasis on transformation in mainstream leadership research.

## 2. Leadership as a transformational process

Broadly speaking, research into leadership can be divided into three phases (Haslam, 2004). In line with the ‘Great Man’ theory alluded to above (e.g., Carlyle, 1840), the first was characterized by a search for the distinctive intellectual and social characteristics (e.g., intelligence, good judgement, insight and imagination) which set leaders apart from followers and which make them inherently more adept at directing, influencing and inspiring others. Nowadays such theories have few academic adherents. There is simply no reliable evidence of any traits which either distinguish leaders from non-leaders or which predict leadership effectiveness (e.g., Jenkins, 1947; Mann, 1959; Nadler & Tushman, 1990; Sherif & Sherif, 1953; Steiner, 1972; Stogdill, 1948). However, even if one cannot identify leaders by their characters, there is better evidence that it may be possible to do so by their actions. For instance, Fleishman et al. (Fleishman, 1953; Fleishman & Peters, 1962, see also Bowers & Seashore, 1966) showed that effective leaders display (a) *consideration* for the interests and welfare of followers and (b) *initiation of structure*—that is, a capacity to structure the activities of followers with a view to achieving group goals.

The inability to discover any single factors that mark out ‘Great Men’, coupled with a growing discomfort with such domineering figures, led to a second phase of research in which it was argued that leadership is a contingent product of *both* personal and situational factors (Gibb, 1958). Within this school of thought, probably the most prominent approach has been that articulated by Fiedler (e.g., Fiedler, 1964; Fiedler & Garcia, 1987). However, once again, the evidence that might support this model is mixed at best (e.g., see Schriesheim, Tepper, & Tetrault, 1994). Nevertheless—at least in part because it formalizes lay thinking on the topic (e.g., as articulated by Sarros & Butchatsky, 1996)—Fiedler’s specific model and the contingency approach in general continues to appeal both to students of leadership and to writers of organizational textbooks.

Despite this appeal, there is something profoundly unsatisfactory about the contingency approach. Distaste at ‘Great Man’ conceptions may well be understandable, but by reducing the vitality of leadership to a mundane and mechanical matching process researchers appear to have swung the pendulum too far in the opposite direction. As a result, the analysis becomes part of the “routinized economic cosmos” against which Weber railed. Certainly the sense of “something outside the realm of everyday routine” which he identified as lying at the heart of the leadership process is lost between the textbook and the boardroom, between the training course and the battlefield (Weber, 1947, p. 361). Not surprisingly, then, as part of a third phase of research which attempts to rediscover some of the ‘magic’ that is missing from recipe-like contingency models, there has recently been a rediscovery of Weber’s concept of charismatic leadership.

From our perspective, there are two points which emerge from this work that are particularly important. The first is that charismatic leaders are capable of *redefining* group norms and objectives

(House & Shamir, 1993; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; see also Haslam et al., 2001; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer & Hogg, 2004). They not only direct, but actively transform, their followers' attitudes and behavior (Burns, 1978; Peters & Waterman, 1995). This point is very much in keeping with Weber's observation that charisma is effective because it promotes "a subjective or internal reorientation born out of suffering, conflicts, or enthusiasm" (1947, p. 363).

The second significant feature of such transformational approaches is that they broaden the analytic focus to include not only leaders but also followers and indeed the relationship between the two (e.g., Hollander, 1958, 1995). Indeed, if anything, the focus of Weber's conception was more on the latter than the former as he saw charisma as something *conferred* on leaders by their followers or 'disciples'. Although some recent research (e.g., Burns, 1978) has regressed to a more trait-based approach, Weber's original insight has been partly restored by Lord's leadership categorization theory within which leadership is seen as "the process of being perceived by others as a leader" (Lord & Maher, 1991, p. 11; see also Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984).

What, then, determines whether and when followers invest their faith in a leader and open themselves up to the process of transformation? The ostensible answer is often provided in intra- or interpersonal terms. Yet often there is at least an implicit acknowledgement that a collective level of analysis is important as well. Thus, as we have already seen, transformational theories emphasize the redefinition of *group* norms and objectives. Along similar lines, House's (1971) path-goal theory sees the successful leader as someone who engages followers' wills by reconciling their personal goals with those of the collective. Equally, leadership categorization theorists have increasingly acknowledged that expectations about leaders vary according to context and that there may be value in examining how the categorization process relates to the ongoing dynamics of the group and its interests (Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999; Lord & Hall, 2003).

There is a truth here which is so obvious that it is easy to overlook. Leadership is not simply a matter of leaders, or even of leaders and followers. Rather it has to do with the *relationship between leaders and followers within a social group* (Haslam, 2001; Sherif, 1962, p. 17; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003b). Indeed, whenever we talk of a leader, there is an implicit (but often absent) reference to an associated group: the nation, the political party, the corporation, the research group, and so on. It is therefore incumbent upon theorists of leadership to retain the insights of previous research while also making explicit, both empirically and theoretically, this group setting. Equally, any consideration of leader and follower agency must consider their inter-relationship within the group. This notion of leadership as a group process is the starting point for the social identity approach to leadership, to which we now turn.

### 3. The social identity approach to leadership

The remainder of this article outlines our social identity approach to leadership in three sections. In this first section, we show how leaders and followers are defined with respect to a social categorical framework. In the next section we examine the agency of leaders in terms of the definition of this framework. Then, in the third section, we show how leaders both enable followers to become agents and how leaders are reliant upon the ability of followers to make identity definitions manifest in practice.

The first step of our argument is, in fact, present from the very first statement of self-categorization theory (Turner, 1982), even if the term leadership is not actually used. Turner argues that the psychological basis of group membership is the cognitive act of defining oneself as a category member

(i.e., the act of social identification). This entails a process of self-stereotyping whereby, having identified with the group, people seek to ascertain the ‘critical attributes’ associated with the given category membership and conform to them. This has three important implications for the influence process:

1. The people who are subject to common influence are those who share identification with a common social category.
2. The ideas and proposals that are influential are those that are consonant with the critical attributes of the social category.

And, most critical for present purposes,

3. The people who are influential are those who are in a position to supply information about the category definition—in particular those who are seen as (proto)typical group members (see also Reicher, 1982).

This final point is developed by Turner (1987, p. 74) as one of the formal hypotheses in his detailed exposition of self-categorization theory:

**H.22.** That the direction of effective influence within the group (who successfully influences whom) is a function of the relative persuasiveness of the members, which is based on the degree to which their response (their arguments, position, attributes, experience, role, etc.) is perceived as prototypical of the initial distribution of responses of the group as a whole, i.e., the degree of relative consensual support for a member.

In short, those in a position to direct the group are those who are seen to be most prototypical of the group position in a given context (which itself is defined as the position which most clearly differentiates between the ingroup and the outgroup and therefore varies as a function of which outgroup is the subject of comparison; Turner & Haslam, 2001).

In recent years, these ideas have been repackaged as explicit ‘social identity models of leadership’ (for overviews see Haslam, 2001; Hogg, 2001; Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2004; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Turner & Haslam, 2001; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003a)—although the term self-categorization models might be more accurate since social identity theory contains no analysis of either prototypicality or social influence (see Haslam, 2001; Turner, 2004, for a discussion). Moreover, a considerable amount of evidence has now been accumulated to support two key points. First, that leadership is indeed contingent upon leaders being perceived to be prototypical of a social identity that they share with followers (Duck & Fielding, 1999, 2003; Hogg, Hains, & Mason, 1998; Jetten, Duck, Terry, & O’Brien, 2002; Platow, van Knippenberg, Haslam, van Knippenberg, & Spears, in press; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003b; all after Turner, 1991). Second, that in order to be influential and effective, leaders need to represent and define social identity *in context* (Ellemers, de Gilder, & Haslam, 2004; Haslam & Platow, 2001; Haslam et al., 2001; Platow, Hoar, Reid, Harley, & Morrison, 1997; Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001).

Yet while the body of empirical work that has been used to advance these claims is considerable, this has largely focused on the capacity for leaders to receive support or to exert influence as a function of the extent to which their behavior embodies characteristics of a *pre-existing* identity that is shared by would-

be followers (the research participants) in a pre-determined context. For example, in Haslam & Platow's (2001) research, the independent variable was the apparent decision by a (male) leader to allocate places on a decision-making committee to individuals who did or did not share a political identity (for or against education cuts) with the research participants (university students). The dependent variable was the extent to which those participants supported the leader (Experiments 1 and 2) and were willing to engage in intellectual activity (generating suggestions) that would help translate his policy vision into action (Experiment 2). As predicted, support and tangible followership depended on the extent to which the leader had displayed ingroup favoritism (i.e., allocating more places on the committee to individuals who were against education cuts) rather than even-handedness, and was thus perceived by participants to embody relevant ingroup norms.

In studies such as these, a context is created such that the relevant identities (e.g., as a student, as a member of a particular political group) exist (or are assumed to exist) *a priori* and are mechanically invoked for the purposes of experimental manipulation. This leads to neglect an implicit and logically prior assumption: that the very possibility of leadership depends upon the existence (or manufacture) of a shared social identity (Haslam, 2004; Haslam, Postmes, & Ellemers, 2003). Where people do form such a group, then one can expect leadership to emerge. Where they fail to form such a group, then it will be impossible for anyone to exercise leadership. The BBC Prison Study provides an excellent illustration of these emergent processes (see Haslam & Reicher, 2005, for a full empirical account of the study and Haslam & Reicher, *in press*, for an extended discussion of the study's general relevance to organizational theory).

As discussed elsewhere (Reicher & Haslam, *in press-a*), our initial predictions for the study were that the guards, as members of a high-status category, would identify with their group from the outset. The prisoners, as members of a low-status group, were predicted only to identify with their group membership when there was no opportunity to improve their position through individual effort—that is, when the category boundaries were *impermeable* (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; see also Ellemers, 1993; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). In order to manipulate permeability, at the start of the study participants were led to believe that it was possible to be promoted from prisoner to guard. However, after a promotion had actually taken place on Day 3, participants were informed that promotion was no longer possible.

For the prisoners, these predictions were upheld. However, for the guards they were not. Part of the reason for this was that, while guard status was high within the immediate context of the study, participants were aware that their behaviors could be seen on television and that external audiences might evaluate them negatively if they were to behave in an authoritarian manner. This was particularly true for some participants who were members of liberal organizations in their everyday lives and hence were extremely uncomfortable with the role of guard. The result was that the guards could never form a consensus about who they were and how they should act. The differences between them as to how punitive or lenient they should be were exacerbated once boundaries between groups were made impermeable and the prisoners began to challenge the system. This was reflected in daily psychometric measures. In the first 2 days of the study, guards and prisoners had similar levels of identification with their group. However, after the promotion, the identification of the prisoners increased dramatically while that of the guards declined.

Importantly, these patterns of change in identification over time were mirrored in patterns of leadership behavior. Not surprisingly, given their formal position at the start of the study, participants perceived there to be clearer leadership amongst the guards than amongst the prisoners. Yet there was a

significant interaction such that, over time, leadership among the guards declined while that among the prisoners increased—so that, by Day 6, the prisoners were perceived to have more of a leadership structure than the guards. The same basic patterns were evident both in ratings made by the participants themselves and in those provided by independent observers who watched events unfold over the course of 4 h of television documentary.

Thus, as the guards' sense of shared social identity declined, so their leadership structure declined. Conversely, as a sense of shared identity amongst the prisoners increased, so their leadership structure increased. These parallel effects are consistent with the argument that leadership depends upon the existence of shared social identity (associated with a group that is functioning effectively), but they do not in and of themselves demonstrate the nature of the inter-connection. Richer and more vivid support for this claim emerges from the observational data.

Perhaps the most striking link between the lack of shared identity amongst the guards and their refusal to allow others to represent them came in their failure to develop a shift system. The guards had been advised to develop this in order to avoid the exhaustion that would otherwise result from the fact that their supervisory responsibilities extended from the moment the prisoners woke to the moment they went to sleep. However, this shift system never developed because going off shift required a level of trust in one's colleagues that a lack of identity never allowed (Kramer, Brewer, & Hanna, 1996; Platow, Haslam, Foddy, & Grace, 2003; Tyler & Blader, 2000). Indeed, because there was no shared understanding of appropriate behavior, each guard felt it necessary to be on duty the entire time in order to monitor what the others were doing. This also meant that when one guard decided to treat the prisoners punitively in response to some rule violation, another would typically seek to pre-empt him by making a conciliatory gesture.

These divisions were exemplified in the first (and only) 'disciplinary meeting' held by the guards. They had summoned a prisoner,  $JE_p$ , who, earlier in the day, had thrown his lunch plate to the floor as a complaint about the quality of the food, and had then refused to comply with orders to return to his cell. As soon as one guard proposed a punishment, another tried to temper the impact of this by giving the prisoner a choice about how it should be administered (in order to identify speakers, initials are provided along with the subscript p or g to indicate prisoner or guard):

*Extract 1*

$TM_g$ : We've had our disciplinary meeting and it's been decided that you'll spend tomorrow one-and-a-half hours in the isolation cell.

$TQ_g$ : Or you can take it tonight, you can do it tonight.

$JE_p$  then asked what would happen if he refused to accept the punishment. Three different guards now proceeded to talk over each other, such that no clear voice predominated and no clear position emerged. This allowed  $JE_p$ , despite the fact that he was in a subordinate position and outnumbered six to one, to take control of the meeting and to dictate to the guards how they should act:

*Extract 2*

$JE_p$ : Can I suggest something before I leave? Because I think it's a very valid point.

$TA_g$ : Very quickly please.

$JE_p$ : It's been very confusing this disciplinary meeting.

$TA_g$ : Of course, it's our first one.



*JE<sub>p</sub>*: Can I suggest something—that maybe if you’re going to ask any questions, one of you ask them, if you’ve got any questions that maybe you make a note of them and one person ask them. Because this has been a nightmare for me.

*TQ<sub>g</sub>*: We understand if it’s. . .

*JE<sub>p</sub>*: This has been an absolute nightmare. I’m listening to you [points to TQ], I’m listening to you [points to TM], [IB<sub>g</sub>] hasn’t said anything, and it’s difficult to deal with.

Now, contrast this lack of consensus and of leadership with the following interaction that occurred during a meeting between prisoners and guards on Day 5 of the study. Earlier that day, PB<sub>p</sub> had stolen a set of the guards’ keys and DM<sub>p</sub>, who had been elected as the prisoners’ representative was negotiating the return of the keys in return for certain concessions:

*Extract 3*

*DM<sub>p</sub>*: We’re giving you the opportunity to avoid a one-to-one personal confrontation. By doing this collectively I’m going to get you the keys. I didn’t steal the keys, now you’ve got to believe me on that.

*TA<sub>g</sub>*: We should have looked after the keys, but we got a bit too trusting and because of that one of your lads—one of your lads, as in one of your members—nicked the keys. And now you’re basically saying to us: ‘we’ll give you the keys back if you give us something in return’.

*DM<sub>p</sub>*: Alright. OK. Let’s tell you our position on that: Nobody has got your keys. Is that what you want? Because that’s the position that’s going to prevail if I go out of here and I say, you know, there’s no broad agreement on this. And it’ll not be the keys tomorrow, it’ll be something else.

During this interchange DM<sub>p</sub> talks without interruption, he talks confidently for his group and he is persuasive that what he says is what the group will do (or will not do). So if he says that the guards’ refusal to cooperate will lead to retention of the keys and to continued subversion by the prisoners, then that will happen. As a consequence, despite being in a numerical minority in the room, DM<sub>p</sub> (and the position of the prisoners) prevails. This is a simple and obvious example of leadership, a leadership that is premised on the presumption of group consensus, and a leadership which is, by that token, effective in advancing group interests. To put it slightly differently, it is because DM<sub>p</sub> is in a position to exercise leadership *within* the prisoners that he is also in a position to exercise leadership of the prisoners *against* the guards.

These contrasting examples demonstrate the way in which the ability to lead depends upon the ability to represent a group consensus which in turn is a product of shared identity (Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty, & Reynolds, 1998). Where there is no group and no consensus every other voice represents a threat to one’s own. But where there is a group and there is a consensus then one voice can speak for all. Thus leaders and followers are bound together in a double sense. First, their relationship is dependent upon the existence of a shared social identity. Second, their relationship is dependent upon an agreement as to what constitutes the consensual group position and who best occupies that position. In both senses,

Leadership is a process of mutual influence that revolves around a partnership in a social self-categorical relationship. . . (Haslam, 2001, p. 85).

This formulation overcomes the opposition between leaders and followers and the sense that the more effective the leader is, the more supine followers become (cf. Weber, 1921). Yet it does not, in and of

itself, establish that both parties are active. In fact, it could be argued that quite the opposite is the case. We have already noted the tendency for research on leadership in the social identity tradition to predefine social contexts and social identities. This research renders all participants passive and therefore could be read to suggest that neither leaders nor followers have agency. Do people simply wait until the social reality is such that a group exists and one amongst them happens to exemplify the group prototype? Is it the case that at that point, the prototypical individual assumes the mantle of leadership and others become followers? As with early situationist models (Cooper & McGaugh, 1963), the active and transformational aspects of leadership could here be ignored entirely.

Such an approach would, of course, be a caricature. It doesn't represent the views of those social identity researchers who investigate leadership and it certainly doesn't represent social identity and self-categorization theories themselves. But the danger is that, as long as researchers look one-sidedly at the ways in which social identity frames leadership it gains credence by default. It is therefore all the more important to take seriously the second part of the above quotation from Haslam:

... [Leadership] is about the creation, coordination and control of a shared sense of 'us'. Within this relationship neither the individual nor the group is static. What 'us' means is negotiable, and so too is the contribution that leaders and followers make to any particular definition of 'us-ness' (2001, p. 85).

In other words, we need, as a priority, to look at how leaders and followers are actively involved in framing social identities. For us, leadership activity and leadership effectiveness largely revolves around the leader's ability to create identity definitions and to engage people in the process of turning those definitions into practical realities. Leaders (and followers), we argue, are not mere ciphers, but rather *entrepreneurs* of identity (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001, 2003). This dynamic view of the leadership process is underpinned by a dynamic model of the relationship between social reality, social identity and collective action. We will consider these issues in the next section.

#### **4. Leaders as entrepreneurs of identity**

If one bears in mind that self-categorization theory applies to the behavior of people as members of large social categories such as nations, religions, political parties, corporations or trade unions, and not just to small groups of friends and acquaintances, then it is possible to reformulate its tenets concerning social influence in the following terms:

1. Social identities provide the parameters of mass mobilization.
2. Who is included within a social category determines who will be mobilized.
3. The content ascribed to the social category will determine what they will be mobilized for.
4. The prototypes of the category will determine who will be in a position to direct the mobilization.

In short, category definitions are the basis of social power (Turner, 2005). They are, quite literally, world-making things. Those who control category definitions are therefore in a position to make and remake the world. This makes the question of how category definitions come about a matter of societal as well as individual concern.

Self-categorization theorists view social categories in relation to social reality (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). They stress the ways in which categories reflect the existing structure of social relations in a given context and hence how they change along with the changing structure of context (Haslam & Turner, 1992, 1995; Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994). However, Reicher and Hopkins (1996a, 1996b, 2001, 2003; Hopkins & Reicher, 1997a, 1997b; Hopkins, Reicher, & Kahani-Hopkins, 2003; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Reicher, Drury, Hopkins, & Stott, 2001) have complemented this analysis by addressing the other side of the equation—the way in which category definitions are used to create new structures of social relations in the future. That is, these researchers explore the manner in which category definitions shape mass mobilizations which in turn have the potential to shape social reality.

The importance of such a two-sided approach to the social reality-social category relationship is that it opens the way to an analysis of the active role of leaders in shaping groups and shaping society. Indeed, we argue that, precisely because social category definitions affect collective mobilization, those concerned with shaping the social world will actively define the nature of categories as a function of their social projects. They will seek to create an inclusive category which embraces all those they seek to mobilize, whose values and priorities are realized in their proposals and of which they themselves are representative. That is what we mean when we refer to leaders as entrepreneurs of identity.

Take one prevalent case, that of nationalism. Whereas people frequently ask questions of the form “What does it mean to be British?” (or indeed to define oneself in terms of any other nationality) we instead are concerned with what people are seeking to achieve when they offer up such definitions (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). First of all, the very use of national categories is not related to any particular policy (which means that those who stress ‘our country’ are not necessarily nationalists in the narrow sense of seeking independence and opposing foreigners) but rather is related to the audience one is seeking to influence. That is why, in a world of universal franchises, parliamentary politicians (whatever their persuasion) stress nationhood. Precisely because they are appealing to the entire electorate they need a category that includes all electors and ‘nation’ fits the bill in a way that more or less exclusive categories (e.g., class, humanity) do not.

Second, politicians differ profoundly in the way that they characterize the meaning of nationhood. In Scotland, for instance, separatist parties tend to portray the Scots as an independently minded people, socialist politicians tend to define them as communal, while cooperative and conservative politicians tend to celebrate their entrepreneurial instincts (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). In each case party policy is presented as a realization in practice of ‘who we are’ in principle.

Third, whether by descriptions of their background, through autobiography or even through the ways they dress, politicians seek to create an image of themselves that matches their image of the category more generally. At the extreme, leaders may even create a personal mythology through which they become the living embodiment of the nation. Wilner (1984), for example, details the way in which the Indonesian leader Sukharno came to be represented as Bima, the legendary hero and demi-god of Javanese and Balinese mythology. This was along multiple dimensions. The tale of Sukharno’s career was told so as to emphasise how he embodied Bima’s two key attributes—bravery and a stubborn will. The parallels between Bima’s muscular appearance and that of Sukharno were accentuated. Sukharno spoke in a booming voice and a low Javanese dialect that violated the norms of Indonesia’s dominant cultural groups but which resonated with Bima’s usage. Sukharno was brutal in his gestures and his verbal style, once again violating aristocratic manners but emulating Bima. Sukharno even alluded to Bima’s association with the colour black (which

symbolizes strength) by invariably carrying a black baton which, for some Indonesians, was a repository of sacred power.

Having outlined some of the principles concerning what leaders do as entrepreneurs of identity, let us return to *The Experiment* in order to put some more flesh on these arguments. In particular, let us return to the case of DM<sub>p</sub>. In the previous section we showed how he was able to emerge as a leader of the prisoners because he was able to articulate a shared consensus based on a shared prisoner identity. Now we will consider the ways in which he sought to construct shared identities amongst participants as a whole.

DM<sub>p</sub>'s professional background was as a senior trade union organizer. This is important in order to understand both his aims and the skills he deployed in the study as a whole. In particular, DM<sub>p</sub>'s project was not limited to leading the prisoners. Rather, he sought to unite both prisoners and guards in order to challenge the experimenters (who he saw as akin to management) over the conditions imposed within the study. To achieve this, he needed to encourage participants to see themselves in terms of a *new* set of categories and to imagine a world based on those new categories. The nature of this vision was signposted in some formative interactions between DM<sub>p</sub> and his cellmates, FC<sub>p</sub> and DD<sub>p</sub>. First, he initiated a discussion about the clothes they were wearing (orange singlets and baggy orange trousers) and suggested that they looked like the uniforms of local government employees. His cellmates picked up on the analogy and extended it, suggesting that perhaps they looked like miners and other groups of workers. Next DM<sub>p</sub> raised the question of the heat in the prison and asked why people put up with it. When FC<sub>p</sub> and DD<sub>p</sub> responded that it was just part of the study in which they had agreed to participate, DM<sub>p</sub> challenged this view, saying that whatever else he might have agreed to, the heat was not part of the experimenter–participant contract.

These social categories were spelt out much more clearly in a conversation he had soon afterwards with a guard, TQ<sub>g</sub>, during one of the daily work periods. After both had agreed that the heat was intolerable, DM<sub>p</sub> continued:

*Extract 4*

DM<sub>p</sub>: If this was a real life situation. . .

TQ<sub>g</sub>: Yes.

DM<sub>p</sub>: . . . and you were working in this condition, then you as an employee could well go to the employer and say “the condition is unacceptable, I’m not prepared to work in it”. Now let’s treat this as a real life situation. You and I—your group and the group I’m in—both have this problem of the heat. And if I’ve got to sleep in this, there is no way I will. And, you know, I won’t bear it. And I think collectively we should do something about it to the people who are running the experiment. Now you know in a normal, day-to-day, real life situation, that’s what would happen.

TQ<sub>g</sub>: Well, I am most impressed with your new found kind of angle on this, which possibly shouldn’t come as a surprise to me. But I think that is a very, very valid point you are making and I’m going to go along with it completely.

Here we see that the categories that DM<sub>p</sub> was working to create, and encouraging others to embrace, were those of workers (incorporating both prisoners and guards) vs. management (incorporating the experimenters and the BBC) and that the shared vision he was seeking to promote was of a workers’ struggle for enhanced conditions. The difficulty with achieving this vision, of course, was that, at this particular point in time, any sense of unity seemed distant given the increasing antagonism between prisoners and guards and the lack of any institutional basis for bringing them together as a common

category. DM<sub>p</sub> was well aware of this and of the fact that, in order to achieve his ultimate ambition, he had first to overcome the existing guard–prisoner divide. His opportunity to do so came through PB<sub>p</sub>'s theft of the guards' keys which we noted above. The prisoners met as a group in order to decide how to exploit the opportunity that this gave them. DM<sub>p</sub> proposed the following:

*Extract 5*

DM<sub>p</sub>: Can I make a suggestion? What we should do is, we should suggest to them—and I suggested this to a couple of lads before, and the guards, and they were nodding—we should have a forum that meets once a day between us, all of us, the guards and us, and in the forum we'll discuss the grievances we've got.

PB<sub>p</sub>, however, argued that a forum would be an empty talking shop and the only way to achieve concessions was, as he had done, to mount individual acts of sabotage against the guards. As he put it: “the only reason we've got this meeting now is 'cos somebody stole the fucking keys”. He therefore proposed that they should use the keys to make a specific demand for hot drinks and rejected the forum out of hand:

*Extract 6*

PB<sub>p</sub>: I don't want to be part of it. I don't want to be part of a forum. I know we're all here because we're wearing the same uniform but we're all here as individuals. And I am here as an individual.

In these extracts we see, there were a number of key differences between DM<sub>p</sub>'s position and that of PB<sub>p</sub>. First, PB<sub>p</sub>'s approach was exclusive while DM<sub>p</sub>'s was inclusive. This is apparent in PB<sub>p</sub>'s explicit determination to act alone. It is apparent in the substance of the proposals: whereas PB<sub>p</sub> advocates an exclusive approach based on individual acts of heroic subversion, DM<sub>p</sub> advocates an inclusive approach in which everyone works together to advance the group position. However, it is equally apparent in the different language used by the two men (Donnellon, 1996): PB<sub>p</sub> stresses what ‘I’ want whereas DM<sub>p</sub> stresses ‘what we should do’. Or else, as JE<sub>p</sub> put it in responding to PB<sub>p</sub>'s forthright rejection of the commune: “the majority, we want to do things as a team here”.

Second, PB<sub>p</sub>'s approach was conflictual while DM<sub>p</sub>'s approach was consensual. Heroic subversion involves constant acts aimed against the guards whereas the forum involves prisoners and guards working together in a common enterprise. Indeed, in DM<sub>p</sub>'s contribution, there is a gradual elision between ‘we’ referring to the prisoners and ‘we’ referring to the participants as a whole such that, by the end (“in the forum we'll discuss the grievances we've got”) it is not entirely clear which he is referring to. Thus, even as DM<sub>p</sub> provides a clear formulation of prisoner identity and prisoner norms, he provides a bridge towards a broader participant identity.

Third, while PB<sub>p</sub> advocated an uncertain and erratic way forward which is dependent upon unpredictable acts, DM<sub>p</sub> proposed a clear structure to implement his cooperative version of guard–prisoner identity and a process by which to achieve that structure. Hence, in addition to providing a vision of how the group should be, DM<sub>p</sub> (in contrast to PB<sub>p</sub>) organized a practical means of realizing that vision. Thus he initiated structure (Fleishman & Peters, 1962), but critically, this structure was an *instantiation of a shared social identity*.

Overall, DM<sub>p</sub> may have benefited from conditions conducive for social identity and hence leadership to emerge amongst the prisoners. Yet, however necessary these were, they are not sufficient to explain the fact that an agreed sense of selfhood did emerge, the form that it took, or the fact that DM<sub>p</sub>'s definitions prevailed. Far from emerging spontaneously, identity definitions were

carefully crafted by DM. He crafted definitions of identity that were appropriate to his overall project both in terms of the boundaries and the content of categories. He was creative in his use of images and analogies which made his vision of a restructured prison all the more compelling. Last but not least, he was eminently practical in translating his vision into the mundane details of social organization.

The principles of context-sensitive social categorization that underpin this restructuring are well understood within self-categorization theory (e.g., Haslam & Turner, 1992). What we see here, though, is not simply that changes in comparative context have the capacity to change the nature of social identity, but that comparative context is *politically managed* in order to bring about particular changes that make both *particular identities* and *particular leaders* viable (Reicher & Hopkins, 2003). Indeed, this point was tacitly recognized by Hitler (1925/1998) when he wrote in *Mein Kampf*: “The art of leadership . . . consists in consolidating the attention of the people against a single adversary and making sure that nothing will split up that attention”.

To rephrase our point in the existing language of leadership research, the transformative potential of leaders lies in their ability to define shared social identities. It is through redefining identity that they are able to shape the perceptions, values and goals of group members. The agency of leaders consists in their ability to mobilize people to transform society on the basis of these perceptions, values and goals. This point is critical. Leaders do not have direct social power to shape social reality. Their power comes through the groups they help create (see Turner, 2005) and their agency depends upon their ability to direct that power to the maximum practical effect.

Two points flow from this. The first is that leaders must be organizers as well as visionaries. We have already seen with DM<sub>p</sub> that it is not enough to imagine new identities and new social realities, one must also be able to build a serviceable bridge towards that reality. Second, leaders can do no more (and no less) than offer a vision of the world in which their followers wish to live and bring them together in order to achieve it. Thus, from a social identity perspective, the agency of leaders does not substitute for that of followers but rather enables it and is dependent upon it. It is not leaders but followers who have the power to transform existing social relations, and the viability of a leader’s imagination is only as great as the ability of followers to bring it to fruition.

## 5. Leadership, followership, and identity in practice

We argued above (a) that leaders and followers are dependent upon the nature of social reality and hence the definition of social categories and (b) that leaders define social categories and thereby mobilize group members to transform social reality. But what then determines the balance between these two sides of the equation? When are leaders and followers able to redefine social conditions and when are they defined by them? When are they architects of the future and when are they prisoners of the present? Or, to put it slightly differently, what determines whether leaders and their groups are able to realize their vision of the social world in practice? We suggest that the answer lies in considering the balance between the power generated by any social mobilization and the nature of the resistances that this mobilization must overcome. These resistances derive from (a) from the way in which past versions of identity have become sedimented into the organization of laws, institutions and customs, and (b) from the immediate and active opposition of other leaders and their social groups. In other words, resistance is a function of the direct and indirect,

past and present mobilizations of social groups and leaderships within a given social and political system.

In this way, the balance between creating reality and being created by reality is a matter of the development of intergroup relations over time. Three factors are critical here:

1. The ability to mobilize people and create social power through a compelling construction of social identity (e.g., see Simon, 1998; Simon & Klandermans, 2001).
2. The ability to organize the exercise of group power based on an accurate analysis of where outgroup resistance lies.
3. The effectiveness and power of counter-mobilizations.

This last, of course, is the mirror of the first two factors but for other groups. Let us therefore briefly consider these first two factors in turn.

The ability to create compelling constructions of social identity is partly the product of a combination of cultural knowledge and rhetorical skill which is akin to what Billig (1987) calls ‘witcraft’. That is, it depends upon the ability to draw upon commonly available understandings of identity as contained, for instance, in school history books, public monuments, the works of revered writers and poets and even depictions of landscape and environment, and then weave them into a coherent account of ‘who we are’ (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; see also Citron, 1989; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Holy, 1996). Equally it depends upon the ability to take ambiguous or novel circumstances and, using metaphor and analogy, make sense of them in terms of familiar constructions of social identities. This is akin to the processes of ‘anchoring’ and ‘concretization’ as described by social representations theorists (see Farr & Moscovici, 1984). It is important to note, though, that these processes presuppose an active audience and a *dialogue* rather than monologue between leaders and followers. Followers do not automatically accept what is put to them, rather they weigh it and evaluate it on the basis of their prior experiences and the other sources of information available to them. To borrow from social representations theory again, followers (like leaders) are not dupes but fully-fledged members of a ‘thinking society’ (Moscovici, 1993).

These points are well illustrated by the way in which DM<sub>p</sub> in his conversations with his cell-mates uses analogies between the uniforms of prisoners and those of workers and also draws upon the heat in the study as a Health and Safety issue in order to make it seem obvious that participants should see themselves as united in opposition to the managing experimenters rather than divided into prisoners and guards. DM<sub>p</sub> may well have initiated these conversations but their success was dependent upon the way in which the analogies he offered were taken up and developed with equal creativity by his interlocutors.

However, successful constructions of social identity require more than skillful rhetoric. They also need to be structured into the practices of the social movement which seeks to affect the wider society. In this way, one can demonstrate in the present the ‘practical adequacy’ of a vision for the society of the future. Consider, for instance, the way in which Hitler matched his vision of Germany, his rhetoric, and the physical organization of the Nuremburg rallies. As Mosse (1991) shows, the *Fuehrerprinzip* (a hierarchical conception of German society with the leader predominating over the masses) was manifested in the way that Hitler would emerge from the masses to stand in the centre and above the symmetrical and undifferentiated ranks of Party members. Likewise, Ozouf (1989) shows how the leaders of the French revolution set about creating a set of new Festivals to replace

those of the ancient regime: organization in terms of fixed social status gave way to inherently transitory categories such as age. Equally, within the BBC Prison Study, we have seen how DM<sub>p</sub>'s success derived not only from his rhetorical abilities but also from his skill in devising a cooperative forum which gave substance to his vision of prisoner identity (and ultimately his vision of transcending that identity).

The actions of DM<sub>p</sub> also illustrate the second factor in successful leadership: the ability to use collective power to the greatest effect. That is, he analysed where the weakness of the guards lay—namely in their ambivalence about the exercise of power and in their disquiet at the resultant disorder within the 'prison'. He then directed the strength of the prisoners against this weakness by demanding a cooperative forum that would deliver order at the 'cost' of major concessions from the guards.

DM<sub>p</sub>'s combination of rhetorical, analytic and organizational skills combined with the lack of consensus amongst the guards meant that he was able to generate and direct sufficient collective power to overcome resistance and reshape social reality. Another way of putting this, and of linking up with the existing literature, is to say that he used his various skills to *initiate structures* that would realize the social identity-based values and norms of his group (see Fleishman, 1953; Fleishman & Peters, 1962). Indeed, combining the present point with our previous argument about social movement practices, the notion of initiation of structure is important in a double sense: first as it relates to the structure of the group itself; second as it relates to the structure of the wider society. In both senses, however, the concept of structure is important in terms of its ability to turn social identity into social reality.

After DM<sub>p</sub> had won the forum, he was withdrawn from the study. Having provided an alternative vision of reality, what would then happen without DM<sub>p</sub> himself to implement it? In the short term, there was a return to confrontation. What is more, the coordinated actions of the prisoners set against the uncoordinated reactions of the guards eventually led the system to collapse. The prisoners occupied the guards' quarters, the guards relinquished their authority and the participants came together to propose and implement a 'self-governing, self-disciplining Commune'. Most of the participants identified strongly with the commune, in fact far more strongly than with either the guards or the prisoner groups. The new group thereby acquired a considerable degree of social power. However, the Commune faced dissent from participants who wished to reimpose a hierarchical system. The Communards also (falsely) believed that the experimenters disapproved of the system and would not allow it to survive. However, they were not prepared to initiate structures that would direct their power against either the internal or the external opposition. Thus, when the principal organizer of the Commune, FC<sub>p</sub>, was asked what he would do if participants refused to perform a chore that had been allocated to them, he replied 'give them another chore'. When asked what would happen if they refused that too, he simply remained silent. The Commune may have been self-organizing, but it failed to be self-disciplining.

In this context, the Communards began to lose faith in their ability to create a communal world and their organization fell apart. Instead of being able to transform a hierarchical set of social relations, their beliefs began to shift towards an acceptance of hierarchy. Over time, they scored increasingly highly on measures of authoritarianism such that, when the dissenters openly proposed a new and more draconian prisoner guard system, the Communards displayed little willingness to resist it (although the study ended before such a system could actually be imposed). As one committed supporter commented, the situation in the Commune was worse than before, since the group had the increasingly difficult challenge both of trying to make a faltering system work and of accepting responsibility for its failure.



In sum, these examples show, first, that it may be necessary for leaders to use category definitions in order to create social power. However, social power is not sufficient for social transformation unless it is yoked to structures that function in such a way as to overcome resistance to the collective project. Where it is so structured, as in the case of the cooperative forum, new category definitions can lead to a new social reality in their image. Where it is not, as in the case of the Commune, new category definitions are discarded in favor of those which reflect existing realities.

Second, they show that leaders themselves can only succeed where they enable followers to become successful agents. It was because DM<sub>p</sub> allowed the prisoners to become masters of their own fate that his vision and his position was secure. It was because the organizers of the Commune failed to establish a communal society that both they and their vision were swept aside. Agency, according to this position, is not a limited resource to be distributed between followers and leaders. It is something which followers have because of their leaders and vice-versa.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this article we have outlined our social identity approach to leadership. In this we are clearly indebted to self-categorization theory (Turner, 1982, 1987; Turner et al., 1987) and to existing work which has developed a model of leadership from the tenets of SCT (e.g. Haslam et al., 2001; Hogg, 2001; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; van Knippenberg and Hogg, 2003; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). However, there are three distinctive points that arise from the present analysis. First, we show that the very possibility of leadership is dependent upon the existence of a shared social identity. Without such an identity there is nothing to bind leaders and followers together, there is no consensus for a leader to represent and therefore leadership is impossible. Second, we show that leaders are not passive onlookers when it comes to identity processes. They actively intervene in creating and redefining identities and thereby in creating and transforming their followers. Third, we show that the creativity of leaders is not limited to words and ideas but also extends to the initiation of structures which can make those ideas manifest.

It is important to stress that, while we are arguing that our approach adds something distinctive to the understanding of leadership processes, we would not wish to dismiss or downplay the contribution of other approaches. Indeed, as should be clear from our argument, we believe that social identity research has much to gain from existing literature. Most obviously, we need to take seriously the current emphasis on transformation, and also to address the importance of structure and its initiation. Our point is simply that social identity concepts help us understand how transformation occurs and why certain forms of structure prove effective. In short, we see the relationship between social identity theory and the field of leadership as one of symbiosis rather than invasion.

This relationship is clear when it comes to the broad issue with which we began: what is the relationship between the agency of leaders and that of followers? Are they necessarily opposed and, if not, does the social identity approach have the potential to overcome this opposition? That is, is it possible both to have our cake and eat it: to celebrate the creativity of leadership without thereby sanctioning tyranny? Having outlined our position, we are now in a position to answer these questions.

Once again, we cannot simply apply a ready-made social identity or self-categorization model to 'solve' the issues of leadership. Rather, these approaches themselves need to be developed in order to address the nature of leadership and to incorporate the insights of existing research. The critical insight is that

leadership is a transformational process. It involves changes in the self-understanding of people and also in the nature of the social world. Indeed, one of the insights to come out of our analysis is that these two forms of change are interdependent since identities are models of how the world is and of how it should be.

The starting point for a self-categorization model is the recognition that leaders and followers are bound together by their mutual involvement in a social category. Leadership is therefore a matter of interpreting what it means to be ‘us’ in a given context. Thus leaders are dependent upon followers both conceiving of themselves as a common ‘us’ and accepting their interpretation of what that implies for action in context. Conversely, followers are dependent upon leaders to translate a general understanding of self into a specific plan of action and thereby to generate the social power which can render such action effective (Pfeffer, 1992; Turner, 2005).

However, if this equalizes the relationship between leaders and followers, it could either do so by removing agency from the leader and making both parties passive or else by restoring it to followers and making both parties active. According to the former version, followers automatically defer to leaders who match given category prototypes and leaders can only wait until their position matches these prototypes. According to the latter version, leaders actively define the category, themselves and their projects in order to enhance their prototypicality while followers actively weigh and interpret the definitions offered to them. So while leaders are entrepreneurs of identity, followers are not merely passive consumers. They frequently reject leaders who violate their understandings of either identity or of social reality. As one of the leaders of the French revolution of 1848, Alexander Ledru-Rollin famously observed (although the quote has also been attributed to a range of figures from Disraeli to Gandhi): “I must follow them, I their leader” (Haslam, 2001, p. 66).

So the agency of leaders does not substitute for that of followers. Instead, both are active interpreters of the social world (Reicher & Haslam, *in press-b*). But interpretation is not enough. Identity, we argue, is about more than beliefs, values and understandings. It is about creating a social order on the basis of those understandings. A socialist does not just believe in equality but wants to create an equal world. A nationalist does not just believe in the nation state but wants to bring about a world of nations. Effective leadership is about supplying a vision, creating social power and directing that power so as to realize that vision. In this sense, it serves to make collective agency possible (Drury & Reicher, 2005). It allows people to make their own worlds rather than having to live in a world made by others. Moreover, in an unequal world, a world where the only source of power available to the powerless lies in their combination, participation in a well-led group may in fact be the only way in which the individual can shape history.

Of course, to argue that leadership need not diminish the agency of followers (and may in fact enable it) is not to deny that there are forms of leadership which do attempt to do so. Far from encouraging an open debate about who we are and how we should act, some leaders may indeed try to essentialize their constructions, to present them as the only possible versions of who we are and to brook no debate. The extreme to which we referred above, where the leader constructs him- or herself as the embodiment of the ingroup, leads to a situation where anything the leader says or does by definition encapsulates the group identity and anyone who opposes the leader by definition becomes an opponent of the group. Where, on top of that, a sense of pervasive threat is created such that the ingroup appears to be in danger of destruction by imagined enemies, then extreme measures to quell dissent can be justified in the interests of self-defense.

Such strategies, of course, are commonly found in undemocratic and dictatorial regimes (Reicher & Hopkins, 2003; see also Koonz, 2003; Overy, 2004). Our concern is that if one presupposes that leadership takes away the agency of followers then one fails to address the conditions under which

tyrannical leadership thrives (Haslam & Reicher, 2005). This lessens our ability to promote open and democratic leadership and to defend against autocracy. In this way, the danger is not that the traditional opposition between leaders and followers is valid in theory but rather that—partly through a faulty theoretical analysis—it may become true in practice.

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