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## Collapsing self/other positions: identification through differentiation

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## **Abstract**

There is a widely recognised tendency for people to positively differentiate Self from Other. The present paper asks: What counter dynamic constrains this othering tendency? A phenomenon, termed *identification through differentiation* is presented in which the positive differentiation of Self from Other collapses in a moment of identification. This phenomenon is demonstrated and explored using quasi-naturalistic group discussions with tourists in India. Three excerpts are analysed. The first demonstrates a tourist's attempt to positively differentiate himself from other tourists. The second demonstrates how such an effort can collapse in a moment of identification with the previously derogated 'other' tourists. The third is used to explore how identification through differentiation is complicated by issues of self-presentation. The discussion uses concepts from Mead (1934) and Ichheiser (1949) in order to theorise about the preconditions, interactional mechanisms and wider applicability of the phenomenon.

Keywords: Identity; self; other; differentiation; identification; tourists

## **Collapsing Self/Other Positions: Identification through differentiation**

From a social psychological perspective, tourists have a peculiar identity because they often resist being positioned as tourists. Crick (1989, p. 307) crystallises this peculiarity by asking: "Why do so many tourists claim that they are not tourists themselves and that they dislike and avoid other tourists?" The research suggests that tourists prefer to identify themselves as "travellers" (Allcock & Young, 2000) or "post-tourists" (Feifer, 1985) while simultaneously derogating "tourists" (Prebensen, Larsen & Abelsen, 2003). It seems that tourists resist being positioned as tourists because the identity position of tourist is spoiled. In the mass media and daily conversation tourists are ridiculed as camera-touting dupes (Löfgren, 1999). Given that identities are closely related to place (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000), tourists' identity appears problematic by virtue of being out of place: tourists don't speak the language, they are ignorant of local practices and they conflate the authentic with the superficial. Accordingly, it is not surprising that people abroad try to avoid being positioned as tourists.

The problem for people on holiday abroad is that, while derogating other tourists, they remain tourists themselves and thus potentially members of this so-called outgroup. Try as they might to positively differentiate themselves from each other, the fact is that most tourists end up engaging in similar touristic activities: they take photographs, visit touristic sights, buy souvenirs, and attend cultural performances. Thus there are two inter-related but opposing tendencies that make tourist identity interesting. On the one hand, there are tourists' attempts to positively differentiate themselves from

naïve camera-touting tourist dupes, while on the other, there is the fact that these scornful tourists tend to act in fairly similar ways as the derogated ‘other’ tourists.

The present paper focuses upon the tension between these opposing tendencies. Specifically, it is concerned with how tourists’ attempts to positively differentiate themselves from one another can, due to the similarity between tourists’ actions, collapse in a moment of identification with the derogated ‘other’ tourists. This collapse is termed *identification through differentiation* and the present paper will introduce, illustrate and theorise this phenomenon.

### Othering and the Self

It has long been observed that people tend to positively differentiate themselves and their ingroup from other people and outgroups (Mead, 1934; Ichheiser, 1949; Heider, 1958; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and there exists historical, naturalistic and experimental evidence for this.

Historical case studies of the representation of women (de Beauvoir, 1949/1989) and the Orient (Said, 1978) have clearly demonstrated how the representation of the other is deeply entwined with the representation of self. For example, according to Said (1978) the representation of the Orient, amongst Occidentals, has historically been defined by what the Occident is not. Thus the Orient has been portrayed as undeveloped, passive and immature while the Occident has been represented as advanced, pro-active and mature. Such historical case studies have led to the concept of ‘othering.’ According to Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1996, p.8), othering occurs when Self represents Other in terms of what Self is not (and in terms of what self does

not want to be) in a way that is “self-aggrandizing.” The concept of othering has proven popular, and has been used to discuss nationalism (Steedman, 1995), conflict (Rabinowitz, 2001), and the logic of the mass media (Bishop & Jaworski, 2003). A variant of the concept can be found in the psychoanalytic concept of projection. Joffe (1999, 2003), for example, has demonstrated how the social representation of HIV and risk in general can entail the projection of negative attributes to outgroups as a means to allay anxiety.

The literature on othering is complemented by experimental research on the self and social identity. Most theories of the self contain some variant of a self-esteem motive (Gecas, 1982), that is, a motivation to maintain a positive self-concept by conceptualising self and the social world in self-affirming ways. This motive is evident, for example, in the self-serving bias (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999). At a group level this motivation manifests in intergroup bias, which refers to the widespread tendency for people to evaluate their own group more favourably than the outgroup (Mackie & Smith, 1998). According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this bias sustains high ingroup status thereby providing a positive identity for the ingroup members and thus satisfying the motivation for positive self-esteem (Hogg & Abrams, 1990).

These literatures on othering, self-esteem and intergroup bias point in the same direction: toward a widespread tendency to differentiate ingroup from outgroup and Self from Other in such a way as to bolster and protect Self. There is a debate about whether this tendency is an inevitable by-product of relatively fixed modes of cognitive processing or whether it is a cultural creation (Hewstone, Rubin & Willis, 2002; Wilkinson & Kitzinger,

1996). The present paper, however, sidesteps this debate. Accepting that the tendency towards positive differentiation is widespread, the present paper asks a new question about the limits of this tendency.

According to Billig (1985, 1987), thinking is based on conflicting tendencies, and thus wherever a one-sided tendency has been postulated, it can be useful to look for necessary counter dynamics. As a counterpart to the psychological process of categorisation, for example, Billig (1985, 1987) proposes the complementary process of particularisation. Equally, one could argue that Moscovici's (1976) concept of minority influence is a necessary counterpart to majority influence. In this vein, the present paper seeks to identify a counter dynamic which constrains people's tendency to discriminate in favour of the self while derogating the other. One could argue theoretically that such a counter dynamic must exist because otherwise we would inhabit a world of radically polarised identities and representations of the other would be little more than self-aggrandising hallucinations.

The counter dynamic proposed in the present paper is termed identification through differentiation. In this process, exaggerated attempts at differentiating oneself from others can cause a collapse of the emphasised difference and result in identification. In identification through differentiation, the negative attributes initially attributed to the other or the outgroup are, at least temporarily, attributed to self and the ingroup.

To conceptualise identification through differentiation, I take a cultural psychological approach (Valsiner, 2004), originating in the work of Mead and Vygotsky (Gillespie, 2005). This approach assumes that individuals are embedded in cultural streams of meaning, such as social representations

(Howarth, 2006) and symbolic resources (Zittoun, Duveen, Gillespie, Ivinston & Psaltis, 2003). Identities are conceived to be socially constituted within these collectively created streams of meaning (Duveen & Lloyd, 1986).

Cultural psychology is concerned with the thought and action of individuals within these streams, as they negotiate the social world and seek to position themselves in the social world. The focus is on understanding thought and social interaction as step-by-step time-dependent processes (Valsiner, 2001).

Methodologically, this approach usually entails qualitative in-depth interpretation of situated events. It differs from discourse or conversation analysis, in that its concern is with psychological processes such as intentions and thoughts, and particularly the cultural constitution of these psychological processes.

The aims of the present paper are firstly to establish and describe the phenomenon of identification through differentiation and secondly to offer a cultural psychological explanation of the social processes underlying this phenomenon. The empirical context for this demonstration and theorisation is the identity work of tourists in northern India.

## Method

### *The Research Site: “Little Tibet”*

Ladakh, often referred to as “Little Tibet,” is a high altitude region of Jammu and Kashmir State in northern India. The area is predominantly Buddhist and very sparsely populated. It is described in the popular Lonely Planet guidebook as “one of India’s most remote regions” (Mayhew, Plunkett, Coxall, Saxton & Greenway, 2000, p. 201). Until 1974 Ladakh was closed to

tourists and some areas remain off-limits to tourists today. Since opening to tourists, however, the area has received a steady stream of visitors intent on trekking in the Himalaya and touring traditional Buddhist culture. Tourists usually base themselves in the capital, Leh, from which they take trips of one to several days to visit the surrounding Buddhist monasteries, mountain peaks and remote villages. Despite having a reputation amongst tourists for being remote and ‘off the beaten track,’ almost half of Ladakh’s GDP comes from tourists (Jina, 1994). Thus, economically Ladakh is more dependent upon tourism than the Bahamas, the Maldives or Bermuda.

Tourists visiting Ladakh are a self-selected group. They have been led to Ladakh by a shared representation of the Himalaya as spiritual, traditional, exotic and filled with adventure. These tourists share an interest in backpacking and going off the beaten track. The tourists I met, who invariably came from high-income countries, were generally young adults, either in university or pursuing professional careers. They were concerned with the rapid modernisation of Ladakh and feared that the Ladakhis would lose their traditional culture. These tourists were also reflexively aware of their own impact upon Ladakh, and were concerned to minimise this by reducing rubbish and supporting local businesses.

### *Constructing the Data*

The present analysis is part of a larger study which investigates the dynamics of identity in the interaction between tourists and Ladakhis using group discussions, interviews and ethnography. Specifically, the present analysis utilises three excerpts drawn from 25 group discussions with tourists. These discussions were conducted with the intent of constructing quasi-

naturalistic conversation amongst tourists. The procedure was to approach naturally occurring groups of tourists in restaurants and bars in Leh and request if they would participate in a discussion on “changes in Ladakh.” With the consent of the participants, all the discussions were audio-recorded. All of the tourists approached agreed to participate and seemed to welcome the distraction.

The tone of the discussions was informal. In return for participation I offered to pay for the participants’ dinner, dessert, beer or coffee. Food and especially beer proved to be valuable aids to the facilitation of the kind of discourse that normally passes between tourists in the bars and restaurants of Leh. The discussions lasted between one and a half and four hours, and the topics covered included tourist photography, souvenir shopping, interactions with Ladakhis, memorable experiences, surprises, the past and future of Ladakh, Ladakhis’ attitudes towards tourists, and the impact of tourism on Ladakh.

The discussions are only quasi-naturalistic because the participants were inevitably orienting toward me as a researcher (Farr, 1984). Within tourists’ jostling for recognition, for having authentic experiences, and experiencing the ‘real’ Ladakh, my experience and knowledge as a researcher laid claim to a privileged position. On those occasions when participants learnt that I had been to Ladakh several times, that I could speak some basic Ladakhi, or that I had Ladakhi friends, then I suspect that my participants’ identity as tourist outsiders became salient.

### *Analysis*

The corpus of tourist discussions contains almost 52 hours of group discussions. These were analysed in audio format with transcription, according to the conventions detailed in Appendix 1, occurring during the analysis. The analysis focused solely upon the identity relation between tourists. Accordingly, the first stage of the analysis sought to identify instances when tourists mobilising the category of ‘tourist’ were engaging in othering, or attempting to positively differentiate themselves from other tourists. This yielded 70 instances. An analysis of these instances revealed that tourists are not simply defining themselves in positive terms vis-à-vis other tourists, but there are also moments of identification with the derogated other. The second stage of the analysis entailed searching through the 70 instances of othering in search of such moments of identification. In total 16 such instances were identified.

The following analysis makes no claims regarding the frequency with which identification through differentiation occurs. The aim is simply to demonstrate and theorise this phenomenon. Accordingly, the analysis considers just three excerpts, each of which has been selected for a different reason. The first excerpt has been selected in order to illustrate positive differentiation of self from other amongst tourists in Ladakh, and because it reveals a contradiction in the way in which tourists represent themselves and other tourists. The second excerpt has been selected because it is a particularly clear case of identification through differentiation and thus exemplifies the phenomenon. The third excerpt has been selected because it demonstrates the way in which identification through differentiation is

embedded in the social context and thus bound up with issues of self-presentation.

### Othering Amongst Tourists

In order to study identities, it has been argued, one needs to consider their content (Tajfel, 1984; Duveen, 2001). This advice is particularly apposite for the study of identification through differentiation because, as will become clear, it depends upon a contradiction between the content of the differentiation and the behaviour of Self. The following excerpt, from a middle aged Dutch couple, introduces the content of the derogated tourist identity position.

- Marten:** We went to the Phyang festival [a religious festival in a Buddhist monastery], it was shocking  
**AG:** What were you shocked about?  
**Marten:** About the tourists  
**Karen:** With the short sleeves, and with the cameras  
**Marten:** Totally no respect, no respect [ ] in the festival there was a man, and a woman breastfeeding, and there was a man taking pictures from only [one] meter distance, like on top of her, and I said 'don't you think this is rude'  
**AG:** You said this!  
**Marten:** But he was German, and he did not understand, he looked at me like, 'are you crazy?'

Marten and Karen report to me, a researcher on tourism, that they found the behaviour of "the tourists" at a certain festival "shocking." "The tourists" are derogated because they have "no respect": they neither wear the appropriate dress for a religious festival nor do they treat the Ladakhis with respect when they photograph them. Specifically, one of these tourists is reported as taking a picture of a Ladakhi woman breastfeeding "from only a meter distance." The narrative implies that Marten and Karen are not like these tourists because they have respect – indeed Marten even intervenes on behalf of the

breastfeeding woman. Given the vehemence of this othering, one might expect that Karen and Marten do not act like these disrespectful tourists. However, as the conversation continues it becomes apparent that they have engaged in similar actions.

- AG:** What pictures have you taken?  
**Marten:** Mostly of landscapes! [laugh] and *gompa!* [a Buddhist monastery] and a few times of people, because at Kaltsang, this little town, its more like a truck stop, and we were talking to people, and we took a picture with a family, and it was different, because they said, 'ok, can you take a picture and send,' it was different because -  
**Karen:** We had made friends  
**Marten:** A bit, for a day or something, it's, it's, different  
**AG:** Yeah, it's different when you have a relationship  
**Marten:** Yes, em, a bit of a relation, em, also,  
**Karen:** (Also when they)  
**Marten:** Also of people, em, really sneaky, but em, but em, I'm sure they don't know, but it's different from shoving such a lens in someone's face from a meter distance  
**AG:** But if you were going to photograph people, who would you chose to photograph?  
**Marten:** The old women, of course, and old men  
**AG:** Why?  
**Karen:** Because they look nice  
**Marten:** Their characteristics [pause] but when you want to take a picture of an old woman, try to have a little relation with them, not like run through the country and take some pictures  
**Karen:** And go home  
**Marten:** Like Japanese or something

My question, "what pictures have you taken?," puts both Marten and Karen on the spot. They must justify their actions in the light of their earlier criticism of tourist photographers. Marten's laugh suggests a degree of insecurity. Marten and Karen confess to taking some photographs of people at Kaltsang, but emphasise that that their behaviour is "different" to that of the tourists they were previously criticising. The difference, they argue, is that they had formed "a relation" with the Ladakhis they photographed.

However, examining the excerpt closely reveals a contradiction. In the middle of the excerpt Marten adds, with much hesitation, that he has taken “really sneaky” photographs. The degree of Marten’s hesitation perhaps indicates that he senses the contradiction. He has been differentiating himself from other tourists on the basis of having “a relation” with the Ladakhis that he photographs, but his “really sneaky” photographs could not entail a substantial relationship with his photographic subjects. His actions in these instances have been no different from the tourists that he criticises. Indeed, as the exchange continues, Marten proceeds to further criticise tourists who don’t “have a little relation” and instead “run through the country.” Yet Marten has been doing just this. He and his wife Karen were only in Ladakh for a short visit, they were taking “sneaky” photographs and moving on. Accordingly, when seen from the perspective of another tourist, their actions would position them as typical disrespectful camera-touting tourists.

This contradiction is not unusual and is evident in many of the discussions that I had with tourists. What is interesting in the above excerpt, however, is how this contradiction remains implicit. If the contradiction became explicit then Marten would be forced to identify with the tourists he is derogating. Thus Marten’s identity position vis-à-vis other tourists is precarious and teeters on the edge of collapse. The following two excerpts examine how this self/other boundary can indeed collapse.

### Identification Through Differentiation

The first example of identification through differentiation comes from a conversation I had with three older English tourists. These tourists were travelling around Ladakh in a private jeep. I met them in a restaurant-bar in

Leh, near their comfortable hotel. When I approached them, with their clutter of cameras, bags and sun-cream, I asked Norman, Betty (Norman's wife) and Carol if they would participate in my research on "tourists." Norman interrupted me to explain that they were not "tourists" but "travellers." Once I had explained that "travellers" were also part of my research, and the group agreed to participate, I then asked Norman about the difference between travellers and tourists. He said:

**Norman:** I think travellers are people who go to a country to appreciate the culture, and I think tourists go to a country to be voyeurs, in a way, they have nothing to contribute to it, they really just want to go as a diversion, they may as well go to Blackpool.

When I had initially implied that Norman was a tourist, he resisted. He claimed the position of being a "traveller," and in his explanation of this difference one can see how he polarises travellers and tourists on a dimension from respectful appreciation to bored voyeurs. "Tourists" are derogated: they have nothing to contribute, they are "voyeurs" who just want an entertaining distraction. Voyeurs have visual pleasure without getting involved. The idea that tourists are voyeurs is quite common and is linked to the close association between tourism and photography (Urry, 1990; Gillespie, 2006).

But Norman, like Marten, occupies a precarious semiotic position: he scorns other tourists for being "voyeurs" and positions himself as superior, while he fails to see that many of his own actions indicate voyeurism. Given the cameras on the table, I asked Norman whether he took photographs.

**AG:** Em, have you taken many photos?  
**Betty:** Now be honest! [laugh]  
**Norman:** Yes  
**AG:** What type of things have you photographed?

- Norman:** Generally, landscapes and buildings - I'm nervous about taking people  
**Betty:** Yes, people I find difficult, I find embarrassing

Asking tourists about their photographic practices is taboo, the topic is sensitive and the question intrusive. I hesitate (indicated by the 'em') when broaching this topic fearing that Norman will perceive the question as a challenge to his "traveller" identity. Norman's wife, Betty, blurts out, with a nervous laugh, "Now be honest!" indicating that there is something to hide. Norman's answer is short and unelaborated, so I probe. Then both Norman and Betty confess to finding it difficult to photograph Ladakhi people, which in turn implies that they have, at the very least, been trying to take such photographs. Arguably it makes them nervous and embarrassed because they feel that this activity does not befit their claims to be different from the average camera-touting tourist. They do not dwell upon their own photographic behaviour, however, and return to discuss other tourists' voyeurism. But this time, the attempt to positively differentiate self from the other collapses.

- Betty:** I think a lot of the time people don't realise what they are looking at [ ] certainly at Key *gompa* [a Buddhist monastery] I got that feeling, there were just lots and lots of Westerners there, and all taking photos, you know they had tripods and they had videos, and you know, all around the performance area  
**Carol:** (I could not believe it)  
**Betty:** You know they were taking it as, as a colourful performance, which it was, but there must be, behind that, which we are not aware of, a philosophy that we don't understand [ ] and we are there intruding as Westerners intruding with flashing [cameras]  
**AG:** But then the question is if we don't understand what is going on [in these festivals] why is it so meaningful, why do you take photographs?  
**Betty:** Because it's pretty to look at  
**Carol:** Because it's colourful, it's different

- Norman:** It's totally different to anything we have seen in the past [pause] we have all been brought up on the *National Geographic*
- Carol:** We are completely observers, we are not part of it
- Norman:** We don't know what is going on, I think it's voyeurism

Betty carries the conversation forward by criticising other tourist photographers that she saw at Key gompa. She says, "they" did not understand the dance that they were looking at, "they had tripods," "they had videos," and "they were taking it as, as a colourful performance." One is reminded of Norman's distinction between tourists and travellers. The implication is that Betty and her co-travellers are different from these "voyeurs." However, we know that Betty and Norman are tempted to and do indeed try to take photographs of Ladakhis. Thus there arises a contradiction between Betty's self-positioning and her behaviour.

This contradiction leads to a moment of identification through differentiation. The self/other differentiation collapses just after Betty states that "they" were taking it as a "colourful performance." Abruptly, she interrupts herself, finding herself in agreement with this point of view, saying "which it was." In this moment, Betty's description of the orientation of the voyeuristic tourists and her own orientation merge. Then we learn that it was not only "they" who were "intruding with flashing [cameras]," but "we." That is to say Betty had her own camera in hand.

The collapse of this attempt at differentiation is evident in the subsequent change of pronoun use. The boundary between "they" and "us" has collapsed into "we." It is "we" who are not aware, "we" who don't understand, "we" who are intruding with cameras. The collapse of the self/other boundary is continued in the use of "we," first by me, and then by

Norman, who concludes that “we” all have been “brought up on the *National Geographic*.” The implication is that the *National Geographic* has socialised us into a sort of voyeurism, where we search out the visual image of the dance, rather than the meaning of the dance. The excerpt ends with Norman positioning himself alongside the tourist photographers as a “voyeur” and thus collapsing the distinction between “tourists” and “travellers” that he had initially insisted upon. The self/other boundary has shifted and derogation has been replaced by identification.

What is the social psychological process that leads Betty to the moment of identification? The collapse of self/other positions is preceded by Betty describing and derogating the attitude of other tourists to the “colourful performance” and it occurs when she interrupts herself to agree with this description. At this moment, Betty is in dialogue with herself. Her utterance is reflexive. I suggest this is an instance of what Mead (1936, p. 379; Farr, 1997) termed “the peculiar importance of the vocal gesture,” namely the fact that we hear ourselves speak in the same way that we hear others speak and thus we can converse with ourselves. Betty’s reflexive shift of position is not simply a cognitive shift that is subsequently expressed in her utterance, rather the audible utterance derogating the ‘other’ tourists is a constitutive part of the emergence of identification. Thus I argue that Betty’s movement to identification through differentiation cannot be reduced purely to intrapsychological mechanisms. The process underlying this change of positioning appears to be distributed between central nervous system and the auditory modality. The following section will take this argument further,

demonstrating how identification through differentiation is also entwined in the social interaction.

### Identification Through Differentiation and Self-Presentation

According to the present Meadian interpretation, identification arising through differentiation is not a strategic way of doing things with words (i.e., Austin, 1962). In contrast, it is something that words do to people. Such instances of identification are unpredictable and catch their speaker unawares. Speakers are not, by default, masters of their own utterances, and speakers must often struggle to control the words that come out of their mouths (Bakhtin, 1981). Although instances of identification through differentiation are not strategic, they are often followed by vigorous efforts at self-presentation in which the speaker attempts to mediate the audience's interpretation of the emergent identification. Permitting the collapse of the Self/Other boundary would be both to derogate Self and to suggest that earlier statements were hypocritical. After-the-fact impression management seeks to prevent these negative interpretations. Consider the following excerpt from a discussion I had with three British university students.

- Sophie:** [They] Just sat in a café getting absolutely stoned  
**Janet:** 'Cos you speak to the Israelis  
**Sophie:** (There are lots of Israelis)  
**Janet:** You speak to them, and you're like 'what have you done while you have been here?'  
**Ruth:** 'Oh we have been in here for two weeks'  
**Janet:** 'We sat here and we smoked, and then we got a motorbike' [Everyone laughs]  
**Ruth:** Yeah! They all think they are out of *Easy Rider* or something [laugh], going around with their long hair  
**AG:** It is surprising how many negative comments I hear about them  
**Sophie:** The thing is, I know it sounds awful, but they are so clique-y, em, it's so difficult to talk to them.

- Janet:** I mean we still partook in stuff going on there, we just did it more limited and we did other stuff as well
- Sophie:** The thing is, I'm sure it's the same in the Spanish resorts, like all the Brits going there, and things like that, it's just - I don't know
- Ruth:** It is the same, Brits on holiday in Spain are a real nightmare, I mean we were in a minority

The conversation begins with the women deriding a group of Israeli tourists they had met in a café several days previously and who were smoking hashish and “getting absolutely stoned.” Switching into a theatrical mode, Janet asks them “what have you done while you have been here?” and she replies, on their behalf, “we sat here and we smoked, and then we got a motorbike.” The Israelis are derided for riding ostentatious and noisy motorbikes, for having long hair, for imagining that they are in the film *Easy Rider*, and most of all for spending two weeks “just” sitting in the café and smoking hashish. The implication is that to travel all the way to India only to live in a haze of hashish smoke is superficial and uninteresting. The women find their own scorn amusing. Implicitly, these women differentiate themselves from this kind of behaviour. However, after a brief silence Janet interjects: “I mean we still partook in stuff going on there, we just did it more limited and we did other stuff as well.” The first “stuff” here refers to hashish. Thus Janet’s critique of the ‘other’ tourists has collapsed. She criticised them for smoking hashish, and now she confesses that she and her friends did the same.

Thus, like Betty, initial over-enthusiastic differentiation of self from the scorned other collapses into identification with the other. “They” becomes “we.” Again the mechanism seems to depend upon reflexivity in the auditory modality because it is only after hearing her own critique that Janet realises

that it also applies to herself. Thus again the process of identification appears to be distributed into the auditory modality.

However, unlike Betty, Janet does not passively capitulate to this identification with the derogated other. Janet clearly recognises the contradiction between smoking hashish and then criticising other tourists for doing just this. But she resists the identification by claiming a more subtle differentiation. She says that “we just did it in a more limited way” and “we did other stuff as well.” These pleas are attempts to reinstitute the self/other positions, albeit in a weaker form. The point I want to draw out of this example is the way in which Janet’s resistance to the emergent identification appears to be bound up with her self-presentation (Goffman, 1959). Having publicly positioned herself as opposed to hashish-smoking tourists she then needs to differentiate her own hashish smoking from that which she scorns. The collapse of the self/other boundary puts Janet in an uncomfortable position. In order to remain reasonable she must either alter her critique of the hashish-smoking tourists or renounce her position of being superior to these tourists. The self-presentation strategy that she pursues is to maintain her superior position while modifying her critique: it is not smoking hashish *per se* that she criticises but doing this exclusively.

There is a second and unusual instance of identification through differentiation in the above excerpt. It is unusual because this collapse of self/other positions enters as a welcome surprise, facilitating self-presentation. This second instance is instigated by my uncertain attempt to comment upon the participants’ derogation of Israeli tourists by saying, “it is surprising how many negative comments I hear about them.” Sophie, who had initially

focused the topic on Israelis, realises that she might have created an impression of anti-Semitism. She apologetically says, “I know it sounds awful.” She then tries to defend her position by describing Israelis as “clique-y.” This utterance does little to extricate her from her awkward position, but it does trigger a collapse of the self/other positions. In her next utterance, Sophie is no longer talking about Israelis. She is now applying the same critique to “the Brits” on holiday in Spain. Ruth participates in this blurring of the self/other boundary stating “it’s the same with the Brits” and that in Spain “they are a real nightmare.” Thus the critique initially directed at “Israelis” returns and is directed at “the Brits.”

Unlike Janet, Sophie and Ruth are not trying to resist the collapse of differentiation. Indeed, they felt awkward about their initial derogation of Israeli tourists and thus welcome the collapse of this differentiation. By generalising their critique so that it is not Israelis in particular who are “clique-y” but any group who is in the majority, such as British tourists in some Spanish resorts, the women attempt to avoid being positioned as anti-Semitic. Again we are dealing with self-presentation after the event. However, while Janet is trying to manage the fact that she engaged in similar behaviour to those she criticised, Sophie and Ruth are trying to manage the impression created by their claim about Israelis which they fear “sounds awful.” In both cases strategising is not evident in the spontaneous collapse of self/other positions, but it is evident in the *post hoc* attempts to deal with that collapse.

### Discussion

Given the widespread tendency for people to distinguish themselves positively from others, there must also be various counter dynamics, or

limiting factors, which constrain this tendency because otherwise the representation of the other would become little more than a self-aggrandising hallucination. The present paper has proposed identification through differentiation as a counter dynamic which reins in the tendency to otherise. Differentiation can collapse into identification when there is a contradiction between a speaker's utterances and actions which becomes explicit. The process by which this occurs, I have argued, is not narrowly cognitive. Rather, it is a process which is distributed between the speaker's cognitive processes, the auditory modality and the audience.

In order to theorise the emergence of identification through differentiation the following discussion will address four questions in turn: Firstly, what are the preconditions for the collapse of Self/Other positions through differentiation? Secondly, by what social psychological process does the collapse of positions actually occur? Thirdly, in which social situations, beyond tourism, might the drive toward differentiation result in identification? And finally, what implications does this phenomenon have for intergroup conflict?

Firstly, a necessary condition for the collapse of Self/Other positions through differentiation is an implicit contradiction in the speaker's actions and utterances. One useful way of conceptualising this contradiction is the mote-beam divergence described by Ichheiser (1949), who is one of the uncelebrated ancestors of social psychology (Farr & Moscovici, 1984; Rudmin, Trimpop, Kryl & Boski, 1987). Ichheiser (1949, p. 51) describes the mote-beam divergence as the tendency to "perceive (and to denounce) in others certain characteristics, for example, prejudices, or blind spots, or

ideologies, or ethnocentrism, or aggressiveness, which, strangely enough, we ignore in ourselves." The name of this divergence comes from a passage in the Bible:

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? (Matthew, 7.1-7.5)

Spotting a splinter in the eye of the other while failing to notice a large beam in one's own eye is a vivid metaphor for what is observed amongst tourists: they criticise other tourists for taking photographs and smoking hashish, when they themselves have engaged in the same activities. The mote-beam divergence is one possible outcome of the self-esteem motive. In order to accentuate the difference between Self and Other, people use a more lenient criterion to evaluate themselves than they use when evaluating others. The mote-beam divergence results when the self-esteem motive leads people to differentiate themselves from the other in a way that is hypocritical.

If the tendency toward positive differentiation accentuates the mote-beam divergence, in so doing, it also lays the foundations for a subsequent collapse of Self/Other positions. Positive differentiation based upon a mote-beam divergence can only be successful if the evaluative criteria used to evaluate Self and Other are kept separate. Marten provides a good example of this. He is able to criticise other tourists for not forming a relationship with their photographic subjects, while not using this criteria to evaluate his own surreptitious photography. The more divergent the evaluative criteria used to evaluate Self and Other (i.e., the larger the mote-beam divergence) the

greater the potential for a collapse of Self/Other positions, and, arguably, the more spectacular the results. On the basis of this interpretation, identification through differentiation occurs when a mote-beam divergence collapses and Self evaluates Self using the same criteria previously used to evaluate Other.

The second question to ask is, what are the social psychological processes that collapse the mote-beam divergence and turn differentiation into identification? The present analysis suggests that reflexivity in the auditory modality, as described by Mead (1936, p.379), is fundamental. According to Mead, speakers do not usually think first and then speak. Rather, thinking often occurs in speakers' responses to their own utterances. People are "thinking through the mouth" (Marková, 2003, p. 89). By virtue of being able to both speak and hear, people are able to converse with their own previous utterances. Betty hears herself describe the attitude of other tourists toward the "colourful performance" and then finds herself in agreement with this 'other' attitude. Janet begins by scorning hashish-smoking tourists, and then after hearing herself, interjects that she too "partook in stuff." Sophie criticises Israeli tourists and then recognises that the same critique applies to British tourists in Spain. In each case the collapse of Self/Other positions is instigated by speakers' responses to their own utterances. The speaker's own utterance calls out of the speaker a sense of familiarity with the actions that they are describing, and that familiarity indicates the point of identification.

Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 354), when illustrating the generativity of dialogue, pointed out how the utterance of an interlocutor can call out of us thoughts that we never knew we possessed. In cases where differentiation leads to identification it seems that it is the speaker's own utterance which

calls out of the speaker a novel thought. The interesting point about this analysis is that it displaces identification from being a purely cognitive process, and situates it as a distributed and dialogical process that extends beyond the human skull in a loop that leaves the mouth and returns through the ears.

However, the analysis has revealed that the phenomenon of identification through differentiation is also distributed across the social interaction. Identification through differentiation can be awkward, and often brings into play the dynamics of self-presentation. While the speaker is trying to use discourse strategically to institute a difference between Self and Other, the unfolding discourse has the opposite consequence. Instead of instituting a difference, the discourse leads the speaker, and the audience, to recognise a point of identification. The speaker stumbles into a web woven by their own actions and utterances. But, if the collapse reveals the tenuous control that Bakhtin (1981) depicts speakers as having over discourse, then speakers' *post hoc* attempts to manage the impression created by the collapse demonstrate their mastery over discourse. Immediately following the emergence of an awkward identification, one can perceive the speaker make strategic choices about whether to accept or reject the shift in Self/Other positions. The audience, and more specifically, the speaker's unfolding thoughts about the audience's perception of the speaker, are constitutive in turning differentiation into identification, and especially in shaping the speaker's own response to the emergent identification. Thus, to summarise, the process by which differentiation collapses into identification must be conceptualised as distributed beyond the individual's cognitive apparatus, to

incorporate the dynamics of the auditory modality on the one hand and the social dynamics of human interaction on the other hand.

The third question is, in which domains beyond tourism might the concept of identification through differentiation be applicable? It is possible that this phenomenon is particularly common amongst tourists because people are continually moving into and out of the identity position of tourist and this movement creates a mote-beam divergence. Nobody is a tourist all the time, most people are tourists some of the time and most tourists are not tourists the majority of the time. When not in the social position of being a tourist, people may enjoy participating in public discourse that derogates tourists. They can amuse themselves with television images of camera-touting tourist dupes from the comfort of an armchair. The problem arises when these same people go abroad. Then the non-tourist steps into the identity position of tourist, and begins to act in typically touristic ways which conflict with the previously espoused derogatory representation of tourists. Thus movement between social positions could contribute to the creation of mote-beam divergences and thus of contexts in which differentiation may frequently collapse into identification. Accordingly, the question becomes: Are there other contexts in which people move between social positions?

While much of the research on Self/Other relations and ingroup/outgroup categorisations has tended to work with relatively fixed identities, it is clear that in society people often move between social positions (Gillespie, 2007). Young people become older people, students enter the workforce, able-bodied people become disabled, employees become managers, healthy people become hospitalised, people change their

sexuality, unmarried people become married, married people become divorced, employed people become unemployed and unemployed people become employed. Drury and Reicher (2000), for example, have pointed out that crowd members must become crowd members and participating in collective action can lead people to identify with identity positions initially rejected. Equally, Smith (1999) has studied how women reposition themselves upon becoming mothers. Considered from the present standpoint, it is possible that all these movements between identity positions provide fertile soil for the creation of mote-beam divergences and their subsequent collapse. Indeed, Smith (1999, p.414) quotes a new mother struggling to reconcile her previous representation of mothers with her new found identity position of being a mother. Within this struggle, one can see the boundary between Self (not-mother) and Other (mother) collapse as she reconciles herself to becoming the Other from whom she previously differentiated herself. The idea is that the phenomenon of identification through differentiation is likely to be found in contexts where people, for whatever reasons, have come to occupy an identity position from which they previously tried to differentiate themselves. While differentiation often takes the form of derogation, it is also possible that in certain contexts admiration for Other may collapse into identification. Consider, for example, the case of a business executive who admires her more senior colleagues and who subsequently finds herself promoted to an equivalent position and admired by junior colleagues.

The final issue to address concerns the contribution of identification through differentiation to the study of intergroup conflict. Research has clearly documented the processes through which groups in conflict derogate each

other (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hewstone, Rubin & Willis, 2002). Given that the present paper identifies a limiting factor on that widespread tendency, what might it contribute to the understanding of how inter-group conflict can be reduced?

From the outset, it is worth observing that intergroup conflict situations usually fulfil the precondition for identification through differentiation discussed above, namely, they are rife with mote-beam divergences: there are mutual accusations of intolerance, mutual derogations, mutual acts of ‘defence’ and mutual suffering at the hands of the other. In short, there is a tendency for both sides to criticise in the outgroup negative attributes that are overlooked in the ingroup. According to the present analysis, the existence of such mote-beam divergences should provide the foundations for the collapse of Self/Other positions. However, whether these positions actually do collapse is an empirical question which can only be fully addressed by future research. If they collapse only rarely, it would be interesting to investigate what insulates speakers from the realisation that activities which they derogate in the outgroup have also been carried out by the ingroup.

Turning to the reduction of intergroup tension, the present analysis directs attention to a new issue. In recent decades much research has focused upon decategorisation (Bettencourt, Brewer, Rogers-Croak, & Miller, 1992), recategorisation (Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989), and multiple categorisations (Hall & Crisp, 2005) as means of reducing intergroup tension. All of these approaches try to avoid categorisations that accentuate the differences between the ingroup and the outgroup by introducing novel, superordinate or more complex categorisations. The present analysis

suggests that, under certain conditions, it may also be worthwhile emphasising the categorisations that accentuate intergroup differences. The appropriate conditions are when these categorisations contain the seeds of their own undoing, in a mote-beam divergence. Where mote-beam divergences have been identified, in the context of intergroup conflict, then the issue becomes one of trying to collapse that differentiation into the experience of identification. The present analysis provides some clues as to the contexts which might be conducive to turning positive differentiations into identifications. Firstly, these differentiations should be expressed verbally, so that there is an opportunity for the speaker to react to, and reflect upon, the differentiations that they are trying to make. Secondly, if these utterances are made in the presence of more neutral interlocutors, then if the Self/Other positions do collapse, the norm of being reasonable will be enforced, and the speaker will feel the need to modify the Self/Other positions.

In conclusion, to propose a social psychological process of identification through differentiation is not to argue against the existence of othering or the tendency to positively differentiate self from the other. The dynamic collapse of Self/Other positions is not opposed to the tendency of othering but rather is an outcome of that tendency and, moreover, an outcome which is a limiting factor on that tendency. People use discourse to positively differentiate themselves from one another, but there are times when they lose control of their discourse and the spoken words create unanticipated meanings and impressions. If the speaker has acted in a similar way to the actions they derogate then the speaker risks hearing their own words with a familiarity born of experience, thus forcing some degree of identification with

the derogated ‘other.’ Moreover, if the speaker perceives their audience to also be aware of this contradiction, then they are led, by the norms of social interaction, to redefine the Self/Other positions.

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## Appendix 1

### *Transcribing conventions*

- (I could not believe it)      Round brackets are used to indicate that an utterance is overlapping with the previous utterance.
- [a Buddhist monastery]      Square brackets are used to clarify the text and make observations, for example, about participants laughing.
- [ ]      Empty square brackets signal that material has been deleted from the excerpt.