

The Self-Rationalization Effect Within Social Identity's Villainization Process

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Abstract:

In the early 1970s Henri Tajfel introduced us to a social psychological issue where individuals go through the three psychological processes of social categorization, social comparison, and social identification in their cognitive process of what groups best aligns with them and their eventual group membership. This group membership decision becomes their social identity and thereby, creates and defines their place in society. Tajfel's social identity theory suggested that once an individual becomes a member of a group, their individual perceptions of the world around them becomes greatly influenced, some say even determined, based on the group perspective. The theory suggests that group members see others as either in-group or out-group individuals. In this research I have identified a type of villainization process within the social identity theory where group membership perceives an individual as a villain (enemy) because they are a threat to the in-group membership. This perceived villainization process allows members to act in a manner that goes against accepted behaviors associated with a kind and virtuous person, even though the member truly believes they are in fact, the kind and virtuous person in this situation. This belief in self virtue, why acting in a normally contrary manner, is explained in the research by the introduction of self rationalization into the social identity cognitive process.