Social Identity, Prototypes, and Exemplars in Gospel Narratives : Methodological Considerations

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1. Introduction

During the past decades, the social identity approach (SIA), derived from the field of social psychology,[1] has proven its usefulness for New Testament studies and established its position in the methodological toolbox of scholars who seek to clarify the message of the New Testament in its original social setting as well as in later contexts. Scholars who have applied the social identity approach have been interested in how the New Testament texts contribute to the formation of ingroups and outgroups, and especially to what extent New Testament narratives provide exemplars for normative, prototypical behavior among the recipients of the texts.

Philip Esler made the social identity approach more widely known in New Testament studies in his groundbreaking book *Galatians* (1998), which was followed by *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (2003).[2] Since then, several New Testament scholars have applied the approach in articles and monographs.[3]

Among the central concepts of the social identity approach are *exemplars* and *prototypes* on the basis of which the members of a group learn and maintain group norms and values. In his book on Romans (2003), which has inspired much New Testament social identity analysis, Esler defined these terms as follows:

> A "prototype" is a summary representation that is considered to capture the central tendency of the category and derives from multiple experiences with category members. A prototype of a group of people will be a representation of a person thought to typify the group. Such a prototype will not be a current or actual member of the group, but rather the image of an ideal person who embodies its character. On the other hand, social psychologists refer to an actual person who may embody the identity of a group as an "exemplar." Debate rages as to whether observers assess

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[1] The social identity approach refers here to two closely related social psychological theories: social identity theory (SIT) and self-categorization theory (SCT). For the background of these theories, see below.

[2] Esler 1998; Esler 2003. Esler applied social identity theory for the first time in a paper that he presented at the British New Testament Conference in Nottingham (in 1994), with the title "Social Identity, Group Conflict and the Matthean Beatitudes: A New Reading of Mt. 5.3–12," but the paper was not published until 2014 in a revised form (Esler 2014a). Notably, the title of the published paper, "Group Norms and Prototypes in Matthew 5.3–12: A Social Identity Interpretation of Matthean Beatitudes," applies the term prototype that was not yet in the title of the Nottingham paper. The first published application of the social identity approach was Esler 1996.

[3] As a result of growing interest in the approach, *T&T Clark* published the *Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* in 2014 (Tucker and Baker 2014) and the one volume *T&T Clark Social Identity Commentary on the New Testament* in 2020 (Tucker and Kuecker 2020). A commentary series on the entire New Testament is also underway. The first volume in the series is Brawley 2020. Several Finnish New Testament scholars have also applied the approach. See, for instance, Hakola 2015; Nikki 2019.

group members in terms of their closeness to a prototype or to individual exemplars, but that issue need not detain us here.[4]

Some social psychologists have taken initiative to extend the scope of their social identity analysis to encompass a longer historical perspective, and they have also inspired biblical scholars.[5] However, there are still unanswered methodological questions, especially concerning the use of the terms *exemplar* and *prototype* that were originally developed to describe on-line cognitive processes in the human mind, not ancient textual phenomena. What is needed is a more thorough consideration of the terms under which it would be possible to regard characters in ancient narratives simply as exemplars, exemplars that contribute to the cognitive processing of prototypes in the minds of the readers of the narratives, or even as direct group prototypes, as many seem to assume.[6]

Although the following discussion focuses on the social identity approach, the attempt to clarify the cognitive categorization processes that are related to characterization in ancient texts also has some bearing on the hermeneutics of New Testament narrative criticism.[7] More generally, due to its cognitive orientation, the present article can also be seen as a contribution towards the "transdisciplinary" discussion of narrative and mind, called for by some scholars who have been developing cognitive narratology.[8] However, a thorough discussion with studies on cognitive narratology falls outside the scope of the present article.

Before going into the discussion about the application of the SIA in the analysis of ancient narratives, it is fitting to provide a short overview of the social identity approach in social psychology and especially of its internal discussion concerning the use of exemplars and prototypes.

2. The Social Identity Approach

The Background and Basic Principles of Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory

The term *social identity approach* is sometimes used, like in this article, as an umbrella concept that encompasses two closely related branches in the social-psychological analyses of group processes:

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[4] Esler 2003, 172–73 and Esler 2014a, 166–67 following Smith and Zarate 1990, 244–46. Similarly in Esler and Piper 2006, 33; Esler 2014a, 166.

[5] Condor 1996; Cinnirella 1998; Reicher and Hopkins 2001. More on this below.

[6] For instance, Esler (together with Piper) also thinks that it is possible to call literary characters prototypes. In his view, if the person believes that an ancient figure like Abraham was a real person, then Abraham is understood as an exemplar. However, an outside observer who sees Abraham as an imagined figure would use the concept of a prototype. Esler and Piper 2006, 35–36, 75. Thus, the same literary figure can be seen as an exemplar or as a prototype depending on who is making the judgment, which is confusing. There are several examples of calling characters in the gospel narratives as prototypes in New Testament social identity analyses. See, for instance, the following in the T&T Clark one-volume commentary: Carter 2020, 174; Kuecker 2020, 229; Marohl 2020, 494–96; Coker 2020, 517–18.

[7] The honoree of this Festschrift is widely known as an expert in applying modern argumentation analysis to the letters of the New Testament and more recently also to the gospel traditions, which include much more narrative material than letters. For instance, Thurén 2014 and 2015. For a historical overview of narrative criticism in New Testament studies, see Merenlahti and Hakola 1999.

[8] Cf. Herman 2014, 58. Within the confines of the present article, it is not possible to explicate the significance of the following considerations in the framework of cognitive narratology. For an introduction to this field, especially concerning characterization, see Herman 2014 and 2013, 193–215, 311–13 (esp. 311). As regards characterization, Jannidis (2014, 42) identifies the need to link the character presentation in literature more closely to the discussion concerning the social construction of identities as one of the areas of particular interest.

social identity theory and self-categorization theory.[9] Social identity theory was developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s in Bristol, and it mainly studies intergroup situations and the role of social identity in them.[10] Later on, Turner and his colleagues started to focus more on intragroup dynamics and cognitive processes that are operative in social identity phenomena, thus laying the foundations for self-categorization theory.[11]

Because the two branches of the social identity approach were originally developed over the course of many years, it is natural that there have also been changes in terminology and concepts. Nevertheless, the subject matter of categorization has been there from the very beginning.

The background of Tajfel's ideas about social identity lies in his earlier research in cognitive psychology. Tajfel's experiments, conducted with A. L. Wilkes, showed how categorization and accentuation functioned in simple tasks of perceptual judgment—like estimating the length of lines—producing in the minds of the observers an impression of a greater difference between two labeled groups than there was in reality. Tajfel and Wilkes argued in their report of these experiments that similar phenomena of categorization and accentuation also characterize social stereotyping.[12] There was already earlier evidence for this,[13] and Tajfel and his colleagues' subsequent minimal group experiments proved this assumption correct. Minimal group experiments famously showed that the mere labeling of people under the same group name was enough to induce in them an idea of "us," an ingroup that was also favored in practice, in simple tasks of distributing benefits for ingroup and outgroup members.[14]

At that stage of research, the accentuated social categories were termed *stereotypes*, and this terminology continues to be used in social identity research, although there has also been a tendency to reserve the term stereotype for depersonalized perceptions of outgroup members.[15]

An important phase in the development of social identity theory was Tajfel's idea to place human group behavior on a continuum with interpersonal behavior at one end and intergroup behavior at the other end. The continuum enabled Tajfel and Turner to make a distinction between acting as an individual and acting as a group member. Turner's subsequent research focused on explicating the cognitive aspects of the psychological processes that would explain movement along this interpersonal-intergoup continuum. This laid the foundations for Turner's self-categorization theory.[16]

At the first stage, Turner developed a theory of self-stereotyping, which hypothesized that "as people defined themselves and others as members of the same category, they would self-stereotype

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[9] Hogg and Abrams 1988, 6–30; Abrams and Hogg 1990a; Hornsey 2008, 204, 207–8. However, it is also a common practice to use the term *social identity theory* as a more general concept that covers both "social identity theory of intergroup relations" and "self-categorization theory." See, for instance, Hogg 2012b, 503; Esler 2014b, 23.

[10] Tajfel and Turner 1979. The central ideas and key components in the development of social identity theory are available in Tajfel's 1981 collection of essays (Tajfel 1981). According to Turner (Turner 1988), the theory began to form already in the beginning of the 1970s, and the first published article to include the initial ideas appeared in Tajfel 1972.

[11] Turner et al. 1987. For overviews of the two theories in the context of social psychology, see Hogg 2012b; Ellemers and Haslam 2012; Turner and Reynolds 2012, and in the context of Biblical studies Esler 2014b; Russell 2020, and in Finnish, Jokiranta and Luomanen 2013.

[12] Tajfel and Wilkes 1963, 112–14.

[13] See, Tajfel 1981, 77–78, 154.

[14] Tajfel et al. 1971.

[15] See, for instance, Hogg 2012b, 509.

[16] Turner and Reynolds 2012, 402.

in relation to the category and tend to see themselves as more alike in terms of the defining attributes of the category."[17] Turner and his doctoral students developed these ideas further by drawing on Jerome Bruner's work on the accessibility of categories and Eleanor Rosch's work on the role of prototypes in categorization.[18] Rosch's research inspired further deliberation about class inclusion and levels of inclusiveness, leading to the idea of levels of self-categorization: the interpersonal level (self as an individual), the intergroup level (self as a group member), and the superordinate level (self as a human being).[19]

However, because Bruner's and Rosch's experiments and theorizing in cognitive psychology concerned relatively mechanical categorization tasks, the implications of their results had to be adjusted in order for them to be applicable to much more variable social categorization processes. Eventually, this resulted in the formulation of the *metacontrast principle*, which has become one of the key ideas of self-categorization theory:[20]

> The principle states that a collection of individuals tend to be categorized as a group to a degree *inter alia* that the perceived differences between them are less than the perceived differences between them and other people (outgroups) in the comparative context.[21]

Because the formulation of the metacontrast principle was inspired by Rosch's research on the role of prototypes in catetorization processes, the concepts of *prototype* and *prototypicality* became part of the standard conceptual repertoire of self-categorization theory.[22] With the help of the metacontrast principle, Turner was able to define prototypicality as follows:

> Correspondingly, the *prototypicality* of a category member (Rosch, 1978), the extent to which a stimulus is perceived as exemplary or representative of the category as a whole, is defined by means of the meta-contrast ratio of the mean perceived difference between the target stimulus and outgroup (different category) members over the mean perceived difference between the stimulus and other ingroup (same category) members (the higher the ratio, the more prototypical the ingroup member).[23]

It is possible to express the interconnections between metacontrast and prototypicality in less complicated terms,[24] but I have chosen this early definition (from 1987) because it explicates the "Roschian" roots of the metacontrast principle and shows that, originally, Turner's self-categorization theory did not make any clear distinction between prototypicality and being "exemplary" or "representative" of a category.

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[17] Turner and Reynolds 2012, 402.
[18] See, for instance, Oakes 1987, 126–32.
[19] Turner 1987b, 45; Turner and Reynolds 2012, 403.
[20] The work leading to the formulation of the metacontrast principle is described in Turner and Reynolds 2012, 403–4. Penelope Oakes' dissertation further developed Bruner's analysis of the conditions under which categories became salient and applied (Oakes 1987, 132–41). Margaret Wetherell's dissertation on group polarization was the final impulse for the formulation of the metacontrast principle, which aims to explain the conditions under which some positions become prototypical and polarized (Wetherell 1987).
[21] Turner and Reynolds 2012, 404.
[22] Hogg and Terry 2001, 5: "The notion of prototypes, which is not part of the earlier intergroup focus of social identity theory, is central to self-categorization theory."
[23] Turner 1987b, 47.
[24] For instance, Turner and Reynolds 2012, 404: "…any specific person or position tends to be seen as more prototypical of the group as a whole to the degree that the perceived differences between that person and other ingroup members are less than the perceived differences between that person and outgroup members."

Turner and his associates emphasize that, according to the metacontrast principle, categorization and prototypicality always depend on the comparative context and are therefore in constant flux; prototypicality changes when the context changes.[25] The definition of prototypicality in the context of the metacontrast principle also implies that members in a group can be more or less prototypical. This idea of *relative prototypicality* has become important in self-categorization theory, especially in relation to research on social influence and leadership. According to self-categorization theory, "leadership rests on an individual's ability to be seen as prototypical of a shared social identity."[26]

Prototypicality, Prototypes and Exemplars

As can be seen from the above definitions, early formulations of self-categorization theory in the programmatic volume of Turner and his students[27] emphasized the contextual and relative character of prototypicality. This implies the idea of a prototype, and the term prototype is used as a point of reference, as a theoretical maximum that defines the degrees of prototypicality, but the term prototype itself is not explicitly discussed or defined.[28] The same holds true regarding other influential volumes from the early formative period of social identity and self-categorization theories. Michael Hogg and Dominic Abram's jointly authored and edited volumes from 1988 and 1990 have only a few references to prototypes.[29]

Later introductions to self-categorization theory have paid more attention to the concept of prototypes. For instance, in 2001, Michael Hogg and Deborah Terry characterized prototypes as follows:

> Prototypes are typically not checklists of attributes, but are fuzzy-sets that capture the context-dependent features of group membership often in the form of representations of exemplary members (actual group members who best embody the group) or ideal types (an abstraction of group features). Prototypes embody all attributes that characterize groups and distinguish them from other groups, including beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors.[30]

According to Hogg and Terry, prototypes may appear in the "form of representations of exemplary members" or in the form of "ideal types." In light of the discussion concerning cognitive representations of categories—in the field of cognitive psychology—this kind of use of the term prototype may appear confusing because the classic bone of contention in the field is whether exemplars (concrete examples of individual category members) or prototypes (abstracted, ideal pictures of group members) are more important in categorization.[31] Thus, from this perspective, Hogg and Terry's definition may appear circular: prototypes may appear in the form of prototypes (i.e. "ideal types," "an abstraction of group features") or in the form of exemplars.

However, it is important to notice that "exemplary members" in Hogg and Terry's definition cannot be equated with the use of the term "exemplar" in cognitive social categorization research in which

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[25] Turner 1987a, 79–80; Oakes 1987, 131–32; Hogg 2012b, 509.
[26] Turner and Reynolds 2012, 408. For self-categorization theory and leadership, see, for instance, Hogg 2001.
[27] Turner et al. 1987.
[28] For instance, Turner 1987a, 81–87.
[29] Hogg and Abrams 1988; Abrams and Hogg 1990b, see the indexes of the volumes.
[30] Hogg and Terry 2001, 5. Hogg has applied practically the same definition also in his subsequent descriptions of self-categorization theory. See, for instance, Hogg 2012b, 508; Hogg 2012a, 67.
[31] Smith and Zarate 1990. More on this below.

the term "exemplar" refers to all relevant category members that are to be classified. In Hogg and Terry's definition, "exemplary member" is to be understood as something like an incarnation of the abstract ideal, a real person that best embodies the ideal features of membership in the group, the prototype. Thus, Hogg and Terry's definition is in line with Turner's original definition of prototypicality, according to which "being exemplary" or "representative" are presented as synonyms for degrees of prototypicality (see above).

It is symptomatic of the social identity approach in general that its terminology is not fully compatible with the terms applied in the field of cognitive psychology. Although the social identity approach is based on Tajfel's research on basic categorization processes, there seems to be relatively little discussion among self-categorization theorists about how the basic ideas of prototypicality, prototypes, and exemplars in self-categorization theory relate to the cognitive processing of prototypes and exemplars in nonsocial categorization tasks, a topic that has been much discussed and debated in cognitive psychology.

Obviously, this confusing situation reflects the overall orientation of the social identity approach. From the beginning, one of its central goals has been to provide a corrective to earlier social cognition research, which had become too narrow. For instance, Abrams and Hogg summarize the critique towards social cognition research as follows: "its model of human beings is asocial in that it views people as isolated information-processing modules that are only social to the extent that certain sources of information are other people."[32] In contrast to cognitive psychology, the social identity perspective has focused on the social group as a psychological reality and on categorization processes, such as stereotyping, as shared consensual perceptions.[33]

Social Identity in Historical Perspective

However, there is a branch in social identity research in which the role of exemplars has become more important, and this branch has also addressed the question about the cognitive processing of exemplars and prototypes. In his 1998 article *Exploring Temporal Aspects of Social Identity: The Concept of Possible Social Identities*, Marco Cinnirella argued that, by the time of his study, self-categorization theorists had not paid enough attention to possible temporal aspects of social identity. Cinnirella proposed that self-categorization theory should take into account the concept of "possible selves,"[34] that is, the possibility that prototypicality may also be affected by temporal comparisons. For instance, "past-oriented social identities may lead to the derivation of prototypicality based on past comparisons and outgroups."[35] When arguing for his position and providing concrete examples, Cinnirella explicitly used the terms exemplars and prototypes:

> Hypothesis 3: The activation or salience of cognitions about ingroup exemplars, norms, prototypes and stereotypes, will be affected by the nature of the temporal orientation adopted towards the ingroup.[36]

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[32] Hogg and Abrams 1988, 88–89 summarizing critique of social cognition research at that time.
[33] Hogg and Abrams 1988, 89–90.
[34] "Possible social identities include conceptualizations of the social categories and groups an individual might have been a member of in the past, and could become a member of in the future." Cinnirella 1998, 230.
[35] Cinnirella 1998, 231–32.
[36] Cinnirella 1998, 232.

Before presenting this hypothesis, Cinnirella refers to Eliot R. Smith and Michael A. Zarate's article *Exemplar and Prototype Use in Social Categorization* from 1990, which focuses on the use of exemplars and prototypes in social categorization.[37] This might suggest that, in the above Hypothesis 3, the term "exemplars" refers to "rank and file members" of a group, like it does in Smith and Zarate's article. On the other hand, the term appears in association with other terms that rather refer to the optimal position in the group, which would be in line with "exemplars" representing the optimal "exemplary members," as in Hogg and Terry's definition above and in self-categorization research in general. Be that as it may, it is clear that, after presenting his hypothesis, Cinnirella uses the term exemplar in the sense of "being an exemplary" representation of group membership, which coheres with the more traditional self-categorization usage. Cinnirella's exemplars are individual historical persons, for instance, players in the 1996 soccer European Championship or British second world war leaders, such as Churchill.[38]

Cinnirella uses Smith and Zarate's article in his discussion of exemplars and prototypes. Although the article refers to social identity theory as one area of research that has shown the importance of social categorizations,[39] the article itself is more at home in the field of cognitive psychology because it mainly deals with the categorization of nonsocial stimuli. Perhaps because of this, the article has not been very influential in social-psychological self-categorization research, beyond Cinnirella. However, its ideas have been received more favorably in Biblical social identity applications, and, for this reason, they also deserve to be described in this context, together with a couple of other articles that deal with the same topic.

Prototypes and Exemplars in Cognitive Psychology

Smith and Zarate first note that, by the time of the writing of their article, the classical cognitive psychological model of categorization, which was based on the idea of a *set of necessary and sufficient attributes*, had been rejected for a number of reasons. For instance, it was unable to explain why people usually classify objects as members of the same category but consider some of them to be more typical of that category than others. A robin is easier to classify as a bird than a penguin—but both of them are usually categorized as birds. In the categorization research of nonsocial stimuli, prototype models and exemplar models had replaced the classical model.[40]

In a typical prototype model, information about categories is stored as an abstract concept that best captures the central tendency of the category. In this model, the role of exemplars is to provide information for the abstracted prototype, which is then used in the assessment of new stimuli.[41] By contrast, pure exemplar models emphasize that information about individual items and stimuli become stored as exemplars in memory. Consequently, the categorization of new stimuli is based on their similarity to the stored exemplars.[42] In their own contribution, Smith and Zarate seek to show the importance of exemplars for categorization processes, but without denying the possible

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[37] Smith and Zarate 1990.

[38] Cinnirella 1998, 232–33.

[39] Smith and Zarate 1990, 243.

[40] Smith and Zarate 1990, 244. As an example of the classical model, Smith and Zarate refer to Jerome J. Bruner, Jacqueline J. Goodnow, and George A. Austin, *A Study of Thinking*. New York: Wiley, 1956. The 1986 edition in the Bibliography of this article includes a new preface by Bruner and Goodnow.

[41] Smith and Zarate use Posner and Keele 1968, and Reed 1972 as examples of the prototype model. Smith and Zarate 1990, 245.

[42] Smith and Zarate 1990, 246. Medin and Schaffer 1978 are presented as supporters of the exemplar model.

role of prototypes. They end up supporting a mixture model in which both prototypes and exemplars have their own role to play.[43] The mixture model and emphasis on exemplars laid its stamp on the reception of their work by Cinnirella and through him also on biblical social identity research. For instance, Esler's definition of prototypes and exemplars that was quoted at the beginning of this article includes elements from Smith and Zarate's work as well as from earlier self-categorization research. [44]

Interestingly, there are neuroscientific studies on the processing of exemplars and prototypes that seem to cohere with the mixture model by showing that there are different regions in the brain for processing prototypes and exemplars. For instance, laterality experiments, conducted with persons whose left and right brain hemispheres are disconnected—due to lesions, accidents or an operation to prevent severe epileptic seizures— support the hypothesis that prototypes and exemplars are processed in different brain regions. In experiments in which subjects had to categorize abstract line drawings, the left hemisphere was shown to rely more on prototypical representations while the right hemisphere stored and processed information about exemplars.[45] More recent neuroimaging studies have also found support for the hypothesis that prototypes and exemplars are processed in different brain regions and that, under certain circumstances, people seem to use both operational modes.[46]

The exact neurological processes discussed above still require further study, and their connection to social categorization is—and may remain—quite fuzzy. Yet the experiments show that theorizing in terms of prototypes and exemplars is not without a neurological foundation. Although self-categorization theorists within social psychology have not (yet) developed joint terminology with cognitive psychology, a more integrative approach—as suggested by Smith and Zarate as well as by Cinnirella and adopted to biblical studies in Esler's programmatic publications—is well grounded and deserves to be developed further.

From Neuroimaging to Social Identity Categorization

When assessing the relevance of neuroscientific categorization research for social identity categorization and especially for self-categorization theory, it is pertinent to keep in mind that the studies quoted above deal with quite simple categorization processes: simple line drawings in the above-quoted laterality studies and cartoon-like images in the neuroimaging study. Is it possible to

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[43] Smith and Zarate 1990, 248.

[44] According to Esler's definition, prototypes are based on "multiple experiences with category members." This corresponds with Smith and Zarate's (1990) discussion of cognitive representations where prototypes are abstractions on the basis of many "exemplars." On the other hand, in his definition, Esler uses the term "exemplar" in the sense of "being the most exemplary member," which is more in line with standard self-categorization literature. The present article is in line with Esler's more integrative approach, seeking to clarify terminology that would help keep up with research in social as well as in cognitive psychology.

[45] For a summary of these experiments, see, for instance, Gazzaniga, Ivry, and Mangun 2002, 435–47, 672–75. For their significance in biblical social identity theorizing, see also Luomanen 2007, 217–20.

[46] Bowman, Iwashita, and Zeithamova 2020, 11: "The present data newly show that neural prototype and exemplar correlates can exist not only across different task contexts but also within the same task, providing evidence that these neural differences reflect distinct category representations rather than different task details." As regards the regions of the brain, the study shows that "the ventromedial prefrontal cortex and anterior hippocampus tracked abstract prototype information, and the inferior frontal gyrus and lateral parietal cortex tracked specific exemplar information." It is beyond the competence of the present writer to discuss how the results concerning the specific regions might relate to earlier laterality experiments (described in Gazzaniga et al., 2002). The report of the latter neuroimaging study (Bowman et al., 2020) did not record any differences between left and right hemispheres.

think about the formation of group prototypes along these same lines? Obviously, social categorization and norms that define group behavior are much more complex issues. Hogg and Terry's above definition takes this into account by characterizing prototypes as "fuzzy sets," an aspect that becomes even more pronounced in a definition that Hogg offered somewhat later. According to him,

> people cognitively represent a category/group as a prototype—a fuzzy set of attributes (perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors) that are related to one another in a meaningful way, and that capture similarities within the group and differences between the group and other groups, or people who are not in the group. Prototypes describe and evaluate categories and prescribe membership related behavior.[47]

Interestingly, a prototype is characterized here as a "set of attributes" that presupposes several different cognitive processes: perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors. Thus, although the definition includes the idea of "a prototype" that is able to function as a representation of a group,[48] this process actually must include—if considered in the framework of social cognition research— several categorization processes and therefore also several "sub-prototypes" or "sub-prototypicalities" that all require and depend on their particular contexts. If the above reasoning is on the right track, it should follow that each definition of a prototype should be accompanied by an ample description of all the relevant comparative contexts in that particular situation. As self-categorization emphatically states: when the comparative context changes, the prototype also changes.

Social-psychological applications of self-categorization usually have no problems taking into account the fluidity of prototypes, but the case is somewhat different within biblical studies where chasing "the prototype" of a group in a text may sometimes become a goal in itself.[49]

3. Ancient Narratives in Social Identity Analysis: Methodological and Terminological Distinctions

Keeping in mind the above discussion concerning the methodological principles of self-categorization theory, it is now possible to proceed to offer some methodological and terminological distinctions that might prove to be helpful in future applications of the social identity approach in New Testament studies. After a short introduction to basic differences between observing live social categorizations and analyzing New Testament characterizations from the perspective of social identity, I approach the topic from two viewpoints: (1) the perspective of reception and reader and (2) the authorial perspective. The terminology I suggest seeks to take into account both the basic principles of self-categorization theory and the terminological distinctions applied in cognitive research on the categorization of nonsocial stimuli.

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[47] Hogg 2012b, 508.

[48] The idea of "a prototype" that is able to capture the distinctive characteristics of a group is entertained especially in the applications of self-categorization theory to leadership. For instance, according to Turner and Reynolds (2012, 408), "[G]roup members will emerge as leaders …. to the degree that they are perceived as relatively prototypical of the group as a whole … and the most prototypical person will tend to be recognized as the leader when such a role is defined." Likewise, Hogg and Reid describe prototypes in their article on group norms and prototypes as follows (2006, 10): "Group prototypes submerge variability and diversity in a single representation that characterizes an entire human group."

[49] Cf. above, n. XXXX (8):

3.1 From Live Social Categorizations to Narrative Social Identity Analysis

As background to the discussion concerning the analysis of characterization in New Testament texts, it is helpful to take a closer look at how self-categorization and communication theorists have described the process by which group members learn the norms and prototypes of their ingroup in live situations. Hogg and Reid describe ingroup communication as follows:

> Within groups, information about the prototype and who is most prototypical can be gleaned by simply observing how people behave—what they do, how they dress, what they say, and so forth. Such information can also be intentionally communicated nonverbally through gestures and expressions … or verbally by actually talking about what is and what is not normative of the group. People can ask direct questions to find out what is normative, or they can engage more indirectly in discussion designed to elicit attitudinal positions that are normative or not.[50]

For anyone that is familiar with the gospel accounts of the New Testament, it is easy to see that they provide many scenes that include similar features. For instance, when the mother of the sons of Zebedee comes to Jesus and asks special positions for her sons, the norms of Jesus's group become clear through reactions: the other disciples are indignant, and Jesus gives a lesson on true greatness after the departure of the mother (Matt 20:20–28).

However, there are some basic differences between live categorization situations and those recorded in literary narrative form. Although literary characters may appear live in the course of a narrative that describes their actions, their "living" is closed, as if frozen, within the narrative. The author may have implanted inconsistences in the behavior of the characters, and some development may occur in their personality when the narrative proceeds, but whatever happens, it happens the way the author has composed the narrative.[51]

Another notable feature of the characters in the gospels of the New Testament is that, on the continuum of characters from "flat" to "round", that is, from simple, two-dimensional characters to complex, multifaceted characters,[52] the characters in the New Testament are generally closer to the flat end of the continuum. Even the more round ones are not very round when compared to the characters in modern literature. The difference reflects the interest in personal psychology and psychological development that was introduced to literature in the eighteenth century.[53] In antiquity, literary characters were made to exemplify virtues and vices, thus serving as the ethos of the narrative. The result is that many characters have become either positively or negatively

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[50] Hogg and Reid 2006, 14. Hogg and Reid possibly make use here of Reid's expertise in communication studies, admitting that social identity researches have not paid much attention to this aspect. In passing, they also refer to the role of narratives in communication: "for example, stories embedded in narrative and discourse manage bonds among group members…construct representations of social categories… and such representations of group (and situational) norms influence what people actually talk about."

[51] See Merenlahti 1999, for a perceptive discussion of the development of characters in New Testament gospel traditions and the author's role in making the characters to serve the ideology of the narrative.

[52] E. M. Forster's distinction between *round* and *flat* characters is widely used in narrative criticism. Forster 1958, 65–75, esp. 65, 75; Resseguie 2005, 123–24. Jannidis (2014, 41–42) acknowledges the wide use of Foster's disctinction, pointing out also some of its weaknesses.

[53] For discussion concerning the usefulness of Forster's distinction for the analysis of the New Testament gospels, see Lehtipuu 1999, 78–81.

stereotyped, reflecting the author's ideas about behaviors that are typical for certain types of characters.[54]

This tendency becomes particularly clear in the Gospel of Matthew. The editor of the gospel has stereotyped both the positive and negative ways of approaching Jesus. The people who respect Jesus and implore him to help them, come to him, kneel, and address him as "Lord" (*kyrie*). This is an obvious norm for ingroup members. On the other hand, outsiders, the scribes and Pharisees, challenge him and address him as "teacher" (*didaskale*).[55] Obviously, this kind of stereotyping provides a good starting point for social identity analysis as well.

3.2. The Perspective of Reception and Readers

From a methodological point of view, it is relatively easy to conceptualize the influence of past narratives on present social identity processes by extending the comparative context to include the past narrative-social worlds of the texts as well. In this kind of reception-historical analysis, individual group members may pick up *exemplars* not just from their present ingroups and outgroups but also from the past. They store the exemplars in their minds, take notice of the present and ancient individuals that the entrepreneurs of identity present *as exemplary members/persons*, and thus form, in their minds, normative presentations of the *degree of prototypicality* of perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors in their group. All this contributes to the formation of *individual group prototypes* in the minds of the group members. As far as these are consensual, they become *group prototypes* in particular comparative situations. When the focus is on present groups, it is possible to collect and analyze information related to all these processes with empirical methods, by observation and through interviews and questionnaires.

The case is different when the analysis focuses on texts in their past historical contexts. Ancient hearers or readers cannot be interviewed. Therefore, there are only limited possibilities of analyzing how they processed the individual characters of the narratives in their cognition and to what extent they contributed to the formation of prototypicalities and prototypes in their minds. The internal logic of the narrative and the interaction of its characters may allow some hypotheses about typical reception. If Jesus presents the offering of a poor widow as exemplary (Matt 12:41–44), the ancients were likely to have taken it as such, just like we are.

However, in the final analysis, the prototypicalities and prototypes that the real ancient hearers and readers formed in their minds remain unknown. This is not only because we do not have access to their minds, but first and foremost because the real comparative context in which the hearers and readers processed the narrative is inaccessible. In the ancient world, people seldom received the text through solitary reading. Therefore, it is clear that, in addition to the internal comparative context of the text (compare Jesus' reaction to the widow's offering), the text reached its audience through the on-line comparative layer of the tone and emphasis of the performer and positive or negative on-line reactions of fellow hearers. This is also the reason why I think that the kind of narrative critical

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[54] Merenlahti 1999, 51–52; Lehtipuu 1999, 74–76.

[55] The address *kyrie* is typical of Matthew. It appears (as an address of Jesus) 24 times in Matthew, 1 time in Mark, and 18 times in Luke. Of Matthew's 24 occurrences, 11 are clearly redactional, 4 come from Q, and 1 from Mark. Four occurrences are in the Q-tradition without parallel in Luke and 4 in Matthew's special tradition. For details, see Appendix 2 in Luomanen 1998. For a more detailed discussion on the applicability of the social identity approach to Matthew, see Luomanen 2012.

approach that excludes the question about the real author and the real reader is artificial and sterile. The gospel narratives practically never reached their audiences "just as they are."[56]

3.3. The Authorial Perspective

Social-scientific approaches in biblical studies are generally historically oriented—both in their social-historically as well as theoretically oriented branches.[57] Consequently, social identity analysis of the New Testament has generally focused on the authorial perspective. Although the authors of the New Testament gospels are not available for interviews, the relationship between the authors' goals and basic convictions is much closer than the relationship between the texts and their ancient or modern readers.

The writers of the New Testament gospels had a message to convey, the Good News. Therefore, it is safe to hypothesize that as far as the texts signal normative perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors—by showing these to be desirable through the narrative—*these likely reflect prototypicalities* and *prototypes in the minds of their authors*. The authors of the gospels—and of New Testament texts in general—can be regarded as entrepreneurs of social identities. But to what extent are these assumed prototypes and prototypicalities socially shared and not simply the authors' idiosyncratic ideas? Perhaps New Testament social identity analysis has not paid enough attention to this question. The ideas that the authors propagate may sometimes become too easily identified with consensual group norms.[58]

Although it is justified to assume a relatively close connection between the group norms propagated in the texts and the prototypes in the minds of the authors, these should be kept apart, both theoretically and terminologically. In the framework of self-categorization theory, prototypes are abstractions in the human mind. As such, texts do not have actual minds, only their authors and readers/hearers do. Consequently, *textual phenomena should not be termed as prototypes*. Texts can include *individual exemplars*, and historical or fictive persons can be presented as *exemplary characters*.[59]

In practice, much New Testament social identity analysis has not applied these types of strict distinctions. Texts are read and interpreted as if the prototypes had been leaking from the minds of their ancient authors into the texts. This does not necessarily make the analyses futile. However, more consistent use of the key terminology would help readers connect the textual analyses both with the basic principles of self-categorization theory and with the social cognition research of the categorization of nonsocial stimuli.

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[56] Much New Testament narrative criticism has excluded the real author from its analytical perspective under the influence of New Criticism. Thurén also emphasizes the importance of the implied author in his analyses of Jesus' parables. Thurén 2014, 5–11; Thurén 2015, 12–17. For perceptive narratological descriptions of how cultural codes inform character perception and *vice versa*, see Jannidis 2014, 34–35; Herman 2014, 56–57.

[57] For a history and the two branches in biblical social-scientific criticism, see Elliott 2001; Elliott 2008; Luomanen 2013, 14–16.

[58] Cf. Carter (2014, 237–38, 41) who correctly notices the methodological problem—before proceeding to present his own interpretation of Jesus as "the prototype of maximum ingroup opposition to imperial society."

[59] In earlier contributions, I have suggested that the term "cultural prototype" could be used to characterize textual characters that have come to exemplify authorial or more widely consensual ideas about group prototypes. See, for instance, Luomanen 2012, 203–6.

3.4. Would Context-Free Narrative Analysis Be Helpful for Social Identity Analysis?

Narrative criticism has its merits that may also serve social identity analysis. Even sterile, context-free narrative analysis may help clarify the internal logic of a narrative and the interaction of its characters, which also supports social identity analysis. Narrative criticism and its tools for analyzing characterization and different types of characters may also help the analyst form a better picture of the different kinds of exemplars in the narrative. Consequently, in some cases, a narrative approach may result in a better understanding of what the text presents as exemplary, thus highlighting some of the key ideas of the original author.

However, a full-blown social identity analysis is not possible in an artificial context that does not presume any actual subjects who could process prototypes and prototypicalities in their minds. Knowledge about the original context of the gospels and their narratives also helps modern readers get rid of their cultural presuppositions and to approximate the cultural knowledge that the ancient authors expected their intended audiences to possess.

The application of sociological and social psychological models—like the social identity approach—that illuminate typical human group behavior in group and conflict situations also supports the critical reception of the texts. For instance, the stark contrast that the author of the Gospel of Matthew creates between the ingroup of Jesus's followers and the outgroup of the scribes and Pharisees (see above), reflects the situation in which the early Jesus movement tried to define and legitimate its existence in relation to more traditional forms of Judaism. The stark rhetoric (culminating in Matt 25:27) may be understandable as human social action in that kind of situation—the sociology of sectarianism and social identity analysis have shown how typical this is for humans— but that is certainly nothing to be emulated any more.

Real readers and hearers, ancient and modern, practically never empty their minds of pre-understandings and representations that they intuitively link with texts. Even if a scholar might be able to do so for the limited time of her/his academic sterile analysis, to some extent the scholars' lived life, presuppositions, personal memories of past exemplary figures, idiosyncratic and more consensual prototypes come into play at the moment she/he asks what the text means for her/him personally. Luckily so. Living human minds keep the New Testament characters alive, passing on, contextualizing and reinterpreting their ancient authors' exemplary characters and ideas about prototypicalities and prototypes. The word becomes flesh again—hopefully in an ethically responsible way.

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