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KNOWN AS SERVANTS:

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND MARK 10:35-45

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JUSTIN B. DEWELL

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INTRODUCTION

Why Social Identity Theory?

Scholars widely agree about the central message of Mark 10:35-45. Jesus offers his coming action of sacrifice on behalf of others as a model for his disciples' active stance toward the world. Such a posture runs counter to the attitudes expressed in James and John's request to rule alongside Jesus in his coming kingdom (10:35-41). Scholars examine the critical issues concerning grammar, authenticity, and cultural dynamics to unlock helpful insights concerning this central message. How this passage functions for the disciples and for Mark's readers goes overlooked by scholarly examination. Social identity theory provides a way to see this passage from the vantage point of communal identity. Jesus creates a social identity for his disciples around himself using the norm of servanthood so they can align their identity with him apart from other groups.

Social identity theory illuminates the function of this episode in Mark's Gospel in multiple ways. For example, Robert Gundry uses the concept of norms when discussing what Jesus accomplishes in verse 45, yet he does not explain what norms truly are.[1] Craig Evans says this passage communicates "values" which include service as the "starkest contrast" between Christians and the rest of the world.[2] When commentators speak towards the behavior, values, norms, and differences this passage gives to the Christian community they do not take the next step of explaining why these words are impactful. This is not to criticize such scholars because they have other issues they are addressing; however, this illustrates exactly why a social identity

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[1] Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 580.

[2] Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20.* (WBC 34B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 115 and119.

perspective is needed. Scholars notice details in the text leading them to write about identity without a proper way to frame it.

A social identity approach also contributes *how* Jesus shapes the disciples. The narrative of Mark's Gospel displays how the disciples struggle to understand Jesus, particularly in regards to Jesus' coming death on the cross. They argue over positions of power when Jesus is calling them to act in humble service of others. Yet the disciples go on to start the Church in Acts despite danger to their lives (Acts 4:18-21, 5:18, 27-33, 40-41). Something happened in the lives of the disciples to change their stance from squabbling over power to sacrificing so others may have eternal life. Mark 10:35-45 provides a critical junction between their beliefs and Jesus' identity in action. Social identity theory provides data from observable human behavior that explains how Jesus' actions shape the identity of his disciples. Jesus defines what their group should be like to clarify they should draw their sense of identity from him instead of other groups.

I will elaborate on the contributions to Mark 10:35-45 from social identity theory in three major sections. The overview section will define foundational terms concerning theories of social identity. The second major section explores dynamics of social identity theory in more detail with particular attention given to elements that apply to Mark 10:35-45. The final major section will apply social identity theory to the text to demonstrate how Jesus shapes his disciples to emphasize the identity shaping power of this passage.

Summary of Scholarship on Mark 10:35-45

Scholars agree on the main claim of this passage: Jesus redirects his disciples from pursuing earthly power to serving others. Jesus presents a paradigm shift for the disciples from pursuing power to serving others. Commentators relate this key teaching on servanthood to the topics of

discipleship and leadership in the Church.[3] What scholars fail to address is how this passage functions to construct identity. A social identity approach to Mark 10:35-45 fits with Jesus redirecting his disciples towards serving others while addressing what is missing from the work of other scholars.

I will briefly add that social identity theory does not address all the major issues in Mark 10:35-45. These issues involve the outline of Mark's Gospel, authenticity of the title "Son of Man" and verse 45, and the background for Jesus' teaching on power. These issues, while important to this passage, are not necessary to discuss here for the sake of my argument. They have been thoroughly discussed in various other places.[4] Social identity theory can address the matter of communal identity in this passage and not issues of source and authenticity of the text.

Jesus' twelve disciples, Mark's original audience, and all Christians are shaped by Jesus' action of sacrifice. For the sake of clarity, I will use *the disciples* in reference to Jesus' twelve disciples in the narrative of Mark, and *Mark's audience* or *Jesus-followers* to refer to Mark's original audience.[5] I will use *Christians* as a catch-all to speak about people who believe and follow Jesus throughout history and across geography. This paper will primarily address the disciples and Jesus-followers. Addressing Christians moves into the realm of application which is beyond what this paper can do.

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[3] For examples, see Gundry, *Mark,* 576 and 581; Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark* (NIBC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1989), 170-1; Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 483; Mark L. Strauss, *Mark* (Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014, 463-4; and Kim Huat Tan, *Mark* (NCCS; Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 141-2.

[4] For example, see Alberto de Mingo Kaminouchi, *'But It Is Not So Among You': Echoes of Power in Mark 10.32-45* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 6-41. This is his second chapter which contains a summary of the major arguments concerning these questions.

[5] The specificity of the audience is argued elsewhere. For the sake of this paper I will assume Mark has people in mind as he writes. See Mary Ann Beavis, *Mark* (Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 6; and Nicholas Perrin, "Mark, Gospel of," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (2d ed. ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown and Nicholas Perrin: Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013), 559-60; and Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 20-31.

OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL IDENTITY AND SELF-CATEGORIZATION THEORY

The definitions for the major theories utilized in this paper will be spelled out first. The key terms in this section involve the definitions of social identity, social identity theory, and self-categorization theory. Social identity theory and self-categorization theory make up the foundation for understanding social identity. Socially identity theory was developed first, but self-categorization theory came out of it to solve crucial problems. I will briefly define the two theories before explaining the relationship between them via their history. These theories will be further explained in the next major section on dynamics of the theories.

Definitions of Social Identity and Self-Categorization

S*ocial identity theory* (SIT) was created by Henri Tajfel to address intergroup phenomena.[6] He was personally curious how a group of people could all behave in a similar way and even hate another group of people. In order to further discuss the theory a definition of *social identity* is in order. *Social identity* was defined by Tajfel as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership."[7] It is important to catch social identity is primarily concerned with the individual. Social identity theory can be described as the study of how an individual positively differentiates his group from another. Individuals desire to distinguish their group positively from other groups. What "positive" means can be defined by each group. These shared "positive" characteristics of the group become part of how the

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[6] Philip F. Esler, "An Outline of Social Identity Theory" in *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (ed. J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker: London: T&T Clark, 2016), 23.

[7] Henri Tajfel, *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (London: Academic Press, 1978), 61. Also see Andrew D. Clarke and J. Brian Tucker, "Social History and Social Theory in the Study of Social Identity" in *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (ed. J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker: London: T&T Clark, 2016), 43.

individual identifies herself separately from the "other" group, which is seen negatively. The interactions between groups which form this differentiation is what Tajfel studied.

Social identity theory began with Tajfel exploring how social groups attempted to remain distinctive from each other. The theory was refined by other social psychologists over time as they discovered weaknesses and unanswered questions within Tajfel's original studies.[8] What started as a personal quest for Tajfel has evolved and spread into various disciplines of study, including biblical studies.

An important development in social identity theory was the addition of *self-categorization theory* (SCT) by John Turner, one of Tajfel's students. His theory states people undergo a process of defining their identity more in line with the group than as an individual.[9] This involves two or more people recognizing they have shared similarities and differences setting them apart from others. These people then categorize themselves in some kind of group identity. Each individual accepts being part of the group and further aligns with those similarities and differences. Thus, it is self-categorization because something must happen at the individual level to bring multiple individuals together to form a group.

A key concept to understand in self-categorization theory is *depersonalization.* This is not to be taken as a belittling term. It describes how a person perceives herself in terms of a category membership that is shared by other members of her group.[10] This process transitions a person's level of identity from personal to social by allowing them to add elements of identity from the group(s) they are a part of. In other words, a person begins to describe herself by what her group is like. As she understands herself, she further integrates with the group and

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[8] Esler, "Outline," 22-3.
[9] Ibid, 23.
[10] Haslam, Reicher, and Platow, *Leadership*, 55; and Esler, "Outline," 25.

understand her individual identity along the same lines as the group identity. Depersonalization is the process individuals go through so that a group can exist at all.

SIT studies how groups of people remain distinctive from other groups and SCT focuses on processes an individual goes through to define their identity based on group affiliation. SIT and SCT can be thought of as two pillars to the same theory because self-categorization theory was born out of social identity theory. Essentially, social identity theory explains how individuals positively differentiate the group(s) they are in; whereas, self-categorization theory studies how individuals can make up a group.

In the literature on social identity, the two theories are normally defined as separate theories and terms. There are occasions when the term social identity theory is meant to encompass both SIT and SCT.[11] Because self-categorization theory was born from social identity theory it is considered fitting to use the term "social identity theory" to speak of them both. I will follow this same practice by using "SIT" and "SCT" to speak about the particular theories and "social identity theory" to refer to the holistic theory.

A Brief History of Social Identity Theory

Henri Tajfel first documented what he called social identity theory in a paper released in 1971.[12] Tajfel and his associates ran an experiment called the minimal group studies. Teenage boys were randomly placed into groups based on their choice of paintings and then presented with the decision on how to divide money between members of their group and another group. The boys had no clue who was in each group because all they were given was a list of serial numbers representing each boy in the study. They only knew what group of serial numbers they belonged

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[11] Ibid, 23.

[12] Henri Tajfel et al., "Social Categorization and Intergroup Behaviour," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 1, no. 2 (1971): 149-78.

to. With complete anonymity ensured, Tajfel observed the boys provide their own group with more money. Tajfel and his associates concluded over the course of these experiments that social identity contributed to "creating and defining the individual's place in society."[13] They further noted that group categorization affects intergroup behavior.[14]

In the first four chapters of Tajfel's 1978 book, *Differentiation Between Social Groups,* he explains the foundational ideas that make up social identity theory. Tajfel's primary concern was conflict between groups due to his own personal experience surviving a Nazi concentration camp. Tajfel is a Polish Jew and should have been sent to a death camp, but instead was mistaken as a Frenchman.[15] Social identity theory considers conflict between different groups because of Tajfel's own experience. This focus on conflict led to key issues with the theory because Tajfel focused on group phenomena and did not address how groups could exist in the first place. Others critiqued Tajfel because the psychological processes that construct why people join a group and behave in line with their group were left unexplained.

John Turner, a student of Tajfel, set out to address those issues related to psychological processes with his self-categorization theory. Turner wrote about his addition to the theory during the 1970s, but his major publication detailing SCT came out later. In 1987, *Rediscovering the Social-Group: A Self-Categorization Theory* was published. Turner stated his work built upon Tajfel and made further sense of the observations made during the minimalist studies.[16] He made two primary contributions. First, he demonstrated that intragroup behavior is focused on defining the group in more positive ways when compared to another, based on Tajfel's work.

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[13] Henri Tajfel, "Individuals and Groups in Social Psychology," *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 18, (1979), 40-1 quoted by S. Alexander Haslam, Stephen D. Reicher, and Michael J. Platow, *The New Psychology of Leadership: Identity, Influence, and Power* (New York: Psychology Press, 2011), 50.

[14] Esler, "Outline," 14.

[15] For more on Henri Tajfel's life, read Michael A. Hogg, "Social Identity Theory" in *Contemporary Social Psychological Theories* (ed. Peter J. Burke: Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 112-4.

[16] Esler, "Outline," 23.

Second, he placed an emphasis on the identity of the individual in the group. Philip Esler sums it up well when he says, "social identity was not just part of one's identity derived from belonging to a group but the very mechanism making group behaviour possible."[17] In other words, SCT added an understanding of psychological processes to explain what Tajfel observed in the minimal group experiments.

Social identity theory essentially explains what humans do when they are in a group. Once a person chooses to join a group, or is placed in a group, she begins learning what makes that group unique by comparing and contrasting her group with other groups. Then, she strives to define her group in more positive terms than other groups. Depersonalization occurs as she adds key parts of the group's identity to her own. Social identity theory describes the psychological processes between and within groups that influence communal and individual identity, and this will be further explained with dynamics of the theory.

DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

Biblical scholars deploy social identity theory to understand the nuances of identity formation and group behavior in the biblical context. Social identity theory provides the tools to understand how Jesus shapes his disciples' sense of communal and individual identity. The main goal of this section is to explain the major components or dynamics of social identity theory. I cannot explain every aspect of the theory in this paper, so I focus on essential components of the theory needed for Mark 10:35-45.

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[17] Esler, "Outline," 23.

Groups, Ingroups, and Outgroups

Foundational to Tajfel's theory are three components or aspects of group membership which define a group.[18] First, there is the cognitive component, which means the knowledge of belonging to a group. Second, the evaluative component entails positive and negative connotations that come with group membership. Third, the emotional component contains any emotion one may have about her group and other groups based upon her cognitive and/or evaluative components. This could be feelings of love towards one's own group or hatred towards an opposing group. These three aspects become the building blocks for the social identity of a group and the categories a group member can use to compare and contrast her group with another.

The three components are necessary to understand what a *group* properly is. Tajfel defined group using Emerson's definition of *nation* from 1960. Emerson wrote: "The simplest statement that can be made about a nation is that it is a body of people who feel that they are a nation."[19] Tajfel used this definition for groups because his key understanding of a nation was, "they categorize themselves with a high degree of consensus in the appropriate manner, and are consensually categorized in the same manner by others."[20] He saw nations and groups as similar concepts. Groups exist because members make similar observations about what they are like. At least three people form a group by categorizing themselves and being categorized along similar characteristics.[21] It is possible to speak of a group as two people, also called a dyad, only if the

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[18] Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 229.

[19] Tajfel, *Social Categories,* 229 quoting from R. Emerson, *From Empire to Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 102.

[20] Ibid, 229.

[21] Hogg, "Social Identity Theory", 116.

two are part of a larger existing group.[22] Even a small number of people can constitute a group

and be described by the three components.

Groups are broken into "us" and "them" as *ingroup* and *outgroup*. An ingroup is

essentially "us." Those who associate together based on Tajfel's three components form the

ingroup. An outgroup is any other group that stands outside of the ingroup. Who is included in

any ingroup or outgroup depends on which group is being studied. Since this paper is interested

in Jesus and his disciples, they are the ingroup and any other group will be an outgroup.

Conflict emerges as a primary factor in Tajfel's study of human groups. Ingroups and

outgroups experience conflict as each group differentiates from another. Creating a positive

ingroup distinction often involves belittling or rejecting an outgroup. Tajfel uses the three

components as an outside observer to study what groups hold on to when there is conflict.[23]

Paying attention to the context of an ingroup for signs of conflict clarifies the ingroups sense of

identity. The three aspects provide tools to analyze the conflict in order to find key identity

markers for the ingroup.

Norms and Prototypes

SIT and SCT both make use of *norms* and *prototypes* to understand key descriptors of ingroups

and outgroups. Group norms prescribe attitudes, perceptions, and behavior for members of the

group.[24] Group members know how to behave and belong with their group by following group

norms.[25] Certain group beliefs can also influence and strengthen norms.[26] Norms include

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[22] Ibid, 117.

[23] Ibid, 230.

[24] Hogg, "Social Identity Theory", 124.

[25] Esler, "Outline," 32.

[26] Beliefs could be used to explain how Jesus-followers would continue to have their identity shaped by Jesus' words in Mark's Gospel. See Daniel Bar-Tol, "Group Beliefs as an Expression of Social Identity," Pages 93-113 in *Social Identity: International Perspectives* (ed. Stephen Worchel, J. Francisco Morales, Darío Páez, and Jean-Claude Deschamps: London: Sage Publications, 1998), 96. Taking a deeper look into beliefs is outside the scope of

distinctions between ingroup and outgroup so members can identity who they are as opposed to what makes the other group "them".

Cognitive recognition of norms in a specific context leads to the creation of prototypes. Groups summarize their experiences to create an abstract concept.[27] That abstract concept is what members of the group cognitively identify with so they can say "we are like this" in a general sense. Prototypes are closely related to norms because they describe the average expected behavior. Prototypes are the middle of the road, common expression of norms that a group member can understand.

Norms and prototypes shape the identity of individuals who are in the group because of *social influence*. In social psychology, social influence is how a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are affected and shaped by others.[28] Norms and prototypes play a role in social influence by identifying how members in a group are similar to each other and different from other groups. Individuals then began to fall in line with norms and prototypes to belong to the ingroup. A common effect of norms and prototypes is *polarization* where norms of both the ingroup and outgroup are taken to their extremes. Understanding the norms and prototypes define how ingroup members ought to think, feel, and behave in certain situations. The individual begins to define their identity based on norms and prototypes, then they polarize towards extremes. In other words, norms are like the rule book for an ingroup. A group member is influenced by other group members adhering to the norms so he follows suit. Conflict with group norms leads to polarization due to social influence.

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this paper. For more on group beliefs in SIT see also Daniel Bar-Tal, *Group Beliefs: A Conception for Analyzing Group Structure, Processes, and Behavior* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990).

[27] Esler, "Outline," 33.

[28] Ibid, 32.

Leadership with Social Identity Theory

The study of social identity branches into multiple fields besides biblical studies. In particular, Tajfel and Turner influenced leadership studies through their work. Haslam, Reicher, and Platow released a study called *The New Psychology of Leadership* (NPL). They present a theory of leadership based upon social identity theory containing helpful categories to understand what transpires between Jesus and his disciples on the level of social identity. The three authors of the study summarize their work into four key principles.[29] The four principles explain how leaders are successful at bringing others together to accomplish a shared goal. I will summarize these four principles because they cleanly frame up what Jesus does in Mark 10:35-45. Their research clearly defines how Jesus shapes his disciples' sense of communal identity.

The first principle in NPL is leaders must be seen as part of the ingroup. Ingroup members primarily influence other ingroup members. [30] A leader must be a prototype or exemplar so he has influence as an ingroup member. Leaders do this by standing up for the norms of the group to communicate what matters to other members.[31] This also clearly distinguish "us" from "them" for the group members. When other members know their leader truly is one of "them" their identity is more responsive to the leader's shaping.

Second, leaders must "do it for us." Their actions must advance the interests of the ingroup. Haslam, Reicher, and Platow look at this from the leadership topic of *fairness*.[32] Fairness consists of following the norms a group agrees to behave by. Fairness and unfairness define how leaders' words and actions promote ingroup norms. A leader can be fair for the ingroup and unfair for the outgroup when an ingroup norm goes against an outgroup norm.

[29] Haslam, Reicher, and Platow, *Leadership,* xxii-xxiii.
[30] Ibid, 77.
[31] Haslam, Reicher, and Platow, *Leadership,* 77.
[32] Ibid, 111.

Leaders can be fair to both ingroup and outgroup. The norm of charitable giving typically promotes fairness for both the ingroup and outgroup. [33] This second principle gets at a human desire for the leader's words and actions to align with group norms.[34]

Third, leaders must craft a sense of "us." Leaders actively shape and share what it means to be "us," which involves occasionally breaking out of the constraints of what has been handed down from previous ingroup prototypes.[35] The ingroup can have prototypes that no longer fit the identity of the group. Essentially, when the leader tries to craft that sense of "us" they will have to communicate again and again who they are, and their claims will be challenged.

Fourth, leaders must "make us matter". Leaders embed the norms of the group into reality. The authors observed this from the use of language and rhetoric by leaders. They also noticed particular organizational structures, buildings, or public demonstrations were used by leaders to visualize the concept of a norm.[36] Leaders move the group norms from being ideas and concepts to words, actions, structures, and traditions that exist in the world.[37] The crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus along with the oral and written tradition of his earthly ministry embed the norms he wanted to establish into reality.

Potential Concerns with Social Identity

Before applying social identity theory to Mark 10:35-45 I want to address potential concerns that stem from using a modern social psychological theory on a first-century text.[38] The world of the first century is a collectivist social environment and not an individualistic one like the twentieth century. This shift from collectivism to individualism does not mean social identity theory

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[33] Ibid, 130-1.
[34] Ibid, 109-10.
[35] Ibid, 138-142.
[36] Ibid, 179.
[37] Ibid, 187.
[38] Ibid, 46. Even the NPL states that individuals become group members by choice when they understand doing so will benefit them personally.

cannot be used in relation to the biblical world because these are not mutually exclusive. Social identity theory does not fall apart in a collectivist world.[39] Collectivism means individuals regard themselves and know who they are primarily in terms of the group(s) they are in.[40] Someone in the first century defines himself in light of his group and may struggle to understand himself as an individual. In an individualistic culture the opposite is true. Biblical scholars consider two conditions for SIT which are met in the biblical text. These conditions are: groups must be in a largely collectivist culture, and groups must engage in social comparison.[41] The tenets of social identity theory hold true in both individualistic and collectivist environments.

The reader may also wonder if a leadership study is proper to use in biblical interpretation. The reader would be right in pushing back because the authors of NPL apply their theory to certain situations that do not match what Jesus is doing. For instance, Jesus is not replacing a pre-existing leader, nor is he trying to earn a promotion to be their leader. The twelve disciples were not a formal group until Jesus called them together. I concede that twenty-first century corporate culture in NPL is not helpful for Mark 10:35-45, but the principles remain congruent with observable behavior based on social identity theory.[42] NPL is useful because the principles rely on social identity theory and not corporate culture.

An additional concern may arise with the fourth principle of NPL. Haslam, Reicher, and Platow use words such as "power" and "control" in the chapter on this principle. Their key question is, "How can leaders gain control over the meanings associated with group membership

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[39] Coleman A. Baker, "Social Identity Theory and Biblical Interpretation," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* Vol. 42, No. 3 (2012), 133.

[40] Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 62-3.

[41] Baker, "Interpretation," 133.

[42] A summary of how leaders are the most influential member of their group is found in Michael A. Hogg and Scott A. Reid, "Social Identity, Self-Categorization, and the Communication of Group Norms," *Communication Theory* 16 (2006): 19.

in order to gain control over group members?"[43] This question seems ironic to use in a study on a key passage where Jesus rejects power. However, NPL does not use power in an antithetical way to Jesus. I think Jesus is objecting to the cultural use of power to control others.[44] The authors define power as "power *through*, rather than power *over*" and leadership as "about getting them to *want* to do things. Leadership, then, is about shaping beliefs, desires, and priorities."[45] The authors reject having authority over people because they see it as evidence of failing as a leader. I am giving the authors the benefit of the doubt based on their definition of leadership and power. I think their fourth principle remains helpful because they are not going against Jesus.

A final concern might be an implication that I think Mark and Jesus understood social identity theory and deployed it. This is not an attempt at anachronism. At no point in my argument am I trying to suggest Mark had a working knowledge of social identity theory which influenced how he wrote his Gospel. I am also not saying Jesus had a working expertise of the theory. What I am saying is social identity theory explains observable human behavior. What Mark wrote about in his Gospel happens to provide enough detail for observations to be made that are best explained using social identity theory.

Conclusion

Social identity theory provides a helpful framework for understanding how groups operate both internally and externally. Group members have their identity shaped by the norms and prototypes the group sees as positive traits. These norms are decided based on cognitive, emotional, and evaluative factors for each group. The leader of each group can shape the group identity with norms by reflecting the ingroup to the world. Conflict between ingroup and outgroup pose a

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[43] Ibid, 165.
[44] See Kaminouchi, *Echoes,* 123 for a summary of positions on power in Mark 10:42b.
[45] Ibid, xix.

context where members are influenced to polarize to group norms. The processes in social identity theory provide the framework for how communal and individual identity is shaped. Next, I will address how Jesus' words and actions in Mark 10:35-45 positively impact the disciples to categorize with the norm of service against their displayed desire for power.

A SOCIAL IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE ON MARK 10:35-45

Jesus shapes his disciples to categorize with the norm of servanthood so their identity aligns with him. This occurs through a process where Jesus clarifies the disciples are an ingroup and Gentile leaders are the outgroup. Jesus then frames the norm of service as something he will model for them by going to the cross. Jesus' example creates a positive difference for the disciples to polarize towards. The disciples will self-categorize to the norm because Jesus influences them through his example.

I will now explain how Jesus shapes his disciples by incorporating social identity theory with key details of the text. First, I will identify the challenge to identity in Mark 10:35-45 as a breakdown in self-categorization amongst the disciples. Jesus expressed components of group identity throughout the narrative in Mark, yet the disciples do not perceive themselves as a unique ingroup. Second, the reality of conflict for both the disciples and Mark's audience will be described because understanding the context demonstrates the seriousness of the identity crisis at hand. Lastly, the specific words and actions of Jesus in the passage will be connected with social identity theory to show how Jesus shapes the communal identity of his disciples.

Identity Challenges to Mark 10:35-45

A Lack of Self-Categorization

James and John are a dyad in relation with the larger ingroup of the disciples, yet they identify

with the outgroup because they display incorrect norms of power (Mark 10:37). They ask for

seats of power in spite of Jesus' earlier teaching on power (9:33-35).[46] These two correctly

acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah since they say he will come in glory (10:37), but they are

incorrect about the king of Messiah Jesus is.[47] They do not see themselves as a distinct ingroup

because they desire power like the Gentile rulers. James and John are drawing that norm from

another group, which means they do not see themselves as a distinct ingroup.

The Gospel of Mark includes phrases that invoke the three components of group

membership, which shows that identity formation has been going on throughout the Gospel. In

Mark 3:34-35 Jesus refers to the ingroup as "mother and brothers" (μήτηρ μου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί

μου). Such language for the ingroup would feature cognitive, evaluative, and emotional

components. They know who Jesus considers his "family," recognize connotations from this

association, and feel a certain way about the association. A great example of an ingroup marker

is Mark 4:11. Jesus informs his disciples they have the "secret" (μυστήριον) of the kingdom of

God. They cognitively can acknowledge they are the ingroup because they know something

others do not. The disciples have an evaluative component because they positively get to know

what the parables mean, while others negatively are kept in the dark. They also emotionally

experience being explained what the parables mean (4:10, 34). Identity formation has been a

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[46] Witherington, *Mark*, 286.
[47] Stein, *Mark,* 484-5.

constant theme in Mark as Jesus is trying to shape the disciples, which makes the disciples'

desire for power more concerning.[48]

The disciples are not accepting ingroup norms as they should. Jesus laid out ingroup

norms in his three passion predictions leading up to 10:35-45. In 8:31-33, 9:30-32, and 10:32-34

Each time the disciples fail to understand Jesus' coming death he teaches an ingroup norm (Mark

8:34-38 and 9:33-37). This ongoing pattern exists in part because the disciples fail to

depersonalize concerning the correct norms. They instead perceive themselves as part of an

outgroup.[49] Exactly how they perceive themselves in relation to outgroups is difficult to

determine. All the text provides is the disciples desire for power which is consistent with the

rulers of the Gentiles. At the very least the disciples are basing part of their communal identity

around an incorrect norm.

Sources of Conflict

Throughout Mark's narrative, conflict occurs to highlight how the disciples ought to

act.[50] For instance, scribes accuse Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebul (3:22). Jesus refutes

their teaching and commands the people not to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. In disproving their

teaching Jesus asserts a norm for acknowledging the power of the Holy Spirit. The disciples and

Jesus-followers should not blaspheme the Holy Spirit because that is to reject Jesus' authority.

Another time, Jesus instructs the disciples to handle conflict by leaving towns that will not accept

them (5:11). Outgroups made of demons, religious leaders, and everyday townspeople oppose

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[48] The function of "you" in the Gospel also has the ability to shape the Gospel's audience by creating a sense of inclusion. See Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, "Audience Inclusion and Exclusion as Rhetorical Technique in the Gospel of Mark," *JBL* 129, no. 4 (2010): 718.

[49] David E. Garland, *Mark,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 412-3.

[50] Kaminouchi, *Echoes,* 34-5.

Jesus and the disciples.[51] Most of the conflict until 8:27 is intergroup. Then, conflict shifts to

intragroup until 10:45. I think the change in conflict demonstrates the serious problem of the

disciples not exhibiting Jesus' communicated norms. Thus, they create their own conflict by not

understanding their identity. This is crucial because if the disciples do not self-categorize

according to Jesus, they will exhibit a group identity that does not reflect him. The incorrect

identity would then trickle down to other Jesus-followers.

The world of Mark's audience contained significant conflict to challenge ingroup norms

as well.[52] A brief discussion on the exact audience displays possible sources of conflict requiring

an identity lesson. Scholars look at issues for dating and audience location to decide who Mark's

intended audience was. The majority place the audience in Rome or Syria around 60-70 C.E..[53]

Several options for conflict are presented such as persecution under Nero, The Jewish War in 66-

70 C.E. and the flight from Jerusalem.[54] Some of the outgroups in Mark do reflect such sources

of conflict and the issues Jesus-followers might face.[55] Mark's audience would need instruction

to adopt sacrificial service even in the midst of suffering. Intergroup and intragroup conflict in

Mark demonstrate the significance for identity shaping from Jesus.

When the reader arrives at 10:42 Jesus singles out the "rulers of the Gentiles" (ἄρχειν τῶν

ἐθνῶν). Rohrbaugh identifies such rulers as part of the urban elite class.[56] This social class could

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[51] Paul Middleton, "Suffering and the Creation of Christian Identity in the Gospel of Mark" in *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (ed. by J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker. London: T&T Clark, 2016), 180.

[52] M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary,* The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 22.

[53] Galilee is the minority position with weak evidence and is not widely accepted. See Perrin, "Mark, Gospel of," 560-1, and Stein, *Mark,* 10-11.

[54] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 1xiii.

[55] Herman C. Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989, 12.

[56] Richard L. Rohrbaugh, "The Social Location of the Markan Audience" in *The Social World of the New Testament: Insights and Models* (ed. Jerome H. Neyrey and Eric C. Stewart: Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008), 147.

be a larger outgroup category in Mark's Gospel including other characters. This group of leaders are attributed one particular norm by Jesus which is they "lord" and "exercise authority" (κατακυριεύουσιν, κατεξουσιάζουσιν) over others.[57] Jesus contrasts between outgroup and ingroup here to clarify the disciples, and Jesus-followers, should not identify with this norm (10:43). "They" use their power over people, but "we" will not do that. The ingroup norm of service is set up in a contrast with the norm of another group to distinguish they should not be part of the outgroup.

Jesus Shaping His Disciples

The work of social identity theory comes to fruition in Jesus' teaching in Mark 10:42-45. Jesus turns to frame the norm of servanthood for them after two prior moments where the disciples fail to understand Jesus and their own identity. The four principles from NPL frame how Jesus creates communal identity for the disciples. Each principle will be used to summarize the findings of social identity theory in this passage. Jesus shapes the disciples' identity in these verses by pointing them to his coming action of sacrifice.

When Jesus calls the disciples to him the reader is reminded of the relationship between Jesus and the disciples that is developed throughout the Gospel.[58] Their relationship is the first principle of NPL. The disciples consider Jesus to be a member of the ingroup since they are following him.[59] Jesus has addressed the disciples throughout the Gospel to build cognitive, evaluative, and emotional components of group membership for them.[60] Up to this point Jesus

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[57] See Kaminouchi, *Echoes,* 123-7 for a summary of the argument on these two words.
[58] Paul L. Danove, *The Rhetoric of Characterization of God, Jesus and Jesus' Disciples in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNT Supplemental Series 290; New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 91-101. He examines rhetorical features of the text that demonstrate how the disciples are associated with Jesus yet struggle to be consistent in their identity as his disciples.
[59] Witherington, *Mark,* 151.
[60] Lamar Williamson Jr., *Mark.* Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 193-4.

has influence over the disciples because they have done what he has asked of them (e.g. Mark 6:7-13). The collectivist nature of the first century also means Jesus must communicate the correct group norms so the disciples properly understand the group identity which influences their individual identity.[61] Jesus has been in relationship with his disciples throughout the Gospel so he builds upon this existing bond to shape their identity.

Within the second principle, "leaders must be seen to do it for us," Jesus says he will take the norm of service to its ultimate conclusion. Verse 45 is key because Jesus' coming action of sacrifice will promote the norm for the group. Jesus not only teaches about the desired norm of service, but he will also live out this norm. Social identity theory suggests the disciples will be influenced to live out this norm of service because Jesus is the exemplar of the norm.[62] Dying on the cross is the extreme application of this norm to polarize group members towards a willingness to sacrifice their own lives to serve others. If Jesus solidifies the norm then conflict intensifies polarization.[63] Certain outgroups have rejected Jesus' messianic role as the ongoing conflict in Mark demonstrates (e.g. 3:22). Conflict alongside ingroup norms leads to polarization because of social influence. Jesus' death on the cross is the extreme expression of service to influence his disciples, and Mark's audience, to change their perception of identity.

Myrick C. Shinall Jr. further demonstrates this second principle in *Miracles and the Kingdom of God.* Shinall's thesis is "Mark uses miracles to demonstrate the divine power resident in Jesus, while Q [or the Double Tradition of Matthew and Luke]…uses miracles to demonstrate the triumph of the kingdom of God over the kingdom of Satan."[64] He further

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[61] Malina, *World,* 63-4.

[62] Hogg and Reid, "Social Categorization," 13.

[63] Philip F. Esler, "Groups Norms and Prototypes in Matthew 5.3-12: A Social Identity Interpretation of the Matthean Beatitudes," in *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (ed. J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker: London: T&T Clark, 2016), 167-8.

[64] Myrick C. Shinall Jr. *Miracles and the Kingdom of God: Christology and Social Identity in Mark and Q* (London: Fortress Academic, 2018), xi.

compares how Mark portrays certain events with Matthew and Luke to distinguish that Mark emphasizes Jesus as the one who accomplishes God's victory alone. In Matthew and Luke, others participate with Jesus to bring about this victory.[65] Jesus' death is part of his messianic mission by bringing victory where the outgroups mentioned in Mark see it as defeat. Jesus shapes the disciples' sense of identity by being God's champion over death. They, along with Mark's audience, benefit from Jesus' sacrificial death.[66]

The third principle of NPL is "leaders craft a sense of us". A common behavior observed within this framework is leaders are challenged in their description of the ingroup. Jesus has faced the challenge of his disciples not understanding him in addition to outsiders challenging his teaching (e.g. Mark 8:14-21 and 3:1-6). Jesus has repeated himself on the matter of his coming death three times. This threefold repetition highlights the ongoing shaping by Jesus. The repetition reinforces what norms matter to attempt to cut through the disciples' confusion.

The fourth and final principle is "leaders make us matter." This principle is primarily concerned with leaders establishing ingroup norms and prototypes in reality. The crucifixion becomes the clearest way to see Jesus exemplifying this principle. In looking ahead to his death, Jesus makes this norm real because he lives out what he says. Jesus' coming action of sacrifice this norm is a significant part of communal identity for the disciples. Verse 45 is powerful in how it shapes identity because Jesus' own death on the cross embeds this norm in history.

The disciples represent the new Israel, so Jesus' shaping of their identity is transmitted to future Jesus-followers.[67] Jesus' teaching and example guides Jesus-followers towards a social identity centered on himself as the lead servant.[68] Living after the crucifixion means this norm

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[65] Ibid, 49.
[66] Ibid, 76.
[67] Waetjen, *Reordering,* 174.
[68] Williamson, *Mark,* 193.

polarizes because of intergroup conflict once it is recognized as a group nomr. In light of the possible conflict they are experiencing, Jesus-followers must perceive themselves in terms of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross in the midst of outgroups attacking their sense of identity.

Jesus' own example creates a powerful positive group norm for the disciples and Jesus-followers to identify with. The core principles of NPL help frame what Jesus does in terms of social identity theory. Jesus' coming death as a ransom is positive for the disciples and benefits those in the outgroup as well. This strong positive contrast between servanthood which saves and power which dominates is meant to help the disciples know who they are by clarifying what their group is like. Their ingroup should be known as servants who are influenced by Jesus, which impacts their identity through a distinct norm.

CONCLUSION

Social identity theory developed by Henri Tajfel and his associate John C. Turner provide a wealth of helpful information when it comes to understanding group behavior and communal identity. SIT and SCT help explain the dynamics of intergroup and intragroup behavior, especially with the concept of group norms. These discoveries have influenced many fields besides biblical studies such as leadership studies. Haslam, Reicher, and Platow developed *The New Psychology of Leadership* which employs social identity theory in the world of leadership. Their four principles provide a helpful framework for how group leaders establish and strengthen norms within their group. The insights from social identity theory are useful for understanding interactions between characters in the biblical text.

Scholars widely agree on the main message of Mark 10:35-45; however, within this level of interpretation are a variety of nuanced approaches that do not disagree with the main message.

Each insight is useful; yet, what has been missing is a perspective which addresses how Jesus shapes the communal identity of the disciples in Mark 10:35-45. Social identity helps address this problem because of its attention to the behavior of groups in connection with their perception of identity. The disciples demonstrate they draw some of their norms from outgroups instead of Jesus' stated norms. Jesus creates a social identity for his disciples around the norm of servanthood so they draw their identity from him instead. When someone affirms "Jesus is Christ" that should include Jesus as a servant which influences their own sense of identity.

In Mark 10:35-45 Jesus creates this identity around himself by embedding the norm of servanthood into reality. Jesus' forthcoming death on the cross transforms a concept into reality creating a polarizing effect with the norm. The sharp contrast between the outgroup's norm of abusing power and the ingroup norm of service creates a positive difference the disciples and Jesus-followers can depersonalize to. The ongoing conflict for the disciples and Mark's audience polarizes the norm of service as a marker of their identity. This helps the disciples see themselves as something different from other groups in their world. Jesus exemplifies this norm so that disciples, Jesus-followers, and Christians all will hold faithful to the witness of Jesus as Christ in the midst of conflict with other groups.

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