

Social Dominance

An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression

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1 From Viciousness to Viciousness

Theories of Intergroup Relations

I tried to defend myself but I couldn't. They took my clothes, they hit me, they were pulling my hair. A few days later six soldiers came in. All of them raped me. They cursed me, insulted me, said there were too many Muslim people and said of lot of Muslims were going to give birth to Serbian children.

18-year old Bosnian woman, 1993¹

Despite tremendous effort and what appear to be our best efforts stretching over hundreds of years, discrimination, oppression, brutality, and tyranny remain all too common features of the human condition. Far from having escaped the grip of human ugliness in the civil rights revolutions of the 1960s, we seem only to have increased the overall level of chaos, confusion, and intergroup truculence during the post-civil rights era and the resolution of the cold war. We see signs of this brutality and oppression all around us, from the streets of Los Angeles and Brooklyn to the hills of Bosnia and the forests of Rwanda. Rather than resolving the problems of intergroup hostility, we merely appear to stumble from viciousness to viciousness. Why?

While some journalists and poets have written astute and penetrating descriptions of this nearly ubiquitous barbarism,² it is primarily social scientists who have tried to construct a theoretical understanding of these phenomena.³ As a result, the social science literature on the interrelated topics of stereotyping, prejudice, intergroup relations, gender, race, and class discrimination has become enormous. Different approaches have emphasized different aspects of the problem, ranging from the functions that prejudice and discrimination serve for various psychological motivations, to limitations in human cognitive-processing abilities, to how one's social structure or social environment elicits discriminatory behavior, to how prejudice and ingroup favoritism might be evolutionarily adaptive. So many different people have written so much on these topics that one might truly wonder why anyone would bother to write further.

Part of the answer to this question lies in the fact that while a number of people have had some wise and insightful things to say about these

problems, very little has been done to tie these various pieces together into a coherent whole. It is precisely because there are so many important morsels of knowledge scattered before us that we are in a position to integrate them into a larger theory.

Though both sociology and social psychology would seem equipped to explain social inequality, at present, neither discipline has what we feel is an adequate theory. Within contemporary social psychology, a researcher typically uses one main research method, usually laboratory experimentation, and examines a set of highly specific questions in great and even mind-numbing detail. Though this approach has the advantage of eliminating alternative explanations and providing a great deal of nuanced knowledge about a very specific topic, it has the disadvantage of limiting the scope of relevant theories and phenomena considered. In particular, the more research is done in these laboratory settings, rather than on real social phenomena, the less it seems to address how social processes function in the real world in which people are buffeted and pulled by enormous forces of social context, culture, and social-structural relations.

Within contemporary sociology, the heavy emphasis on social-structural relations and aggregate data analyses has meant that many sociological analyses do not address psychological phenomena in psychological terms – such as motivation and prejudice – or recognize the fact that there are still important and stable individual differences between people, even people who share the same sociological characteristics (e.g., social class, occupation, gender). The split earlier in this century between sociology and social psychology contributed to these divisions and continues to hinder a more comprehensive and rich understanding of the problems of racism, sexism, classism, and general group oppression. In addition, while a number of U.S. political scientists have also been intensely interested in the problems of prejudice and discrimination, this interest has almost exclusively and narrowly focused on the Black–White conflict. Thus, very little if any effort has been made to examine whether the lessons learned from this Black–White context might generalize to other cultural or social contexts.

While many of the theories locked within their traditional academic disciplines are able to reap the benefit of parsimony, this benefit generally comes at the cost of a good deal of cultural and theoretical parochialism. In this book we attempt to break out of this parochialism by presenting a theory of group oppression that not only relies on thinking within contemporary social psychology, political sociology, and political science, but also includes important ideas from evolutionary psychology.

Before presenting our new synthesis in Chapter 2, we shall first review the most important theories and findings relevant to group inequality. In this chapter we shall try to extract the most valuable insights and use them as components in what we hope is a more useful, comprehensive, and fruitful synthesis. For simplicity, we organize these theories into four categories: psychological models, social-psychological models, structural-sociological models, and evolutionary models.

Psychological Theories

The psychological approach to the understanding of racism, discrimination, and stereotyping focuses primarily on the internal processes taking place within the individual. These models focus on (a) personality dynamics, (b) individuals' basic values, anxieties, and beliefs, and (c) individuals' information processing.

Though these kinds of models differ in their focus, all three have been profoundly influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud and his colleagues. Although it is hard for many of us to appreciate this now, Freud introduced a revolutionary new way of understanding human behavior. Instead of regarding human choice and decision making as primarily the result of rational and logical deliberations, Freud suggested that human behavior is largely driven by subconscious and nonrational drives, and is then rationalized and justified in terms of logic and reason. Adopting this view, many scholars both inside and outside of the psychodynamic revolution, began to think of peoples' ethnic, racial, and national stereotypes as manifestations of basic features of their motivations, rather than as rationally held political philosophies.⁴

The Frustration–Aggression Hypothesis

One of the theoretically simplest versions of this new approach is the *frustration–aggression* hypothesis. In their effort to understand the outbreak of ethnic, racial, and political barbarism that had broken out in Europe in the early part of the twentieth century, an interdisciplinary group of social scientists at Yale University formulated a simple and general hypothesis of human aggression that melded drive and behaviorist theories with psychodynamic ideas.⁵ They suggested that aggression, that is, the intention to deliberately harm others, results from the individual's frustration at not achieving highly desired goals.⁶ Because taking out aggression on the source of the frustration could be quite dangerous, especially when that source was a powerful person or institution (e.g., one's boss), Dollard and his colleagues suggested that people will often turn

their anger against less powerful others. The Yale group applied this idea of *displaced aggression* to the analysis of political choice, intergroup prejudice, and discrimination.⁷ For example, they found periodic increases in the lynching of U.S. Blacks following economic stress in the South.⁸

Despite the valuable insights that the frustration–aggression approach provided, this model still left a number of questions unanswered. First, it was not able to account for discernible levels of prejudice and discrimination by people and social institutions that have not been shown to be frustrated in any obvious fashion. Second, the frustration–aggression hypothesis appears to assume that aggression is unusual and not a normal part of social life. However, subsequent analyses of legal practices, religious practices, cultural family patterns, and other forms of institutional discrimination suggest that discrimination is extremely common, and not solely motivated by individuals' levels of frustration. To understand discrimination as more common and institutional, we will need additional theoretical machinery.

Authoritarian Personality Theory (APT)

The most ambitious application of psychoanalytic theory to the study of prejudice and discrimination was *authoritarian personality theory* (APT; see e.g., Fromm, 1941). In the first comprehensive demonstration of this theory, Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford (1950) argued that there is a personality syndrome labeled *authoritarianism*, unifying individuals' social, economic, and political convictions. As a psychodynamic theory, APT theorized that authoritarianism resulted from child-rearing practices that humiliated and deprecated the child and predicated parental affection on the child's immediate and unquestioning obedience to the parents. This kind of subjugating environment was thought to predispose children toward thinking of human relations in terms of dominance and submission and to teach a particular orientation toward hierarchy: the vilification of those thought of as weak, humane, or deviate (e.g., ethnic minorities) and the glorification of those perceived to be strong and powerful. As such, authoritarians were hypothesized to hold conservative economic and political views, and also be generally xenophobic, racist, and ethnocentric. Among the most provocative findings of this research were that (a) people who are prejudiced against one ethnic minority (e.g., Jews) also tend to be prejudiced against other minorities (e.g., Blacks, Catholics) and that (b) authoritarians – as measured by the *F-scale* – have conservative political-economic views and high levels of generalized ethnocentrism.

While authoritarian personality theory is arguably the most influential prejudice theory, it is also one of the most harshly and thoroughly

criticized.⁹ The original research was criticized for using attitude scales that were subject to measurement and ideological bias. The primary measurement bias in question, *agreement bias*, manifests itself when respondents agree with whatever question is being put to them, regardless of the question contents. Not only can this type of artifact result in people being falsely classified as authoritarians, but it can also produce artificially high correlations within and among attitude measures.¹⁰ In addition, the *F-scale*, the measure of authoritarianism, was accused of being politically biased in measuring authoritarianism of the right, while ignoring authoritarianism of the left.

To attempt to correct this ideological bias, Rokeach (1960) constructed a *dogmatism scale*, thought to be a politically neutral measure of generalized authoritarianism. Unfortunately, repeated attempts with this alternative measure have still shown that people on the right have higher authoritarianism scores than people on the left do.¹¹ Not only have Robert Altemeyer's (1981, 1988) efforts to measure authoritarianism addressed problems with agreement response bias, but unlike other measures of authoritarianism, Altemeyer's (1996) measure (the Right-Wing Authoritarianism [RWA] Scale), explicitly includes the contents originally theorized to be part of authoritarianism: authoritarian submission, conventionalism, and punitiveness against deviants.¹² This new authoritarianism measure has shown itself to be highly reliable and valid and to correlate with many balanced prejudice measures, including those assessing prejudice against homosexuals, French-Canadians, immigrants, foreigners, Blacks, and Jews. Importantly, however, Altemeyer has also been unable to measure authoritarianism of the left.¹³

Despite the numerous criticisms directed against the authoritarian personality research, the use of more sophisticated and valid methodologies support several of the original claims. Three are relevant to our concerns. First, just as the authoritarianism theorists speculated, there really does appear to be a phenomenon we may call *generalized ethnocentrism*, reflecting itself in the denigration of a wide range of outgroups, including ethnic groups, political groups (e.g., communists), sexual orientation groups (e.g., gays and lesbians), and stigmatized religious groups. Second, this generalized tendency to stigmatize and denigrate the generalized "other" contains a consistent theme of dominance and submission.¹⁴ Third, and contradicting the assertions of *principled conservatism* theorists (e.g., Sniderman & Piazza, 1993), generalized ethnocentrism is positively associated with political conservatism. This association has been found across a wide variety of cultures,¹⁵ and has been found so consistently that some theorists have even considered ethnocentrism as a definitional component of conservatism.¹⁶

On the other hand, despite this broad empirical support, several other important claims either have never been put to serious empirical test or have been disproved. Among the most important claims having shortcomings is the hypothesized child-rearing origins of the authoritarianism syndrome. Aside from the highly questionable indirect support for this hypothesis that was originally offered, there has been no well-done empirical research offered to support this claim. Second, though the psychoanalytic architecture on which APT is built is rich and interesting, it may not be needed to explain the results found. Third, APT implies that the authoritarian syndrome is somehow a pathological condition that can either be treated or prevented from occurring given proper psychotherapy or child-rearing practices. Yet there is no convincing evidence that authoritarians are any more psychologically debilitated than nonauthoritarians are. Fourth, as with many other strictly psychological models of prejudice and discrimination, APT does nothing to help us understand the relation between the hypothesized psychodynamics within the individual and the dynamics of institutional behavior and ideological processes in the society.

Psychological Uncertainty and Anxiety Models

Because most evidence of authoritarianism is correlational, the robust findings that people prejudiced against one group tend to be prejudiced against other groups, and that people who are prejudiced against outgroups also tend to be politically conservative,¹⁷ are subject to alternative interpretations. Surprisingly, such alternative theoretical explanations are few. One exception was proposed by G. D. Wilson in 1973.¹⁸ Wilson reasoned that the fear of uncertainty is the central psychological motivation underlying conservatism. Wilson and others showed that some expressions of the fear of uncertainty, such as preference for safe and conventional vocations, fear of death, and dislike of ambiguous art, correlate with broad attitudinal measures of conservatism.¹⁹

Another theory that analyzes group prejudice as stemming from a kind of fear is *terror management theory* (TMT). TMT argues that because human beings can anticipate their own deaths, they are subject to the existential anxiety or terror of meaninglessness that such thoughts bring to mind. To counteract this profound anxiety, we create and work to sustain cultural worldviews that provide a meaningful way of understanding the universe and a sense that we are valuable members of this universe.²⁰ Self-esteem, or the sense that one is valuable within some cultural worldview, is one kind of buffer against anxiety. Solomon et al.²¹ speculate that members of minority groups may experience greater challenges to the anxiety buffer because dominant cultural beliefs about those groups

question their fundamental worth and value. They note that because self-esteem measures can be reactive and unstable, it is difficult to assess this hypothesis using current techniques.

Most important for intergroup relations, TMT predicts that people find those with different cultural worldviews existentially threatening and are motivated either to assimilate their views, to convert them, or to derogate or even exterminate them, all in an effort to restore the cultural anxiety buffer. The TMT team has conducted numerous experiments to test its existential threat hypothesis, which shows that being reminded of one's death leads people to denigrate culturally dissimilar others and to elevate culturally similar others. For example, after describing what would happen to them after they died and their feelings about their own death (the mortality salience condition), Christian students evaluated a Christian more positively and a Jew more negatively, a difference not found in the control group.²²

The TMT team has also postulated and found interactions between the individual differences discussed earlier and responses to mortality salience. For example, Greenberg et al. (1990)²³ found that, following mortality salience, only participants measuring high on authoritarianism denigrated partners who expressed dissimilar attitudes, compared with a control group.

There are many praiseworthy features of TMT. It is one of very few theories to address the issue of the existential human condition, to situate self-esteem within culture rather than reducing self-esteem concerns to entirely selfish ones, and to give a predominant role to shared cultural worldviews, symbology, and ideological phenomena in understanding human existence. Its mortality salience manipulation has generated a number of provocative experimental findings that are compatible with other psychodynamic theories. However, we are not as sure that the notion of psychological threat is as novel as the theory implies. William James's (1890, p. 334) definition of *self-identity* as a "continuing sense of self-as-known" would seem to make death a threat to identity, at least in some cultures. So it may be that the mortality salience manipulation is yet another way of inducing an identity threat, of frustrating one's current goals in one's life (à la Dollard et al., 1939), or inducing fear of uncertainty.²⁴

Value and Value Conflict Theories

Another psychological approach to prejudice and discrimination that focuses on people's underlying motivations concerns values theories. This approach was strongly championed by Milton Rokeach. Rokeach tried to understand people's attitudes and beliefs about politics, outgroups, and

social policies relevant to outgroups by examining people's underlying values, or the priorities given to basic principles that related to attitudes and beliefs. In his critique of various approaches to liberal-conservative ideology,²⁵ he noted that there was little cross-cultural or cross-historical consensus on what the terms *liberal* and *conservative* mean. His proposal for saving empirical research from culturally limited and sometimes self-contradictory definitions of liberalism and conservatism was to map such attitudes and beliefs onto more enduring and general values. Rokeach hypothesized that the major twentieth-century political ideologies (i.e., communism, fascism, socialism, and capitalism) could all be classified with respect to the importance they gave to both freedom and equality values.²⁶ Content analyses of political writings supported this idea: Capitalism places high value on individual freedom and low value on equality. In contrast, communism places high value on equality, but low value on individual freedom. Fascism was low on both values and socialism was high on both.

However, at least in Western countries, research has shown that the importance one attaches to freedom is unrelated to one's political leanings, although equality values are quite influential. Supporters of left-wing political parties and policies place much greater emphasis on the value of equality than do supporters of right-wing political parties and social policies.²⁷ The value of equality has been found to be not only extremely important in determining people's political ideologies and party preferences,²⁸ but also quite important in determining attitudes toward specific policies (e.g., affirmative action).

Like Rokeach (1973), Katz and Hass (1988) also examined intergroup discrimination and attitudes in terms of social equality and individual freedom, but in the form of (a) humanitarianism/egalitarianism and (b) individualism, individual achievement, and the Protestant work ethic. They argued that since both values are normative, most White Americans actually hold ambivalent attitudes toward Blacks because Blacks represent good targets for humanitarianism but bad examples of individual achievement. In support of their racial ambivalence thesis, they showed that one could construct independent Pro-Black and Anti-Black attitude scales and that the Pro-Black Scale correlated positively with the Humanitarian/Egalitarian (HE) Scale but little with the Protestant ethic (PE) Scale,²⁹ whereas the Anti-Black Scale correlated positively with the PE Scale and negatively with the HE Scale.³⁰ They also showed that having White college students complete the PE Scale increased expression of anti-Black attitudes, whereas having students complete the HE Scale increased

expression of pro-Black attitudes, compared with a control group.³¹ Because it is assumed that most White Americans hold both sets of values and can apply both to thinking about Blacks, Katz, Wackenhut, and Hass (1986) predicted that this fundamental ambivalence would lead Whites to have exaggerated responses in dealing with Blacks. In fact, they found that Whites are sometimes being overly helpful, as the humanistic approach would prescribe, and sometimes denigrate Blacks because of Blacks' supposed rejection of the Protestant work ethic.

Besides helping us understand political choice and political ideology in a cross-situationally and cross-historically consistent fashion, the values approach has the additional advantage of relating the attitudes of individuals to the social institutions (e.g., political parties) that so powerfully determine the nature of intergroup relations.

Social-Cognitive Approach to Stereotyping

Inspired by Allport (1954), a great number of psychological studies have explored the cognitive underpinnings of prejudice and stereotyping, so many that even recent reviews are numerous and unique.³²

Perhaps the major and overarching conclusions to be drawn from this research are that, over and above any other motives that might be at play, social stereotypes should first and foremost be seen as the result of basic and entirely normal information processing. For example, Hamilton and Gifford (1976) showed that people learn stereotypes because of a predisposition to perceive associations among events. In particular, they reasoned that people perceive relatively unusual negative traits or behaviors and relatively unusual people, such as ethnic minorities, as going together, resulting in negative group stereotypes. By presenting information about individuals in minority and majority groups having the same proportion of frequent and infrequent features, they showed that participants indeed formed an *illusory correlation* and assumed that the infrequent features were more characteristic of the minority group. Since both relatively rare and negative features³³ and social stigma increase psychological salience,³⁴ this would then explain why these negative features and stigmatized social groups become associated in the mind. This process would explain the association of negative characteristics not only with minority groups, but with certain stigmatized majorities as well (e.g., women, South African Blacks, Indian untouchables). Hamilton and Rose (1980) showed that holding prior stereotypes increases the likelihood of forming stereotypic illusory correlations, so the illusory correlation process seems likely to be a contributor to the existence of stereotypes, if

not an ultimate origin of them. Hamilton's illusory correlation research explains how stereotypes could come about even when groups do not actually have different features.

Other research has shown that as part of normal information processing, stereotypes are often very easily activated, are used as causal explanations, are contextually sensitive, and turn out to be extremely robust and possess self-fulfilling properties. We will explore each of these factors in turn.

The Facile Activation of Social Stereotypes

There is some evidence that people learn covariations very easily, and even unconsciously.³⁵ For example, a child who sees that all janitors are people of color and that almost all child care givers are women is likely, then, to learn to expect such features to go together. Such associations then form the basis of a rudimentary stereotype. Similarly, a great number of experiments have shown that one feature of a person (e.g., race, mechanical ability) easily triggers expectations about features that would be unrelated if it were not for a group stereotype (e.g., education level, aggressiveness).³⁶

Once learned, social stereotypes are then quite easily and facily activated. For example, learning one feature of a person (e.g., gender) leads people to presume many other things about that person (e.g., particular hobbies and occupation).³⁷ The associations between such simple expectancies are so well-rehearsed that some researchers even posit that activation of a stereotype³⁸ and of prejudiced group attitudes³⁹ are completely automatic and are cued by exposure to only some stimuli.⁴⁰ Because of this facile activation, stereotypes are thought to enable people to function well enough for their own purposes, even when these stereotypes are only approximately "accurate" and even when they harm the person being stereotyped.⁴¹

Stereotypes as Causal Explanations

People often need to explain and understand the behavior of others who belong to a variety of social groups. Ironically, this need will often lead to the utilization of group stereotypes. For example, Levine and Campbell (1972) argued that when certain social groups disproportionately perform certain roles within the social system, people come to assume that *all* individuals within these groups have personal characteristics consistent with those roles. This suggests that when people make *internal attributions* to explain behavior, by asking themselves questions like "What kind of person would perform this role?" they are likely to come up with a

stereotype they already know as an explanation.⁴² Illusory correlations, real covariations, and causal attributions are processes which imply that even if people are not motivated by any particular animus against other groups, people may still form stereotypes as part of their normal cognitive functioning.

The Contextual Sensitivity of Stereotypes

We also know that there are contextual situations that will make the use of stereotypes more or less likely. For example, Erber and Fiske (1984) showed that when people's outcomes were positively linked with those of a stranger, they paid more attention to individuating features of the person and relied less on stereotypes to form an impression of that person. However, research also shows that it is more typical that members of dominant and subordinate groups are either independent or negatively interdependent (competitive) with one another.⁴³ Furthermore, Deprét and Fiske (1993) argue that people in positions of power, which is more typical of dominant group members, are unlikely to have to pay more attention to subordinates, and so are especially likely to stereotype. Thus, power inequalities are particularly likely to contribute to stereotyping.

The Tenacity and Self-Fulfilling Character of Social Stereotypes

Research shows that stereotypes are often quite robust, tenacious, and long-lived. For example, Devine and Elliot (1995) found that White Americans' stereotypes about African-Americans have had rather similar content over most of this century. Furthermore, and quite relevant for the possibility of social change, research has shown that rather than providing important counterexamples, the admission of *tokens* (i.e., people who are exceptional in a social context, such as a woman in a male-dominated profession), can actually lead to *more* and *not less* stereotyping and discrimination. This effect is the result of the fact that such tokens are often quite salient, and thus people are more likely to make internal rather than situational attributions for the actions of these tokens.⁴⁴

Further, being a token can lead to more self-consciousness, resulting in underperformance. In merit judgment situations, this underperformance often confirms the stereotype and then provides additional grounds for discrimination. For example, Word, Zanna, and Cooper (1974) showed that when White interviewers had negative expectations of Black job candidates, those expectations led them to treat job candidates in interpersonally distant ways. In reaction to this cool response, job candidates appeared more flustered and unprepared and gave worse interviews than

when they were treated more respectfully. Likewise, because the stereotype about Blacks includes the notion of aggression, Bargh, Chen, and Burrows (1996) predicted that subliminal exposure to Black faces would increase the likelihood that participants would be rude to another person. This was found, and the authors argue that it might be expected that such hostility could be returned, further confirming the stereotype. Through a number of avenues, then, stereotypes act like communicable social viruses, getting the organisms they infect to replicate the virus and spread it to others.

Stereotypes not only can provoke self-confirming behavior in stereotyped others, but also can bias memory in ways that get people to recall stereotype-confirming "evidence." For example, Snyder and Uranowitz (1978) had participants learn the life history of a woman. Those participants who later learned that she was a lesbian then recalled facts about her that were consistent with their stereotype of lesbians. However, those who later learned she was straight did not recall such facts. Such recollections are only likely to provide another instance that confirms the stereotype, even though Snyder and Uranowitz's experiment actually showed that it was the stereotype that confirmed the instance.

Stereotypes sometimes also filter the acquisition of information consistent with the stereotype, through both information-seeking strategies⁴⁵ and selective attention.⁴⁶ Though most studies exploring memory for stereotype-consistent and -inconsistent information have found greater recall of stereotype-inconsistent information than stereotype-consistent information, Hilton and von Hippel (1996) point out that this bias may lead to greater attributions for "explaining away" the incongruity, and thereby maintaining the stereotype in the face (and recollection) of inconsistent information. In other cases, incongruent information can be used to form a subtype that also functions as a stereotype.⁴⁷ Importantly, even contradictory subtypes (e.g., virgin vs. whore) seem not to disconfirm super-stereotypes.⁴⁸

Altogether, the broad message of the stereotyping research informs us that stereotypes are a normal feature of peoples' information processing repertoire, are very easily learned and easily activated, tend to have a self-fulfilling quality, and tend to be very difficult to change.

On the other hand, the social-cognitive approach to stereotyping also has some important limitations. In analyzing individuals' cognitive processes, the research has done little to address how institutional discrimination occurs. This is partly because people in institutional settings have been little studied,⁴⁹ and also because the outcomes critical to various

specific theories, such as trait judgments, turn out to have little correspondence to the kinds of outcomes critical to institutional discrimination, such as hiring and firing, salary levels, and promotions.⁵⁰ Finally, in using the individual as the unit of analysis, this literature has not examined discrimination that is contingent on the cooperation of people in different roles within an organization. For example, in one Fortune 500 company we studied, White managers who were friendly with White laborers through Ku Klux Klan groups let it be known that they disapproved of the hiring of a Black manager before the Black manager even came on the job. When the White laborers filed nightly union grievances against the Black manager, they provided an apparently legitimate basis on which the Black manager could be fired. Such socially distributed responsibility has not been well analyzed by the social-cognitive approach, which would have to incorporate such elements as social role, power, and shared communications. One response to the individualistic approach to stereotyping has been to analyze social discourse around, for example, racism, to understand how the ideologies of race are spread and legitimized.⁵¹

Social-Psychological Theories

Whereas strictly psychological models of prejudice, racism, and discrimination concentrate on internal and psychodynamic processes within the individual, social-psychological models place greater emphasis on the individual's connection to and embeddedness in the larger social context, the individual's absorption of cultural and ideological norms, and the individual's desire to fit in and become an accepted member of the social community.

Socialization and Social Learning Theories

Perhaps the clearest example of a social-psychological model of prejudice, racism, and discrimination is the general socialization approach. This approach assumes that the primary reason that individuals exhibit hostile, racist, and discriminatory behaviors toward others is because, from early childhood on, they have been socialized and trained to feel and behave this way. Those discriminatory behaviors and hostile attitudes toward others that are deemed appropriate are rewarded and thereby reinforced, while those considered inappropriate are punished and eventually drop out of the individual's repertoire. From this perspective, one needs no complex theory of intrapsychic and psychodynamic processes, but simply

must attend to what is considered appropriate and inappropriate within any given culture or context.

Modern Racism Theories

One prominent group of social learning theories of prejudice has been largely focused on Euro-American attitudes toward African-Americans. These theories have all essentially asserted that while blatant and extreme forms of racism against African-Americans are now relegated to the past, more subtle and indirect forms of racism remain. This residual racism is often conceptualized as some combination of learned emotional antipathy toward Blacks, on the one hand, and cognitively driven stereotyping mechanisms or adherence to certain U.S. values, on the other hand. These residual racism theories have gone by various names, including *aversive racism*, *modern racism*, *racial resentment*, and *symbolic racism*.⁵² The most well-known and influential of these is symbolic racism theory, developed by David O. Sears and his colleagues. Like other modern racism theorists, Sears and his collaborators have argued that the U.S. civil rights movement was largely successful in eliminating classical “old-fashioned racism” from U.S. society, only to be replaced by what is called symbolic racism. Symbolic racism is defined as a combination of anti-Black affect, or emotional antipathy toward Blacks, and certain traditional U.S. values such as self-reliance, individualism, and the Protestant work ethic. Sears and his colleagues then used this “new” symbolic racism to explore White Americans’ attitudes and behaviors across a series of political issues and public policy debates.

One consistent theme in this modern racism research has been the exploration of the *principle–implementation gap*,⁵³ or the apparent contradiction between White Americans’ expressed support for the principle of racial equality and their consistent opposition to the implementation of any concrete policies that might actually promote racial equality in practice. In general, modern racism theorists have argued that this apparent contradiction can be explained by use of this new form of modern, aversive, or symbolic racism. For example, Sears, Lau, Tyler, and Allen (1980) found evidence consistent with the idea that Whites oppose ameliorative government programs not because such programs work against their own personal interest or because they believe in the racial inferiority of Blacks, but because of symbolic racism.

Despite the robust use of symbolic racism and similar measures in attitudes research, the theory has been attacked on both conceptual and methodological grounds. These criticisms concern complaints such as: symbolic racism is not really measuring anything other than political

ideology, symbolic racism is simply old-fashioned racism in disguise, and there is a serious conceptual overlap between measures of symbolic racism and the various attitudes they are supposed to predict.⁵⁴ While we feel there is some merit to these criticisms, we argue that the most serious shortcoming of symbolic racism and closely related arguments is their theoretical parochialism. Although the symbolic politics approach is much broader, symbolic racism theory was specifically developed to explain the attitudes of White Americans toward Black Americans in terms of beliefs relevant to U.S. culture (e.g., individualism, the Protestant work ethic) and within the context of a particular period in U.S. history (the immediate post-civil rights era). Because of this contextual and historical specificity, these models are not easily applied to other ethnic conflicts, such as those between Hutus and Tutsis of Rwanda, the “ethnic cleansing” of Bosnia, the Holocaust of Central Europe, or even the widespread occurrence of police brutality against African-Americans in the United States.

Realistic Group Conflict Theory

Realistic group conflict theory is among the simplest of social-psychological models of intergroup relations and was developed by a number of social scientists⁵⁵ to explain intergroup phenomena such as war, domination, ethnocentrism, stereotyping, and discrimination. In contrast to symbolic racism theory, this model is quite general and simply asserts that intergroup discrimination and prejudice are the result of real groups being locked in zero-sum competition over either real material or symbolic resources. As summarized ably by Campbell (1965), the perception that one group’s gain is another’s loss translates into perceptions of group threat, which in turn cause prejudice against the outgroup, negative stereotyping of the outgroup, ingroup solidarity, awareness of ingroup identity, and internal cohesion, including intolerance of ingroup deviants, ethnocentrism, use of group boundary markers, and discriminatory behavior. The realistic group conflict model is supported by a large body of research, including descriptive studies of history, politics, and ethnography, as well as field experiments and survey research.⁵⁶

Although realistic group conflict theory is powerful and parsimonious in explaining when and why prejudice and discrimination will arise, this model is still not completely satisfactory. The model is based on two primary assumptions. The first is that real groups actually exist and have a history of shared identity and shared fate. Second, it is assumed that groups believe themselves to be in zero-sum competition over valued resources. While these two conditions are certainly *sufficient* to produce discrimination and prejudice, they are by no means *necessary*.

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

The fact that neither group formation nor zero-sum structure is a necessary condition for discrimination was first discovered by Henri Tajfel and his colleagues in the early 1970s. Tajfel tried to devise an experiment in which the intergroup situation was quite minimal and lacked these two primary conditions that were hypothesized by realistic group conflict theory to cause prejudice and discrimination. Tajfel and colleagues devised a laboratory paradigm in which participants were told that they belonged to one of two groups that they would never have heard of before. Thus, the groups had no history of interaction, had no known stereotypic beliefs about each other, and were not locked in a zero-sum structure. Participants were not told who was a member of which group and were asked to allocate only “minimal” resources such as pennies or points. Since participants were given options to allocate resources to both groups, there was no zero-sum structure to the group relationship. Furthermore, since the participants could not allocate points to themselves, they had no direct self-interest in how they allocated points.

The rather surprising result of this “minimal group” situation was that, even though the groups were not formed in the traditional, socially rich sense and were not in a zero-sum relationship, people still tended to behave in an ethnocentric and biased fashion. Though many people did try to allocate resources as equally as the experimenters allowed,⁵⁷ they still tended to allocate more points to the ingroup than to the outgroup. Even more startling is that when given the choice between (a) allocating points to both ingroup and outgroup so that both groups benefit (but where the outgroup receives *slightly more* than the ingroup) and (b) allocating more points to the ingroup than the outgroup (but at the cost of *absolute loss to both groups*), people opted for strategy (b)! From a rational actor model of human behavior, strategy (a) is quite rational, while strategy (b) is clearly irrational. Even more depressing, discrimination outcomes in minimal groups experiments have been found to hold over a range of different cultures and situations.⁵⁸ However, the interpretation of this result remains controversial.⁵⁹

We like to think of strategy (b) as a *Vladimir's choice*, based on a well-known Eastern European fable. Vladimir was a dreadfully impoverished peasant. One day God came to Vladimir and said, “Vladimir, I will grant you one wish; anything you wish shall be yours!” Naturally, Vladimir was very pleased at hearing this news. However, God added one caveat: “Vladimir, anything I grant you will be given to your neighbor twice over.” After hearing this, Vladimir stood in silence for a long time, and then said, “OK, God, take out one of my eyes.”