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BRIDGING INEQUALITY FROM BOTH SIDES NOW

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Because inequality is one of the central concerns of sociologists, it has been addressed, in various ways, by virtually all of the major traditions of sociological social psychology—social structure and personality, symbolic interactionism, and group processes (Cook, Fine, and House 1995). For those who work in the social structure and personality tradition, inequality refers to inequalities in power, privilege, and resources among sets of actors defined by the major social categories on which society is stratified, including gender, race, and social class. Survey work in this tradition examines how actors' locations on these dimensions affect a variety of individual-level outcomes, ranging from mental health to self-esteem to attitudes. Symbolic interactionists have also studied aspects of inequality, typically by examining the social construction of identities related to inequality (e.g., the identity of a homeless person) and the implications of inequality for self, emotions, and affect. Finally, work in the group processes tradition addresses inequality at a more abstract level, by developing formal theories that examine how structures of power and status produce inequalities in interaction, influence, and benefits. They also consider how actors respond to inequality, including actors' perceptions of injustice and responses to injustice. This tradition, and more specifically exchange theories of power and inequality, is the primary focus of the sociological perspective presented here.

Social psychologists in psychology departments do not typically work in an area called inequality—there are no courses by that name, for instance—but they work on related topics of *prejudice* (closest to the social structure and personality approach in sociology), *stigmatized identity* (closest to symbolic interactionism in sociology), and *power relations* (closest to group processes in sociology). Of these topics, social psychologists have focused most frequently on prejudice, so the psychology part of this article focuses on the unique insights offered by these analyses. Others in this special issue address identity more generally (Deaux and Burke). And the psychology of power relations will appear here in psychological commentary on the sociology of exchange theories of power and inequality.

Sociological Social Psychology: Social Exchange, Power, and Inequality¹

Move to end of first sentence of paragraph—after “support.” (I tried, but it kept changing it to #2).

The social exchange perspective proposes that power and inequality arise out of actors' dependencies on one another for things they value—not only material goods and services, but socially valued outcomes such as status and support. Mutual dependence brings people together, but unequal dependencies create imbalances in power that produce inequalities in

¹For reviews of this literature, see Cook and Rice (2003) and Molm (2006).

exchange benefits: actors who are less dependent have greater power in the relation and are able to obtain relatively more of what they want. These processes occur in numerous settings, at multiple levels—in families, in the workplace, in communities, even among nation states.

The early development of the social exchange tradition was a truly interdisciplinary effort, with major contributions from both psychologists and sociologists. Beginning in the late 1970s, however, sociologists began to focus primarily on the network structures that govern power and exchange, independent of the characteristics of actors. Exchange networks connect dyadic relations into larger structures that give some actors greater opportunity than others to acquire valued resources. In general, actors who have more alternative partners, better alternatives, and/or more available alternatives than other actors are less dependent on those others and have greater power in their relations.

A key insight of this work is that inequalities in exchange can be produced by the structure of power and dependence alone, regardless of actors' intentions and without awareness of their relative power. The strength of these structural effects depends, however, on the network; some networks have a stronger, more deterministic effect on inequality, while others leave room for the influence of actors' power strategies and behaviors.

The inequalities in exchange outcomes produced by structures of imbalanced power lead, quite predictably, to perceptions of injustice and reactions against it, with actors in more advantaged positions regarding unequal exchanges as more "fair" than those in disadvantaged positions. Theories of distributive justice have their roots in the classical exchange theories, but more recent analyses of injustice in exchange also drawn on psychological theories of justice, including procedural justice.

While the structural emphasis in sociology moved the exchange tradition away from its psychological roots, more recent work offers greater potential for interdisciplinary bridging by giving more consideration to the role of affect and emotion in exchange processes. Lawler's affect theory of social exchange, which builds on an earlier theory of relational cohesion, proposes that the effects of exchange structures are mediated by emotional reactions that, when attributed to the relationship itself, influence the formation of commitments and affective bonds (Lawler, Thye, and Yoon 2009). Commitments also develop in response to risk and uncertainty, as does trust; both trust and commitment can reduce power use and inequality (Cook 2005). Finally, the form of exchange has emerged as a key element in these processes, affecting both the use of power and the affective bonds that form between exchange partners. Molm's (2010) work comparing *negotiated exchange* (in which actors bargain over the terms of strictly binding agreements) and *reciprocal exchange* (in which actors engage in unilateral acts of reciprocal benefit, without negotiation or assurance of reciprocity) shows lower inequality in reciprocal exchange and weaker effects of structural power. More importantly, reciprocal exchange also reduces the differences in how actors in unequal power relations feel about each other, by promoting stronger feelings of trust, affective regard, fairness, and solidarity in disadvantaged as well as advantaged actors.

Linkages to Psychology

Psychologists would recognize the sociological definition of power as resulting from asymmetrical dependence (Fiske 1993). However, psychologists' most frequent use of exchange theories and power took formal theory into a more topical turn in developing the psychology of attraction and close relationships.² Analyses of interdependence in close relationships have explained, for example, emotion as resulting from facilitation or hindrance of partner goals, as well as the development of commitment, and the dynamics of

power asymmetry. More recently, beyond close relationships, the psychological study of power has blossomed with insights about its effects on face-to-face interactions of all kinds, with a focus on power facilitating individual agency, approach motivation, positive affect, and self-focus (Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson 2003).³ This mostly experimental research has moved away from formal analyses of interdependence structures, though it might profit from that more active approach in sociology. The sociological analyses of power relations between advantaged and disadvantaged actors relates more closely to prejudice as psychology's view of inequality, to which we turn next.

Psychological Social Psychology: Subtle and Blatant Prejudice⁴—Psychological social psychologists have focused much of their energy in the last half of the twentieth century on prejudice, namely disadvantageous attitudes toward outgroup others. A decade into the twenty-first century, these researchers have considered various levels of prejudice. In particular, blatant prejudice, which is hot-blooded and bloody-minded, coming from perceived threat, afflicts one margin of the population. Blatant prejudice overlaps psychological and sociological processes, openly resenting outgroups and rejecting intimacy. Its origins lie in perceived threat to the ingroup's economic interests (e.g., group-based social dominance) or to the ingroup's cherished values (e.g., right-wing authoritarianism). Blatant prejudice reflects broad ethnocentrism, preference for the status quo, and propensity for group-based aggression.

At the opposite extreme are pure egalitarian orientations, which are open, liberal, and humanitarian, coming from felt security and values; these represent the opposite margin of the spectrum. Here, again, psychological and sociological insights overlap. Beliefs endorse group equality, individual freedom, and social welfare. Going beyond mere tolerance, egalitarian values stem from extensive intergroup contact, outgroup friendships, and multicultural enthusiasm.

Though research has gone beyond common sense, these extremes fit everyday understandings of prejudice. Into the vast middle between these two margins comes subtle prejudice, which is cool, calm, and collective, mostly indirect and norm-driven. Even well-intentioned people are nonetheless influenced by the culture's prejudiced portrayals, as well as by culture's anti-prejudice norms. The internal conflict drives people's biases into more subtle forms. Demonstrating this is psychology's unique contribution. Cutting-edge methods and theories reveal the automaticity, ambiguity, and ambivalence of subtle prejudices.⁵

Automatic prejudice operates unconsciously, unintentionally, and effortlessly; favoring one's own groups is breathtaking fast. People instantly categorize each other's race, sex, age, and maybe social class. The ingroup-outgroup distinction immediately follows, with "us" being better than "them." As priming experiments show, white people exposed (even subliminally) to the concept black go on to recognize words associated with African American racial stereotypes faster than irrelevant words. As facilitation experiments show, people can quickly pair "us" and positive words together, as well as "them" and negative words, compared with the reverse pairings. As neuro-imaging studies show, brain regions associated with alarm and disgust, for instance, come online with sheer exposure to images of outgroup members. A variety of methods show just how automatic and unconscious are people's biased associations.

²For an overview, see Kelley et al. (1983).

³For reviews of this literature, see Fiske (2010) and Magee and Galinsky (2008).

⁴For psychological reviews of this literature, see Fiske (1998) and Dovidio and Gaertner (2010).

⁵For a sociological review of part of this literature, see Blanton and Jaccard (2008).

Ambiguous prejudice describes a variety of biases that carry hidden implications, so they all are difficult to identify; they tend to come in under the radar. Stealth bias emerges, for example, in favoring the ingroup, but not necessarily derogating the outgroup; in a zero-sum situation, the outgroup therefore suffers. People also blame the outgroup for bad behavior but excuse the ingroup, whereas they credit the ingroup for good behavior but shrug it off in the outgroup. As another example, exaggerating cultural differences in language, religion, sexuality, or beliefs is ambiguous in that a kernel of truth becomes an overgrown harvest of excuses. Group cultural or circumstantial differences appear to be group biological essences, supposedly deterministic expressions of genes, reinforcing biases.

Finally, subtle prejudice is ambivalent, being mixed, showing a variety of emotions beyond simple antipathy. In the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2007), ingroups may either disrespect or dislike outgroups, or sometimes both, revealing stereotypes of varying (un)warmth and (in) competence. Within the warmth $\times$ competence space, each quadrant elicits distinct emotions (pity, envy, disgust, or admiration) and distinct forms of discrimination. Warmth predicts active help or harm; competence predicts passive help or harm. What's more, the warmth dimension results from structural relationships of perceived cooperation (leading to perceived warmth) or completion (leading to perceived coldness). The perceived competence dimension results from structural relationships of status, with status conferring presumed competence. Other models also address mixed prejudices.

In all its guises—automatic, ambiguous, and ambivalent—subtle prejudice predicts everyday discrimination: uncomfortable encounters, avoidance, self-fulfilling prophecies, and ingroup-favoring decisions in voting, housing, education, employment.

Linkages to Sociology

The task of integrating sociologists' emphasis on structural inequalities in exchange with psychologists' study of subtle and blatant prejudice seems, on first glance, to be a formidable challenge. But the challenge is a welcome one. Because exchange theorists have traditionally focused on structural rather than cultural sources of inequality and on actors' positions in exchange networks rather than actors' social categories, the field's contributions to the study of inequality have sometimes been underappreciated. And, indeed, they have been incomplete: by taking network structures as a given, exchange theorists have not addressed how actors come to occupy positions of structural advantage or disadvantage—a question that is surely related to actors' gender, race, and social class. By privileging structure over actor characteristics, the contemporary exchange tradition has demonstrated the important role of power structures in creating inequality. But it may now be time to bring actors, and social categories, into the structural picture. Doing so immediately connects us to the processes that psychologists have documented so well: ingroup/outgroup distinctions and the strong (as well as subtle) emotions and prejudices that such distinctions provoke. The broad conception of actors in exchange theories allows for analysis of intergroup as well as interpersonal processes, and recent consideration of emotions and affect in exchange sets the stage for incorporating emotions associated with prejudice.⁶ Similarly, exchange theories of injustice already draw on attributional processes involved in some forms of prejudice.⁷ Linking structure with social categories, power with prejudice, and justice evaluations with hostility towards outgroups offers a potent mix for a potentially deeper understanding of inequality.

⁶For an interdisciplinary discussion of emotions, see Smith-Lovin and Winkielman (this volume).

⁷For a review of this literature, see Hegtvædt (2006).

Conclusions: Trends and Agenda Setting

We hope this brief discussion offers some sense of the influential theories that could result from bridging sociological and psychological approaches to inequality. But how do we get there from where we are now? What trends in our two disciplines offer promising avenues for moving us in the right direction?

In sociology, the exchange tradition has drawn on insights from psychology about social cognition and has begun to incorporate emotion and affect into its theories, but it has not dealt in any direct way with questions of stereotyping, prejudice, or discrimination. Nor has it considered ingroup-outgroup distinctions, even though the actors who exchange can be groups (or their representatives) as well as individuals. The expectation states tradition in sociology is closer to these concerns, particularly notions of categorization and stereotyping. Therefore, one of the most promising trends in sociological social psychology for the goal of interdisciplinary bridging is the effort to integrate social exchange theories of power with expectation states theories of status (e.g., Thye 2000). Status structures are based on cultural beliefs about relative worth, while power structures are based on differential control over resources, but both contribute to social inequality and each may reinforce effects of the other. Unlike ingroup favoritism, however, status beliefs involve *consensual* evaluations of worth, shared by both the advantaged and disadvantaged. This distinction involves a basic tension between status characteristic theories and social categorization theories; in order for ingroup/outgroup distinctions to occur, and prejudice to develop, members of different social categories—different statuses—must develop divergent, rather than consensual, conceptions of worth. Bringing power into the picture may contribute to understanding how this occurs, but it may also be necessary to identify different conditions that activate these different processes.

In psychology, experimental social psychology both draws on sociology and offers new venues. A persistent interest in social issues keeps psychological social psychologists reading sociology and respecting structural variables.⁸ Public policy implications enter psychology through the sociology end of the bridge. On the far end of the bridge, social psychology also links to the more biological end of psychology, providing a translation of social neuroscience and health implications that may aid sociological social psychology. A bibliometric analysis indicates that social psychology is a hub within psychology (Yang and Chiu 2009), and another one indicates that sociology is a close neighbor (Boyack, Klavans, and Börner 2005), so bridges provide access to the rest of the field for sociology and other social sciences. In this case, bridges, not fences, make good neighbors.

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Biographies

Insert short author bios.

Susan T. Fiske is Eugene Higgins Professor of Psychology at Princeton University. Her research primarily focuses on how status and interdependence relationships affect social

⁸Examples are evident in social identity theory and intergroup relations research generally, system justification theory and ideology research generally, leadership research and groups research generally; for these and other examples, see Fiske, Gilbert, and Lindzey (2010), especially volume 2.

cognition, especially stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. She won the 2008-2009 Association for Psychological Science William James Fellow Award and the 2010 American Psychological Association Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award.

Linda D. Molm is Professor of Sociology at the University of Arizona. Her primary research interest is the experimental analysis of theories of social exchange, particularly the relations among power, justice, trust, and commitment. She is past editor of *Social Psychology Quarterly* and recipient of the 2009 Cooley-Mead Award for career contributions to sociological social psychology.

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