

Social Dominance Theory

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ABSTRACT

This chapter outlines the intellectual and personal influences on the development of social dominance theory (SDT). SDT examines how societies organize themselves as group-based social hierarchies. SDT assumes that processes at different but intersecting levels of social organization, from prejudice to cultural legitimizing ideologies, produce and maintain hierarchical societal structure. The chapter examines the counteracting roles of hierarchy-enhancing and hierarchy-attenuating legitimizing ideologies and social institutions, the intersection between gender and arbitrary set discrimination (i.e., discrimination based on socially constructed group distinctions), the distinction between authoritarianism and social dominance orientation, and emphasizes the critical role of social power (as opposed to social status), and the need to see social dominance as an integrated and dynamic social system.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL DOMINANCE THEORY

Stated most simply, social dominance theory (SDT) argues that intergroup oppression, discrimination, and prejudice are the means by which human societies organize themselves

as group-based hierarchies, in which members of dominant groups secure a disproportionate share of the good things in life (e.g., powerful roles, good housing, good health), and members of subordinate groups receive a disproportionate share of the bad things in life (e.g., relatively poor housing and poor health). While the severity of group-based inequality varies across different societies and within any given society across time, the fact of group-based social hierarchy appears to be a human universal (e.g., Lenski, 1984). Because SDT attempts to describe the systematic processes that form the dynamic system of societal inequality, its analysis considers the intersection of processes at multiple levels of social organization (see Sidanius and Pratto, 1999; Pratto, Sidanius and Levin, 2006 for recent reviews).

In a slight modification of Pierre van den Berghe's (1978) taxonomy of social categories, SDT observes that human group-based social hierarchies consist of three distinctly different stratification systems: (1) an *age-system*, in which adults and middle-age people have disproportionate social power over children and younger adults; (2) a *gender*

or *patriarchal* system in which men have disproportionate social and political power compared to women; and (3) an *arbitrary-set* system in which socially constructed categories are hierarchically arranged. These arbitrary sets may be constructed to associate power and legitimacy with social categories like “race,” caste, ethnicity, nationality, social class, religion, or any other group distinction that human interaction is capable of constructing. As the double-headed arrows in Figure 47.1 are meant to indicate, we argue that group-based hierarchy both affects and is effected by roughly seven processes at three levels of analysis.

At the societal level the degree of group-based social hierarchy is effected by and affects two mutually antagonistic sets of forces: (1) hierarchy-enhancing and hierarchy-attenuating legitimizing ideologies, and (2) hierarchy-enhancing and hierarchy-attenuating social institutions. Hierarchy-enhancing and hierarchy-attenuating ideologies justify the establishment and maintenance of group-based social inequality or its exact opposite, respectively. To the degree that the relative balance of these opposing ideologies remains stable, the degree of social inequality remains stable over

time, everything thing else being equal. Actions of hierarchy-enhancing and hierarchy-attenuating institutions also produce the level of inequality at the societal level. Hierarchy-enhancing social institutions allocate social resources to the advantage of dominant groups and to the disadvantage of subordinate groups, whereas hierarchy-attenuating social institutions have the opposite effect. Examples of hierarchy-enhancing institutions are internal security forces, large segments of the criminal justice system, and most large corporations. Examples of hierarchy-attenuating institutions are human rights and civil rights organizations, charities, and legal aid groups for the poor and the indigent (e.g., Sidanius et al., 1996).

At the intergroup level, we posit two general processes that sustain inequality. First, aspects of unequal intergroup contexts afford prejudicial and discriminatory behavior. Unequal contexts readily dredge up stereotypes and remembered histories of past conflicts, perceived intergroup threat, and belief in separate identities, all of which provoke discrimination and stereotyping (see Pratto, 1999, for a review). Second, members of subordinate groups tend to behave in ways that are less beneficial to themselves and their ingroups than dominant group members do with reference to their ingroups. We call this *behavioral asymmetry*, and it is instantiated in many ways. For example, people in dominant groups follow their doctors’ orders and study more than people in subordinate groups (see Sidanius and Pratto, 1999: 227–262). Behavioral asymmetry implies that group-based hierarchies are not solely maintained by the oppressive actions of dominants, but also by agency, albeit constrained agency, on the part of subordinates.

At the person level, the roles, prejudices, social beliefs that contribute to discrimination are coordinated, often in the same directions, so that thousands of aggregated individual acts of cruelty, oppression and discrimination help sustain group-based hierarchy. Certain values, personality variables,

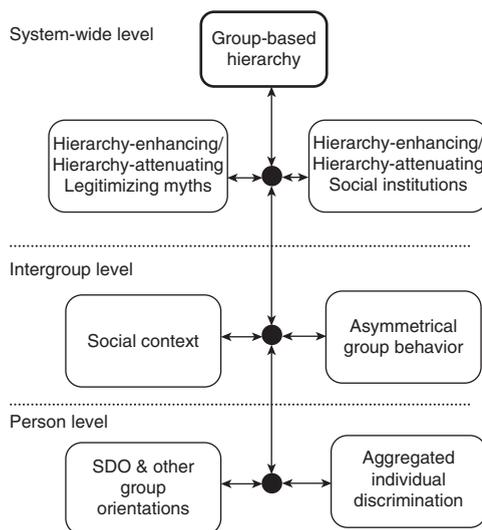


Figure 47.1 An overview of social dominance theory

political ideologies, and temperaments, including openness, conservatism, authoritarianism, and empathy make certain people more or less likely to be prejudiced or to discriminate against subordinates (Akrami and Ekehammar, 2006; Altemeyer, 1998; Pratto et al., 1994; Stephan and Finlay, 1999). In general, an individual's likelihood of performing hierarchy-enhancing or attenuating acts depends on her general desire to support and maintain group-based inequality, a characteristic we call social dominance orientation (SDO).

Thus, at core, there are three basic assumptions underpinning SDT. First, we assume that human social systems are dynamically tenacious. Thus, even as they adapt and change, societies that are group-based dominance hierarchies will tend to continually reorganize themselves, and even other societies, as such. Second, various forms of group-based oppression (e.g., sexism, racism, nationalism, ethnocentrism, classism) should be seen as specific instantiations of group-based social hierarchies. Third, the degree of group-based social hierarchy within any society at any given time will be the net result of the interaction of multileveled hierarchy-enhancing and hierarchy-attenuating forces within that society at any given time. Thus, the ultimate goal of SDT is to understand the multileveled processes which are responsible for the production, maintenance, and reproduction of group-based social hierarchy.

SDT: EARLY ROOTS AND PERSONAL JOURNEYS

Jim's personal narrative

The basic building blocks of SDT were being assembled in my mind since childhood. As a ten-year-old boy growing up in New York City in the mid 1950s I had already become uncomfortably aware that being a "Negro" in America was not an altogether good thing. However, the deadly seriousness of this

predicament did not become clear to me until the day I came across a *Jet* magazine article about a young Black man accused of whistling at a White woman in the South. The article described how a group of White men kidnapped this young Black man, castrated him, and poured gasoline onto the open gash where his genitals used to be. This story left a deep impression on me and I reread it over and over again, trying to grasp the meaning of such brutality.

Perhaps my most consciousness-altering confrontation with American racism occurred when I was a 16-year-old high school student. On my way home from school with my Jewish girlfriend and a White male friend, my male friend and I were followed into a public restroom in Highbridge Park by a White policeman, his gun drawn and demanding that we raise our hands and face the restroom wall. Not being aware of having broken any law, I asked the officer why we were being stopped. I was told to shut the fu*k up, and marched off to the 33rd police precinct. Upon arrival I was told to sit down and once again, to "shut the fu*k up!" After some time had passed, I again demanded to know why I was being detained. This resulted in the arresting officer punching me in the face and yelling a string of racial epithets at me. I lost my composure and struck back. Immediately some four or five baton-wielding police officers pounced on me, beat me into near unconsciousness, placed me in overly tight handcuffs, and threw me into a holding cell. I then spent the night in a jail cell at the Brooklyn House of Detention. The next afternoon I was arraigned in criminal court and listened as the arresting officer testified that I was guilty of drunken disorderliness, interfering with traffic, and resisting arrest. Three witnesses disputed these claims (i.e., my girlfriend, my White male friend and an independent witness to my arrest). After listening to all their testimony, the judge said that he would be lenient with me *this one time*. He then ordered my release, with the admonition that in future, I "show more respect for the law!"

Even though I was released from custody, the message communicated to me was crystal clear. I was arrested, beaten, jailed and arraigned for multiple acts of insubordination: insubordination for the crime of having a White girlfriend, insubordination for the act of questioning the legitimacy of my arrest, and most critically, insubordination by defending myself against physical attack by the police. By being told to “show more respect for the law,” I was clearly being told to keep my place, or else. This critical event led to a visceral understanding of the role the police and other armed authorities play in maintaining generalized submission and acquiescence from Black people in the US. Although this was the last time I was personally subject to police violence, I witnessed this kind of violence across many societies. The direct and vicarious experience of police violence influenced the development of SDT many years later.

Rather than reinforcing my submission to the American racial order, this early experience with the police had the opposite effect. I was transformed from a rather milk-toast liberal into an angry and resentful Black radical. After participating in numerous demonstrations and acts of resistance throughout the 1960s, I had finally had enough of American racism, and left the country in 1970, planning never to return. After traveling to Canada, France, Germany, Denmark, and spending a few months in Algeria hanging out with some members of the Black Panther Party, I made my way to Sweden, where I eventually settled, raised a family, and was awarded a doctoral degree in political psychology.

The early years in Sweden were a revelation. While Swedes treated me with a certain degree of curiosity (at the time many Swedes had never seen a Black person in the flesh), their reactions to me were not laced with that combination of fear and loathing that had become such an intolerable part of my everyday experience with Whites in America.

Although my American origins very often shielded me from various slights and outright

discrimination, it soon became clear that a number of other ethnic minorities were serving as targets of discrimination and devaluation (e.g., Finns, Turks, Roma). And so it was within every society I visited or learned anything about. These discrimination targets varied from people of sub-Saharan descent in Algeria, to Arabs from the Maghreb in France, to Turks in Germany and Denmark, to blond haired, blue-eyed Finns in Sweden, and to Roma in every country in Western and Eastern Europe. I also noticed an unsettling similarity in the manner in which the police treated members of these ethnic outgroups across the countries I visited. This treatment varied from a snarling intimidation to outright physical brutality, so reminiscent of my experiences with American police. Not only did I observe a thought-provoking cross-cultural similarity in the nature of police behavior towards ethnic minorities, the content of the stereotypes concerning these groups was also remarkably similar. Across a variety of different societies, the local ethnic subordinates were often described as lazy, conniving, criminal, dangerous, incompetent, and welfare-dependent.

In doing doctoral research in political psychology at the University of Stockholm, I came across a surprising and consistent finding which was to have a major influence on the later development of SDT. Namely, using two large and independent samples of Swedish high school students, my colleague, Bo Ekehammar, and I discovered some noteworthy differences in the sociopolitical attitudes of boys and girls, the strongest of which were the substantially higher levels of xenophobia and racism among boys than girls (see Ekehammar and Sidanius, 1982; Sidanius and Ekehammar, 1980, 1983). These findings were surprising because gender egalitarianism had been a major component of Swedish political culture for half a century. While there was reason to expect attitudinal differences with respect to gendered issues (e.g., abortion rights), there was little reason to expect gender differences with respect to dimensions such as xenophobia

and racism. Further, the higher levels of prejudice among boys were not moderated by differences in political ideology (Ekehammar, 1985); they were essentially of the same magnitude among communists as among fascists. Shortly after these findings were published, independent researchers replicated these results in other countries such as Great Britain and South Africa (see Furnham, 1985; Marjoribanks, 1981).

Because of the limited academic opportunities in Sweden, I decided to return to the US in 1983. I was initially comforted by the fact that the America I returned to was substantially less overtly racist than the America I had left behind 13 years earlier. However, it did not take too long for me to realize that beneath the surface of this increased racial inclusiveness, one could still clearly recognize a largely unchanged racial order underlying the bulk of social interactions. Despite the substantial progress achieved by the civil rights movement, it also became clear to me that this movement had failed in its central mission. The hierarchical racial order of American life remained very much as I had left it. The attempt to understand this sameness ensconced within change provided the initial emotional energy for the development of SDT.

Reading the history of reformist and revolutionary social movements, as well as the work of the neoclassical elitism scholars (e.g., Mosca, Pareto, Michels), convinced me that the failure of truly transformational change is the rule rather than the exception. Every attempt to replace group-based hierarchy with truly egalitarian social interaction has failed, without exception. These failures range from attempts at large-scale revolutionary transformation (e.g., the French, Russian, Mexican, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Cuban revolutions and the attempt at introducing economic democracy in Sweden during the mid 1970s), to small-scale attempts at egalitarian communities (e.g., the Oneida, Shaker, Harmonist and Jassonist Communities of North America). While many of these revolutionary efforts

have succeeded in replacing one group of ruling elites with another, and sometimes even decreasing the overall level of oppression, none have ever succeeded in their original goals of replacing group-based hierarchy with genuine egalitarianism.

While the building blocks of SDT lay scattered across disparate areas of my consciousness by the time I accepted a tenured position as Associate Professor of Psychology at UCLA in 1988, the first and rather underdeveloped form of SDT did not find its way onto paper until the summer of that year. Professor David O. Sears, one of my senior colleagues-to-be at UCLA, gave me a copy of his paper on symbolic racism he was to present at the upcoming meetings of the International Society of Political Psychology, and invited me to present a paper at this panel. I took the opportunity to react to David Sears' symbolic racism thesis. Rather than regard symbolic racism (defined as a combination of anti-Black affect and traditional American values such as self-reliance) as the ultimate source of White opposition to redistributive social policy favoring Blacks (e.g., busing, affirmative action), I argued that symbolic racism is better seen as one among several legitimizing ideologies serving the purpose of justifying the continued domination of Blacks by Whites, and more generally as the attempt of a dominant group to use a legitimizing ideology to maintain supremacy over a subordinate group. My rather incoherent and tedious reaction to Sears' paper was the primitive beginning of what was to grow into SDT (for a more coherent version of this initial argument, see Sidanius et al., 1992). However, the full development of SDT did not take place until I started to have theoretical jam sessions with Marilyn Brewer, a senior colleague, and distinguished intergroup relations specialist, and Felicia Pratto, a brilliant young woman I had first met when she was an undergraduate at Carnegie Mellon University, and with whom I later reconnected when she was a newly minted PhD from the social psychology program at New York University in 1989.

Numerous critical conversations with Marilyn Brewer stimulated me to develop the central idea of the counterbalancing effects of hierarchy-enhancing versus hierarchy-attenuating social forces, while the collaboration with Felicia Pratto led to the conceptualization and initial measurement of the SDO construct, the conceptual and empirical distinctions between arbitrary-set and gender hierarchies, the extension of the person–environment fit perspective onto the psychology of intergroup relations, and several other aspects of SDT as it stands today.

Felicia's personal narrative

My story is not as dramatic as Jim's, but may give a sense of how a person can develop a consciousness of intergroup power, social exclusion, discrimination, legitimizing myths, and social justice.

My family was formed in the foothills of the Rockies by the intermarriages of second-generation Eastern and Southern European immigrants. Although almost no one acknowledges this, in the presumption that all Whites are the same in the US, the early twentieth-century immigration produced a great deal of ethnic diversity and multilingualism. My family's story includes the fact that ethnic divides help stabilize power structures. My grandfather, Pete Pratto, born in 1900, became a coal miner for Colorado Fuel and Iron after he gave up being a cowboy and homesteader at age 40. Coal miners from many European countries, Mexico, and Japan lived in company towns, were paid poorly in company scrip, and were worked hard in dangerous conditions. The mining companies housed different ethnic groups in separate areas and did their best to stir up enmity as a way of preventing unionization from taking hold. Several of my grandfather's union activist friends were murdered, and this kind of intimidation and ethnic conflict prevented unions from taking hold for decades longer than they should have

(e.g., Beshoar, 1957). My paternal grandmother, Bertha Bon, was a child at the Ludlow Massacre. Her family, and those of all the other miners on strike, was living in tents in the foothills because they were not allowed to live in company housing while on strike. On Orthodox Easter, 1914, their tents were firebombed and they were shot at by the Colorado state militia, which was working at the beck and call of John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil. My grandmother told me that she hid behind a kitchen table turned on its side, and the only reason she felt she and her family survived is that a coal train went between where the militia shooters were and the families were cowering, allowing them to escape farther into the hills. With this family history, I could not grow up assuming that poor people are less virtuous than the rich, that hard work inevitably pays, nor that power is usually used for good and justice is always delivered.

In 1969 my family moved from the American West to Greensboro, NC, where my father was offered an academic job as a sociologist. This move from the West, where everyone we knew was a "guy" because everyone had the same social class and was capable and friendly, taught me much about cultural ideologies as not only scripts but masks. We were told to expect "Southern hospitality," but in fact the White neighbor kids yelled "damned Yankees" at my sister Anita and me as we walked home from school. Not much more subtly, my public school fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. Lambert, regularly asked my class to raise their hands and keep them raised if we were Jewish, then if we were Catholic, while she made notes that we never saw. Molly Ivins had a similar awakening about Southern culture when she was asked how a native Texan could grow up to be a progressive. When she had asked her mother about why she couldn't drink out of the "colored" water fountain and her mother said that it was filthy, when Molly could see it was clean, Molly said she realized that if they were lying about race, they were probably lying about everything else, too. So I did

not feel welcome in North Carolina, but this led me to form great friendships with other “outsiders,” like African-Americans, immigrants and Yankees. Thus, not everybody feels they belong, or is made to feel they belong, everywhere. This basic idea later found a place in SDT.

Attending college in Pittsburgh was refreshing. I enjoyed the mixture of working class and upper class kids from many states in a student culture where everyone could be creative and successful. Carnegie Mellon had its own foibles, but unlike the South, they weren’t designed to prevent certain people from serving in certain roles or to keep people on top who were not deserving, except for one problem: sexism.

In 1979 when I started, the student body was 70 percent men, and the science, engineering, and architecture schools had not only higher proportions, but also a very boyish culture. Dr. Goldberg, my wonderful physics section teacher who taught kids from the South and inner cities and got us to pass Physics 1, was the only PhD who taught a section (the others were led by graduate students). I do not know her whole story, but I do know that when I was a physics major, the non-PhD instructor gave a full-letter-grade lower grade to every woman in the mechanics lab than he gave to her lab partner. We had thought about insisting on egalitarian relations with men in our personal lives, but not in institutions like schools. Given our instructor’s grading and his remarks about “girls” throughout the course, all but one of us women in physics chose to change majors or universities.

I had the fortune to earn my work-study money doing research for several social scientists at Carnegie Mellon, from whom I learned much. Susan T. Fiske, in particular, spent lots of time and effort mentoring me, entertaining my questions, teaching me how to do social psychology experiments, trying to teach my rough sensibilities on how to be a professional. After I graduated, she hired me to help on her research on stereotyping, which enabled me to support myself, grow

up and save more money before graduate school, feel I belonged at Carnegie Mellon, and engage in peace activism. I was deeply vexed by social injustice, and so I thought I should study stereotyping because it was the only domain of social psychology interested in this problem. One afternoon I asked Susan why there were such inequities, such as the fact that I, with a BS, made exactly half as much as my husband-to-be did who had not finished his degree. That was “the market,” not really an explanation of why different kinds of work are valued differently. I asked why we have different people doing different kinds of jobs and Susan gave me the then-standard line about cognitive heuristics leading to stereotyping leading to discrimination. But this “how” answer to a “why” question was not satisfactory, and I blurted out, “What about” –searching for the missing concept – ‘POWER?’ I suppose that is when I started to realize that even if scientists mainly answer how and not why questions, they at least should have complete descriptions of the processes. Still, because I was looking to elders about what to research, I did not follow through on my own intuitions until a few years later.

In graduate school at New York University (NYU), I had a ball doing experiments on automatic processing and stereotyping with John Bargh, and the social cognition process-focused atmosphere was very stimulating. But again, some questions remained unanswered. I recall that in some seminars, all the outcome measures correlated with participants’ social class, and yet the papers were never trying to explain that relation. Also, during my third year, Trish Devine submitted her dissertation research for publication and made the same stir at NYU as elsewhere. She argued that stereotyping could be traced to more essential, unconscious, and uncontrollable cognitive processes (Devine, 1989). This work was an important lesson to me. This approach was in the air in social psychology – I saw Mahzarin Banaji’s students at conferences and they contended that if we could only get at the automatic

processes, we could eradicate discrimination (see Blair and Banaji, 1996, as an example of this work). Earlier, Hamilton and Gifford (1976) had shown that negative stereotypes about minority groups could arise simply because of a nonmotivated, nonsocial cognitive process of associating infrequent features (group members and negative behaviors). This work is certainly intellectually elegant and the nonobviousness of the analysis was widely appreciated, including by me. But my read of social psychology at this time was that in erasing the *intention* from stereotyping and discrimination, the discipline also erased the fact that inequality has real *consequences*. Even outside the social cognition domain, our field had shifted from considering the consequences of racism for Black people (Clark and Clark, 1947), to whether focusing on racism would upset White people's self-image (Gaertner and Dovidio, 1986; Katz and Hass, 1988). So the study of racism had moved from being about how justice and equality could be realized by and for Black people, to how White people could be prevented from feeling uncomfortable. At a moment that I could have gone the cognitive-essentialist route in addressing social inequality intellectually, I decided this was just not the right approach. What I felt *was* essential to a theory of social inequality was (1) culture: the systems of meaning and ideologies that pattern behavior and social structure, (2) an overt acknowledgement of power as part of the social context, (3) a focus on consequential outcomes like inequality and (4) a theoretical analysis that overtly showed how processes at different levels of analysis, from in the person, to intergroup, to society-wide to intersocietal, scaled. For such reasons I was very excited when Jim Sidanius showed me the rough sketch he had made of SDT just after I finished my PhD and was heading to California to join my new (and only) husband. My social cognition training served my work on SDT well because it has systematic methods to substantiate processes and link them together (this is what I tried to do in my pretenure work

on SDT; Pratto, 1999). Through different personal and intellectual routes, Jim and I had come to similar sensibilities about what a real theory was and what had to be included in a theory of inequality.

MAJOR COMPONENTS OF AND INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES ON SDT

SDT has been influenced by a wide variety of perspectives both inside and outside of social psychology. These influences are all the more varied because of our different training in personality, political history, and social cognition. The most important of these influences have come from:

- 1 authoritarian personality theory (a psychoanalytic approach to understanding the intersection between child-rearing practices, personality development, political ideology and prejudice; see Adorno et al., 1950);
- 2 early social identity theory (a psychological theory of intergroup discrimination composed of three basic elements: (a) social categorization, (b) psychological identification, and (c) social comparison and, if possible the achievement of a positive comparison between an ingroup and an outgroup; see Tajfel and Turner, 1986);
- 3 Rokeach's two-value theory of political behavior (the notion that political behavior is a joint function of the value one places on both equality and freedom; see Rokeach, 1973);
- 4 Blumer's (1960) group position theory (the notion that racial prejudice is a result of attempts to establish and maintain favorable positions within a social hierarchy);
- 5 Marxism (Gramsci, 1971; Marx and Engels, 1846);
- 6 neoclassical elitism theory (or the notion that social hierarchies are ubiquitous and essentially inevitable; see Michels, 1911; Mosca, 1896; Pareto, 1901);
- 7 industrial/organizational psychology (Bretz and Judge, 1994); and
- 8 sociological work on institutional discrimination (Hood and Cordovil, 1992), cultural ideologies (e.g., Sanday, 1981), evolutionary biology (Trivers, 1972), evolutionary psychology (Betzig, 1993; van den Berghe, 1978) and biological anthropology (Dickemann, 1979).

The influence of neo-classical elitism theories and the concept of legitimizing myths

One important idea that we borrowed from classical and neoclassical elitism theories concerns the nature of societal structure. With the decided exception of Marxism, these theories presume that social systems and complex social organizations are inherently hierarchically and oligarchically structured. Thus, what ordinarily passes for democratic rule on the surface is, in actuality, the exercise of control by economic and social elites (e.g., Dahl, 1989). For such reasons, we look not at a society's system of government, but rather its degree of group inequality and the mechanisms responsible for that inequality (e.g., Sidanius and Pratto, 1993).

The second major idea that many of these theories share in common concerns the role of ideas in producing and maintaining group-based inequality. Pareto (1935) argued that there are two major means by which members of dominant groups establish and maintain hegemony, force, and fraud. By force, Pareto simply meant the use or threat of physical force and intimidation. By fraud he referred to the use of consensually shared social ideology functioning to legitimize the dominant position of the powerful over the powerless. Elitism theories and Marxism acknowledge that physical intimidation is an important means by which dominants exploit and control subordinates, but they maintain that, in the long run, it is not the most effective means of social control. A more potent means of sustaining hierarchy is by controlling social legitimacy. Marxists refer to these legitimacy instruments as "ideology" and "false consciousness," Mosca refers them by the term "political formula," Pareto uses the notion of "derivations," and Gramsci invokes the idea of "ideological hegemony." All these assert that elites maintain control over subordinates by controlling what is and what is not considered legitimate discourse, and promoting the idea that the rule of elites is moral, just, necessary, inevitable, and fair. SDT calls

these ideological instruments "legitimizing myths."

SDT defines legitimizing myths (LMs) as consensually shared ideologies (including stereotypes, attributions, cosmologies, predominant values or discourses, shared representations, etc.) that organize and justify social relationships. LMs suggest how people and institutions should behave, why things are how they are, and how social value should be distributed. Because they are consensual and closely associated with the structure of their societies, LMs often have the appearance of being true. Consequently, those who reject them take risks and have work to do in explaining how and why they disagree.

Unlike Marxist approaches, including system justification theory (see Jost and Banaji, 1994), SDT does not assume that all such myths are false, nor that they only reinforce social hierarchy (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). Cultural ideologies can also work against hierarchy. For example, in both our lives, the civil rights and anticolonial movements mobilized Western arguments for equality and liberty (e.g., Klein and Licata, 2003). This aspect of SDT is compatible with much critical theory (e.g., Crenshaw et al., 1996), social representations (e.g., Moscovici, 1988) and discourse analysis (e.g., Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002) in identifying the social and political functions of ideology.



SDO AND AUTHORITARIANISM

Furthermore, SDT argues that the individual's attitudes towards redistributive social ideologies, group-relevant social policies, and social groups themselves, will be strongly determined by how much one favors group-based dominance and social inequality in general. Because we have a concrete measure of SDO (see Pratto et al., 1994), one of the unique features of SDT is that it offers an empirical standard for understanding whether given cultural ideologies legitimize continued hierarchy or increased equality.

If the desire for the establishment and maintenance of group-based social inequality and hierarchy (i.e., SDO) has a positive correlation with support for an ideology, one can regard that ideology as hierarchy-enhancing. If, on the other hand, SDO has a negative correlation with support for an ideology, one can suppose it is hierarchy-attenuating. However, a stronger test is how well an ideology *mediates* SDO and support for policies or practices that influence inequality. For example, Pratto et al. (1998) showed that *noblesse oblige*¹ was negatively correlated with SDO, and mediated between SDO and support for social welfare programs, implying that in that context, *noblesse oblige* was hierarchy-attenuating. In the same study, nationalism was positively correlated with SDO and mediated between SDO and support for the US Gulf War against Iraq.

Although authoritarianism and SDO have both been found to be strong predictors of prejudice and hostility towards a range of groups, the two variables are also both conceptually and empirically distinct. Whereas authoritarianism was conceived from psychoanalytic theorizing as an ego defense against feelings of inadequacy and vulnerability, SDO was not conceived of as psychopathological in any sense, but merely viewed as one orientation for engaging in social life. Furthermore, except where the political system is highly unidimensional (e.g., Duriez et al., 2005), right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), and SDO are only minimally related to each other and both make strong and independent contributions to prejudice against denigrated groups such as gays, foreigners, women, Arabs, Muslims, Blacks and Jews (e.g., Altemeyer, 1998; McFarland and Adelson, 1996).

Modern conceptualizations of right-wing authoritarianism define it as submission to ingroup authority, the social norms that these authorities endorse, and the propensity to aggress against those who are perceived as violating ingroup norms and traditions (e.g., Altemeyer, 1998). Rather than being about ingroup norms, SDO is primarily about hierarchy between groups. This conceptual

distinction between RWA and SDO was recently confirmed in an experiment by Thomsen et al. (2008), who reasoned that RWA and SDO would be differentially associated with hostility against immigrants, depending upon how descriptions of immigrants were framed. High authoritarians were most hostile towards immigrants who were described as refusing to accept ingroup norms and assimilate. In contrast, high dominators were most hostile to those immigrants *who did want to* accept national norms and assimilate; thereby becoming competitors with natives (see Duckitt and Sibley, 2007; Henry et al., 2005 for empirical distinctions between RWA and SDO).

The relation between gender and arbitrary set discrimination

Initially inspired by Jim's early discovery of consistently higher levels of racism and xenophobia among men than among women, and influenced by the biosocial analysis of Laura Betzig (1993), we began to theorize that this syndrome of greater affinity for outgroup hostility, social predation, and group-based dominance among males was most likely grounded in the notion that social dominance had slightly higher fitness-value for males than for females over the course of human evolutionary history. Thus, the "invariance hypothesis" was born, or the notion that, everything else being equal, men will tend to have higher SDO scores than women. There is now very considerable and consistent evidence in support of this hypothesis found in scores of different studies, over dozens of different cultures, and using thousands of respondents (see, for example, Pratto et al., 1997; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999; Sidanius et al., 1994b, 1995, 2000, 2006; see especially the meta-analysis of Lee et al., submitted).

Such gender differences contribute to men obtaining hierarchy-enhancing roles and to women obtaining hierarchy-attenuating roles, due not only to stereotyping, but to self-selection as well (Pratto et al., 1997; Pratto

and Espinoza, 2001). These gender differences are not just expressed in attitudes assessed by surveys, or in hierarchy roles, but also in disproportionate acts of violence against outgroups. For example, while women sometimes participate in war, they are very rarely, if ever, the organizers and major protagonists of war (e.g., Keegan, 1993). Similarly, considering US hate crimes as an example of outgroup aggression (i.e., crimes based on arbitrary-set distinctions like race, religion, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation), men again predominate as perpetrators, both among Whites and Blacks (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001).

Another important fact that we have documented concerning gender and arbitrary set discrimination is that even arbitrary set victimhood is gendered. Except for rape and child abuse, extreme violence is primarily targeted against men rather than against women. For example, White males comprised 40 percent of US hate crime victims, while White females were 25 percent of hate crime victims; Black males were 20 percent of hate crime victims, while Black females were 12 percent (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001). In a thorough international review of institutional discrimination, we found higher rates of victimhood among subordinate men than among subordinate women in the labor market, the retail and housing markets, the educational system, and the criminal justice system across many nations (see Sidanius and Pratto, 1999, Chapters 5–9). This gender-based asymmetry in discriminatory outcomes is called the *subordinate male target hypothesis* (SMTH; see Sidanius and Pratto, 1999; Sidanius and Veniegas, 2000).

Because this pattern of men being both the more frequent perpetrators and victims of arbitrary-set violence and discrimination is so consistent across nations, we have explored whether evolutionary theory might inform these gender differences. As mentioned above, we have argued that intergroup aggression, which is often both high risk and high gain, suits the fitness strategies of men more than those of women (e.g., Betzig, 1993).

Furthermore, we have recently begun examining this phenomenon by use of the *prepared learning* paradigm. This approach argues that conditioned fear to stimuli which have been dangerous to humans over the course of human evolutionary history (e.g., spiders and snakes) will resist extinction, while conditioned fear responses to stimuli which have not posed a threat across human evolutionary history (e.g., birds and rabbits) will be more readily extinguished (Ohman and Mineka, 2001). Applying this idea to the domain of intergroup relations, Olsson et al. (2005) used men's faces as stimuli and found that conditioned fear of facial pictures of one's racial ingroup readily extinguished, but conditioned fear of facial images of racial outgroups did not. This implies that people are "prepared" to be fearful of members of less familiar outgroups and do not easily stop fearing them.² Employing the subordinate male target hypothesis, Navarrete et al. (2009) reasoned that since outgroup males, rather than outgroup females have posed the most lethal threats over the course of human evolutionary history, conditioned fear of outgroup faces will be most resistant to extinction when these faces are male rather than female. The experimental results were consistent with this hypothesis.

In a further extension of this reasoning, Navarrete et al., (2010) reasoned that whereas men's desire to aggress against outgroups may be motivated by dominance tendencies, women's negative reactions to outgroups may be motivated by fear of sexual coercion and rape. In fact, they found that fear extinction biases against male stimuli were predicted by aggressiveness and SDO among men, but by fear of sexual coercion among women.

These kinds of studies show what SDT has argued from its inception, namely that because some of the psychological differences between men and women are considered to be "prepared" by evolution (e.g., greater affection for the exercise of raw power, violence and SDO among males), gender can neither be considered as just

another form of arbitrary-set inequality, nor is gender only about sexism and irrelevant to arbitrary-set inequality. In this respect, SDT remains different from the many theories of racism that ignore some of the unique characteristics of gender relations, or consider sexism merely a parallel form of racism.³ Similarly, SDT differs from the many theories of gender that focus only on relations between men and women, and do not recognize how gender intersects with the adult-child and arbitrary set systems, nor how gender influences arbitrary set relations and social structure.⁴

Power, not status

Another important way that social dominance differs from most contemporary theories of intergroup relations is that SDT is centrally concerned with intergroup *power*, not interpersonal power, group status, minority status, intergroup contact, or other structural considerations. The heavy American focus on Black-White US relations and the minority influence school has led many theorists to focus on “minority status” and thus to ignore the examples of apartheid, Israeli treatment of Palestinians, colonization, and sexism, and other cases in which power does not merely come from numbers. Owing to the strong influence of social identity theory, with its motivational engine of positive self-regard (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), of Allport’s (1954) view of prejudice as shades of disliking, and of stigma or lack of acceptance (Goffman, 1959), many other theorists have focused on the social status and social evaluation associated with groups (e.g., Fiske et al., 2002). Obviously, these intellectual cousins have made significant contributions to intergroup relations and related processes in their own right, and our initial theorizing was strongly influenced by social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), which we admired for linking individual and group psychological processes to social structural variables

(see Sidanius et al., 2004 for an extended discussion). However, theorists before us (e.g., Ng, 1979) showed that power and status are not the same. SDT’s most important epistemological assumption is that intergroup power, not which group is liked or respected more, is what matters.

Here it is important to explicate how SDT understands intergroup power. We use terms such as ‘dominance’ and ‘oppression’ to describe some intergroup relations, and this may lead our readers to think we are endorsing a definition of power that social psychologists rejected in the 1950s, namely that power is the ability to get another to act against his or her will, or absolute control. Because of interdependence theory (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959), and the interpersonal interaction model (e.g., Raven, 1986), many social psychologists view power as an aspect of a dyadic relation, wherein the party who can more easily exit the relationship or who exerts more influence has more power. In this view, then, power, is asymmetric interdependence (see Fiske and Berdahl, 2007, for a review). From our perspective, this influence/relational conception of power is not adequate for describing intergroup relations for three reasons.

First, many relations between groups and between group members are simply not interpersonal. There is a good deal of segregation as to where men and women work, where people of different ethnic groups and nations live, worship, and relax, and it is hard to see how not being in interpersonal intergroup contact leads to asymmetric effects for people in more and less powerful groups. What segregation in workplaces, neighborhoods, and service institutions does is to constrain which groups have access to resources, which is properly called power and not status. Another reason that intergroup relations cannot be described simply as aggregated interpersonal power relations is because discrimination is institutionalized (e.g., Feagin and Feagin, 1986). Institutional discrimination reveals that racism and sexism, for example, are not just products of asymmetric discrimination

by individuals. There is a group-ness to intergroup relations across a society; for example, when shared categories lead to systematic differential treatment (e.g., Tilly, 1998).

Second, in addition to the kinds of interpersonal influence Raven (e.g., 1986) identified, intergroup relations may not be easily described as if there is only one kind of power. For example, Israel enjoys nationhood, a functioning society, greater military power, and greater approval by superpowers than the Palestinian people do. On the whole we would have to say that Israel is much more powerful than the Palestinians, who lack first class citizenship and statehood, have an extraordinarily high unemployment rate, receive little social recognition outside the Arab world, and are killed in high numbers by Israelis. But relatively small-scale violence by nonstate actors, like the bombing of the US Marine barracks in Lebanon in 1983, has changed policies of powerful nations (e.g., Pape, 2005). It is possible, then, that certain kinds of actions by less powerful groups, including strikes, boycotts, and nonviolent protests, and also certain kinds of violence, can effect change. To understand this we need to acknowledge that power is not uni-typological. In fact, having things that others desire and exerting military might may make relatively rich and powerful countries like the US and Israel vulnerable to attack by people with little money, no standing armies, and no state security. The forms of power that are relevant to intergroup relations extend beyond influence, and elaborating what these are an important agenda for intergroup relations research.

Third, a solely relational view of power does not address two important aspects of power: the extent to which people have volition or agency, and whether they can obtain basic necessities. Both the philosophy and sociology of power consider degree of freedom or *choice* to be an important aspect of power, a view also held by Lewin (1951). Having power more often enables more choice, whereas survival needs constrain some choices and necessitate others. Wellbeing and

volition may not be absolute dichotomous states, such that one either has or does not have them, but they are also not relative to other people. Unlike relational views of power, SDT's assumptions about power have considered both volition and need.

SDT explicitly allows that both dominants and subordinates can have agency, but has demonstrated that groups in social hierarchies often have asymmetric outcomes. Rather than viewing power as asymmetric interdependence, though, SDT might be said to be more ontological in focusing on how the wellbeing of people in dominant and subordinate groups differs. For example, four chapters of our book (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999) review institutional discrimination to understand how basic needs like housing, income, education, and healthcare are not enjoyed as much by people in subordinate groups as by people in dominant groups. In addition, from its beginning, SDT has shown that certain basic processes are not symmetric for people in more and less powerful groups. For example, SDO is less associated with ingroup identification for people in subordinate groups than for people in dominant groups (Sidanius et al., 1994c), and more generally, the psychological facilitators of dominance do not work as well for members of subordinate groups. Our principle of *behavioral asymmetry* argues that people in subordinate groups do not behave in ways that are as self-serving as people in dominant groups do because of their power situation. Henry (2009), in his low-status compensation theory, may be identifying part of the psychological reason this occurs.

There is another aspect of power that is implicit in SDT, but not in many other social psychological treatments of power. SDT has always acknowledged that societies often have *hierarchy-attenuating* individuals, cultural ideologies, and even institutions that strive against hierarchy, inequality, and exclusion. The fact that these hierarchy-attenuating forces can help the neediest have their needs met, and also effect social change, implies that SDT acknowledges the existence not just

of *oppositional* power, but of *transformative* power. As acknowledged in social movements for empowerment (e.g., Ball, 2008) and in philosophy due to feminist theory (Wartenburg, 1990), power can be used to enable people to grow, thrive, develop, and to change relationships, not only for dominance. Indeed, dominance would be fairly easy to maintain were it not for this other kind of power. Given that we have always pointed out the importance of hierarchy-attenuating forces, it would be a mistake to assume that SDT views power only as destructive, coercive, and oppressive.

We view the recognition that social processes and the outcomes they produce are different for people in dominant versus subordinate groups to be an important and growing legacy of SDT. For example, Pratto and Espinoza (2001) tested whether job applicants of different ethnic groups and genders and who were apparently either low or high on SDO would be hired into hierarchy-enhancing or hierarchy-attenuating jobs differentially. The results showed that ethnic group moderated the previous effects found for White applicants, that men and high SDO applicants would be hired into hierarchy-enhancing jobs while women and low SDO applicants would be hired into hierarchy-attenuating jobs disproportionately (Pratto et al., 1997). Pratto and Espinoza (2001) found that Black and Hispanic applicants, regardless of their gender or SDO levels, were placed in hierarchy-attenuating jobs over hierarchy-enhancing jobs, and that only White male applicants were sorted by their SDO level into compatible jobs. In other words, White applicants were individuated and Black and Hispanic applicants were stereotyped more in job placement. To provide a different example, Saguy et al. (2008) showed that intergroup contact is not symmetric for people in low and high power groups. High power group members prefer to talk about what they have in common with low power groups rather than the power differential, and when they do this, low power group members come to expect that power will be addressed,

when in fact it won't be. One general heuristic that SDT and other group positions theories suggest is that researchers consider that group power may moderate the processes and outcomes they posit.

Social dominance as a system

Unlike most theories in social psychology, SDT uses not just two (e.g., person–situation) but several levels of analyses. Its range of interest varies from the nature of attitudes and attitude formation at the person level (in its discussion of SDO) and the individual's construal of the social situation, to the asymmetrical behaviors of social groups, to the functions of system-wide social ideologies and the allocative decisions of social institutions (Mitchell and Sidanius, 1995). Furthermore, SDT holds that it is the interactions and intersections of these levels of analysis that account for the maintenance of social hierarchy. For example, research derived from SDT has shown that people in hierarchy-enhancing institutions tend to share the same hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing ideologies as each other (e.g., Sidanius et al., 1994a), and has also shown that performing hierarchy-enhancing roles tends to increase use of such ideologies in the discriminatory behavior of institutions (Michinov et al., 2005; Pratto et al., 1998). These kinds of intersecting processes contribute to the systematic perpetuation of hierarchy.

This example points out that SDT's assumptions that societies are social systems suggests a different kind of theorizing than is common in much of social psychology. Rather than perform critical experiments to rule out alternative explanations for large-scale outcomes like discrimination, or simply chain linear processes back in search of a root cause, SDT assumes that there is both elasticity and tenacity to interlinked social processes. This is why we would expect the contents of legitimizing myths to change over time and to differ from culture to culture, despite the fact that the two functions they perform tend to be found

everywhere (e.g., Pratto et al., 2000; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999).

Further, because SDT seeks to account for systematic effects, we have assumed that there are redundant processes in the system of society. For example, we assume that institutional functioning is afforded by good fit between the hierarchy-enhancing or hierarchy-attenuating character of the social institution and the attitudes and behavioral predispositions of the individuals working within these institutions. We have documented evidence for several different processes that contribute to this person–institution fit, including self-selection, hiring and attrition biases, and stereotyping (Pratto et al., 1997; Sidanius et al., 2003; van Laar et al., 1999; see review by Haley and Sidanius, 2005). This redundancy helps to make systems tenacious.

THE APPLICATION OF SDT TO REAL-WORLD ISSUES

One of the strengths of SDT is its broad applicability and ability to make sense of a wide variety of intergroup phenomena and conflicts. We illustrate this wide applicability with respect to three social domains: (1) support for harsh criminal sanctions, (2) understanding the gender gap in social and political attitudes, and (3) understanding support for “terrorism” among Arab and Muslim populations.

Support for the death penalty

The US is among the very few countries in the world, and the only nation among the industrialized “democracies,” that still employs the death penalty.⁵ Consistent with the expectations of SDT, the evidence shows that the death penalty tends to be disproportionately used against subordinates (e.g., the poor and ethnic minorities), especially when these subordinates have been convicted of capital crimes against dominants (see Sidanius and Pratto, 1999: 214–217).

The standard criminal justice literature suggests that Americans support the death penalty for two major reasons: (1) as a means to deter future criminality, and (2) as a means of retribution or revenge for unacceptable behavior. While we have no reason to doubt the importance of both motives as sources of death penalty support, given the fact that the death penalty is disproportionately used against subordinates rather than dominants, SDT would also expect these attitudes to serve as legitimizing ideologies in the service of continued group-based inequality. If this view is correct, we would also expect to find evidence of a substantial correlation between SDO and death penalty support, and that this relationship should be substantially mediated by both deterrence and retribution beliefs.

Evidence consistent with this view has been found using a large sample of university students and structural equation modeling. Sidanius et al. (2006) not only found that death penalty support is strongly associated with the ideologies of deterrence and retribution, but these ideologies were also found to completely mediate the positive and significant relationship between SDO and death penalty support (see Figure 47.2). Thus, alongside the other functions deterrence and retribution beliefs may serve, there is evidence that one of these functions is continued group-based inequality and dominance within American society.

Exploring the gender gap

Men and women have significantly different social and political attitudes and behaviors. For example, women are more likely to vote for liberal or socialist political parties, are more supportive of social welfare policies, and are less supportive of militaristic and punitive social policies than are men (see Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). The gender difference on SDO discussed earlier helps account for these differences. In extensive analyses of a wide range of social and political attitudes, Sidanius and Pratto (1999: 282–290) found

that approximately half of the relationships between gender and these social and political attitudes could be explained in terms of the higher levels of SDO among men.

Support for terrorism

SDT has also been applied to our understanding of support for terrorist violence against the West in general, and support of the 9/11 attack against the World Trade Center (WTC) in particular. There are at least two narratives that can be used to understand popular support for terrorist violence against the West. By far the most well-known narrative is known as the “clash of Civilizations,” thesis first proposed by Bernard Lewis (1990), and later popularized by Samuel Huntington (1993). This thesis essentially suggests that Islamic hatred of the West goes beyond mere conflicts of interest and is to be located in the

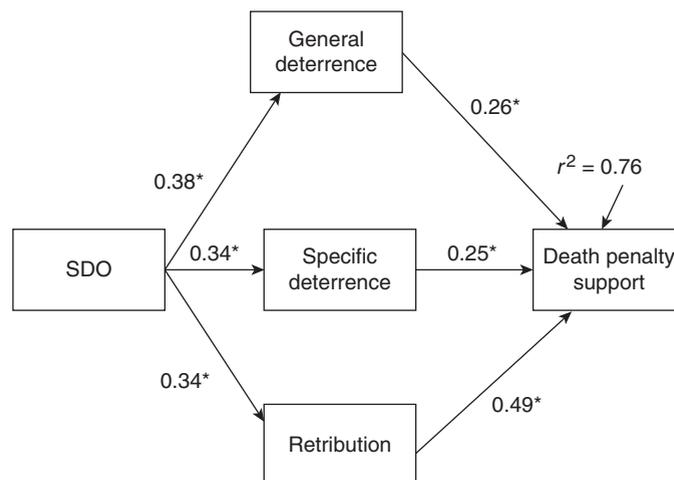
rejection of Western civilization as such, not only what it does but what it is, and the principles and values that it practices and professes. These are

indeed seen as innately evil, and those who promote or accept them as the “enemies of God.” (Lewis, 1990)

In other words, people in other cultures reject the West as being culturally degenerate and even culturally profane.

The second narrative accounts for resentment, not of Western culture, but the politics of Western dominance and hegemony. From our group dominance perspective, support for terrorism against the West can be seen as endorsement of anti- or counterdominance directed at ending the perceived oppression of the Arab and Muslims worlds by the West.

Sidanius et al. (2004) explored the relative plausibilities of these two perspectives using a sample of university students in Beirut, Lebanon. Using structural equation modeling and measures of antidominance and clash-of-civilization attributions for the attack on the WTC, Sidanius and his colleagues found that support for the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center was strongly related to anti-dominance attributions ($r = 0.32, p < 0.05$), while being essentially unrelated to clash-of-civilization attributions ($r = -0.10, n.s.$).



Chi-square = 0.204, df = 1, $p = 0.65$, RMSEA = 0.00, $p(\text{RMSEA} < 0.05) = 0.78$, AGFI = 0.997

Figure 47.2 Support for the death penalty as a function of belief in general deterrence, specific deterrence, retribution, and social dominance orientation. (From Sidanius et al. (2006))

Furthermore, while a consistent body of evidence shows that support for war and anti-“terrorist” violence in the Middle-East is *positively* associated with SDO among Western populations (Crowson et al., 2006; Heaven et al., 2006; Henry et al., 2005; McFarland, 2005; Sidanius and Liu, 1992), support for “terrorist” violence against the West is *negatively* associated with SDO among Lebanese and Middle-Eastern respondents (Henry et al., 2005). In other words, the more participants supported group-based dominance (and assumedly the present dominance of Israel and the West over Arab lands), the *less* one supported terrorist organizations, and the *less* one supported the attack on the WTC. Thus, rather than being an expression of support for group-based dominance and inequality among Lebanese students, support for terrorist violence against the West appears to be associated with counterdominance motivations. These results illustrate a central but uncommon assumption of SDT, namely that the meaning of actions and psychological states of people in dominant and subordinate groups depend on their group position.

SDT’S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE INTERGROUP RELATIONS LITERATURE

There are four main areas in which SDT has contributed to the social psychological literature of intergroup relations. First, in contrast to the normative emphasis on factors such as social status, self-esteem, social identity, and individual social cognition and categorization, SDT helped to reintroduce and emphasize the factor of intergroup power in both its hard forms, such as the use of institutionalized and informal physical intimidation and violence, and soft forms such as the control of legitimizing ideologies (see Sidanius and Pratto, 1999; Mitchell and Sidanius, 1995). Consistent with realistic group conflict theory (e.g., Sherif et al., 1961), intergroup behavior is not simply driven by conflicts over social status, social

regard, and symbolic rewards, but by conflict over the power to allocate social and economic resources to the benefit of one’s own ingroup. We hope this has also refocused the discipline on unequal outcomes.

Second, rather than view prejudice by dominants as the only engine of inequality, SDT also emphasizes the power and agency of subordinates and their allies, for example, in hierarchy-attenuating institutions and in behavioral asymmetry. Whereas stereotyping and prejudice research often assumes only the perspective of dominant groups (e.g., Fiske et al., 2002), and stigma research focuses on the perspective of denigrated groups (e.g., Piel, 1999), SDT not only considers both perspectives, but also how they relate to one another. This is how SDT can describe the complementarity of the behaviors of groups with different interests while showing how the actions of both sustain group dominance.

Third, although most social psychological approaches to intergroup relations limit their analyses to the intersection between the individual and the social group, SDT’s analysis extends our focus from individuals to social context to institutional behavior to cultural ideologies to social structural context and reproductive patterns over historical time.

Fourth and most important, SDT puts the myriad components of intergroup beliefs, values, actions, and structure together to show how they function as a living social system. SDT has not only done this in linking processes at several different levels of social organization together, but by assuming that the stable system of hierarchy has multiple functionally redundant processes that help to stabilize it. This new way of understanding human social life may help social psychologists understand other systematic outcomes as well.

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NOTES

1 Noblesse oblige is defined as the obligations of honorable and generous behavior of those with high rank.

2 However, for a contrary view, see Mallan et al. (in press).

3 Following Kurzban et al. (2001), we also assume that while sex may be a natural category of mind, "race" is not. Rather what we refer to as "race" may be a means of encoding coalitional alliances.

4 For a more comprehensive discussion of these issues, see Sidanius and Pratto (1999: 294–298).

5 The death penalty has been totally abolished in 46 of the 50 European nations. Abolition of the death penalty is also a condition for membership in the Council of Europe and its abolition is considered a central value to the European Union.

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