

Chapter 12

Social Categories Create and Reflect Inequality: Psychological and Sociological Insights

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Social Categories Can Create and Reflect Inequality

As much as we might resist, we are often quickly reduced to categories. In interpersonal impressions, frequently one is what one does: “I’m an investment banker” connotes something distinct from, “I’m a construction worker.” Sometimes there is utility in categorization, such as when police narrow their suspect search based upon a description of age, gender, and race. Nevertheless, rapid interpersonal categorization creates simplistic, unindividuating consequences, reducing us to a mere fraction of our intrinsic complexity, treated as interchangeable with other members of that cluster. And clusters differentiate by social status, which is one of the main reasons we resist them.

This chapter emphasizes this latter, unfortunate side of social categories. After all, not all categories are created equal: Tall and attractive people enjoy well-documented benefits. Overweight and quiet people tend to be underappreciated. Women and minorities have faced historical uphill battles to equal societal benefits. How do we make sense of these power and status imbalances? How do macro, overarching forces, and individual, perceiver biases each contribute?

In discussing these issues, we focus on perspectives deriving from two branches of social psychology: classic sociological social psychology and prevailing psychological social psychology. Both fields delineate how inequalities result from deindividuating people into broad social categories. At the same time, the fields diverge: Whereas sociologically-oriented social psychologists have long focused primarily on how categories foster “inequality” for specific social targets, psychologically-oriented social psychologists tend to focus on the “prejudices” inside the mind of social perceivers. Clearly understanding both perspectives allows the most robust understanding of category-based disparate social outcomes. Fortunately,

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researchers in both fields have begun to recognize the potential benefits of drawing from one another, issuing a call for increased collaboration (Eagly and Fine 2010). Moreover, existing work has already begun to draw from both sides, as we discuss in this chapter.

The chapter starts by noting some classic sociology relevant to inequality, and then some related classic (and recent) psychology on prejudice-based inequality, focusing on mechanisms of interpersonal fluidity and cognitive economy. Then we turn to social (Fiske et al. 2002) categories that often yield inequality, introducing the stereotype content model as a conceptual framework, and then describing the psychology of reactions to the most salient categories (race, gender), as well as less-studied ones (age, disability, sexuality, social class, and weight). We then note some broader psychological perspectives about who uses these categories, drawing from individual differences in societal attitudes, as well as from social cognition (automaticity, ambiguity, ambivalence, complexity). We close with future opportunities for studying social categories.

Classic Sociology: Categories (Indirectly) Foster Structural Inequality

To this day, sociological and psychological social psychology each are fundamentally concerned with how people get categorized and sorted, both by inherent characteristics (such as race and gender) as well as those that are more controllable (Foner 1979; Lieberman 2001).

But whereas the construction of social categories has a formative history in sociological social psychology, the idea that social sorting fosters *inequalities* came about indirectly, as inequality was not the primary concern of the field's theoretical innovators. Perspectives on category-based inequalities do date back to at least the late 1800s, when the French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1893/1964) first introduced the notion of *collective/common conscience*, underscoring how societies maintain social order by shared thinking. For industrialized societies, a major part of common understanding centers on labor division among citizens, and the shared understanding that certain work will be rewarded more than others. Although this has the consequence of strengthening society as a whole, status inequalities may emerge, due to inevitable differences in valuing labor.

Later sociological theories built upon the seminal idea that groups need shared values systems to flourish—again, showing indirectly how status imbalances can result from these systems. Resembling Durkheim's perspective, Moscovici's (1963) *social representation theory* proposes that social groups (including the larger society) use a simplified, shared system of particular values, ideas, and practices to establish order, facilitate group member communication, and make sense of novel or troubling events. Whereas this implies the collective ability to simplify a complex world, inequality and exclusion (e.g., racism) can result from oversimplification of outgroup images (Potter and Wetherell 1998).

Other classic works focus on the importance of societal roles, once again demonstrating indirectly how they foster unequal categories. Dahrendorf's (1968) conception of *homo sociologicus* de-emphasizes narrow self-interests, instead emphasizing people's motive to fulfill roles in a broader social framework. This role orientation inevitably creates inequalities, given the fundamental unevenness of industrialized roles. As a more specific example, Talcott Parsons' depiction of the *nuclear family* includes the complementary roles of industrious men versus nurturing women; though designed to alleviate competition, these functions nevertheless foster gender stratification (Parsons and Bales 1955). Admittedly, people sometimes attempt to dissociate themselves from stereotypes associated with their own role, implementing *role distancing* (such as a surgeon who jokes at the operating table to separate him/herself; Goffman 1972), especially if they perceive role-based inequalities as inhibiting their interpersonal relationships. Nevertheless, sometimes one's social role is too powerful to overcome, as reflected in the influential concept of the *self-fulfilling prophecy* (Merton 1948). All this is to say that sociologists have long considered categories and inequality.

Perhaps the most currently influential classic theory of categories is *status characteristics theory* (e.g., Berger et al. 1972; Ridgeway 1991), which argues that certain categories (e.g., being white, male, middle-aged) create expected competencies that create dynamics making self and others respond with dominance and deference accordingly, thereby perpetuating category-based status inequalities in prestige and resources. This approach fits well with psychological approaches that emphasize social categorization.

Classic (and Recent) Psychology: Prejudice-based Inequality

Psychologists have long considered categories but only more recently considered their status per se. Psychologists seldom use the term *inequality* directly. Instead, the psychological conversation on social discrepancies often begins with Gordon Allport's classic definition of *prejudice*: "an antipathy based on faulty and inflexible generalization [...] directed toward a group or an individual of that group" (1954, p. 9). To this day, social psychologists continue to grapple with how social categories foster the antipathies (and other, more mixed emotions) that permeate particular intergroup perceptions and interactions. Although prejudice is not the only psychological explanation for status inequalities, it is often implicated as the primary one—with theories of group-based power relations a close sibling.

Various elements of psychological social psychology utilize *functional* perspectives to explain how people's prejudices hold apparent psychological utility. This explains not only how inequalities form, but also how they persist. Two types of functional theories are particularly elucidating: early *interpersonal fluidity* theories, and later *cognitive economy* theories.

Interpersonal Fluidity

The first contribution of psychological experimental social psychology was to demonstrate how flexible people are, both in the categories they expect others to fit—despite objective reality—and in how they influence others to respond accordingly—despite their own individuality. That is, people misperceive others to fit categories more than they do, and then influence those others to fit those categories, showing that both perceivers and targets are flexible. All this categorical flexibility can be explained without recourse to motivation, namely, by the perceiver saving mental effort and by targets not bothering to resist. (These cognitive-economy principles are elaborated next.)

Reminiscent of self-fulfilling prophecy, but more psychology-specific, the role of expectations in fostering inequality is apparent in the idea of *behavioral confirmation*—the surprising impact of perceiver expectations on target behavior in an upcoming interaction. For instance, if a perceiver expects a target to be hostile, this can subtly cue the target actually to act in more hostile ways (Snyder and Swann 1978). This is often conveyed nonverbally. Expectancies, based for example on race, can cause a White interviewer to exhibit less nonverbal immediacy; this in turn undermines the performance of the interviewee, causing both to feel that the interaction did not go well and that the other performed inadequately, confirming mutual racial stereotypes (Shelton and Richeson 2006; Word et al. 1974). Whether a perceiver's expectancy ultimately shapes a target's behavior depends upon a host of factors, including both the perceiver's and target's separate interpretations of the target's behaviors (Darley and Fazio 1980).

Cognitive Economy

Later functional theories focused on how category-based responses emerge from the preference for cognitive economy—in other words, people are *cognitive misers* who strive to conserve mental resources when navigating the social world (Fiske and Taylor 2013). By default, this conserving priority spurs people to pigeonhole others into broad categories, fostering inequalities. Nevertheless, sometimes people can override these automatic biases if sufficiently motivated to do so. In psychological social psychology, these two sides of the coin have given rise to a series of influential dual-process models of interpersonal perception, comprising both automatic biases and more deliberate, controllable processes that allow people to override them (e.g., Brewer 1988; Brewer and Harasty Feinstein 1999; Devine 1989).

As an example, the Continuum Model (Fiske et al. 1987; Fiske and Neuberg 1990) theorizes that people form impressions on a continuum ranging from basic, automatic categories (age, gender, race) to elaborated, deliberate combination of aspects (individuating data). Beginning at the automatic end, people decide how far along the continuum they do go based upon their particular information and

motivation, with evolving elaboration of processing. Thus, both Gestalt configural processes (category-based impressions) and piecemeal, algebraic processes (individuating impressions) are at work.

Physical features matter as well in automatic, interpersonal categorization, from ethnic characteristics to clothing (Stangor et al. 1992). Perceivers generally attune most to the most informative physical aspect, such as clothing style over color, or the combination of race and gender as opposed to either on its own. Other factors also matter in which categories are most saliently activated, such as the perceiver's availability of attentional resources and general pre-existing attitudes (Macrae and Bodenhausen 2000).

Social Categories Often Yield Inequality

The role of categorization—Allport's "nouns that cut slices"—is clear from both sociology and psychology, but the societal structure and comparison of common categories was incomplete. Appearing next is progress in understanding stereotype contents, their origins in social structure, their emotional concomitants, and the downstream discrimination.

Stereotype Content Model

Psychological research using the stereotype content model (SCM; Fiske et al. 2002) indicates that the dimensions of perceived *warmth* and *competence* are fundamental in people's perceptions of social groups. The warmth dimension answers the question: "How friendly and trustworthy are this other's intentions?" which is the more immediate judgment that people make. The competence dimension answers the secondary question: "How well can this other enact those intentions?" From a simple classification along these two dimensions, four distinct clusters emerge, categorizing different social groups, with associated emotional prejudices (see Table 12.1): pride (high warmth, high competence, e.g., middle class), pity (high-low, e.g., older people), envy (low-high, e.g., rich people), and contempt (low-low, e.g., homeless people). This framework generates a society's social category map, applicable to the societal, interpersonal, and even neural level (Fiske et al. 2007). This perspective is similar to sociological social psychology, in its focus on the sociostructural origins of categories and the power of societal stratification systems (Massey 2007).

From the SCM's two dimensions, different forms of inequality emerge. Generally, warmth is dictated by groups' *interdependence*, or how cooperative-competitive groups appear. On the other hand, perceived competence correlates highly with status (in other words, people believe that "you get what you deserve" in society). Status of course speaks to inequality, but interdependence does too, as when one prioritizes the cooperative ingroup over the competitive outgroup, regardless of status.

Table 12.1 Typical stereotype content model distribution of group categories across warmth x competence space, as predicted by social structure, resulting in emotions and behaviors

Stereotype (Structural predictor)	<i>Low competence</i> (Low status)	<i>High competence</i> (High status)
<i>Behavioral tendency</i>	<i>Passive harm (neglect, ignore)</i>	<i>Passive help (associate, go along to get along)</i>
<i>High warmth</i> Active help (help, protect)	Older, physically disabled, mentally disabled, traditional women	Americans, middle class, heterosexuals, whites, Christians
	Pity	Pride
<i>Low warmth</i> Active harm (attack, fight)	Poor blacks, poor whites, homeless people, immigrants, drug addicts	Rich people, white professionals, black professionals, lesbians, career women
	Disgust	Envy

Moreover, the SCM clusters predict different types of behavioral tendencies, as a result of emotional prejudices (see Table 12.1): Warmth stereotypes (associated with pride, pity) determine active behavioral tendencies, eliciting active facilitation (helping, defending). Low warmth (cold stereotypes, associated with either envy or disgust) trigger the opposite active harm behaviors (harassing, bullying). Competence stereotypes (associated with either pride or envy) determine passive behavioral tendencies, eliciting passive facilitation (associating, complying). Low-competence stereotypes (associated with either pity or disgust) elicit passive harm (neglecting, excluding). Although themselves predicted by the stereotypes, the emotions are the proximate cause of the behavior (Cuddy et al. 2007).

Most relevant here, societies differ in their usage of the mixed, ambivalent clusters (low on one dimension and high on the other) (Cuddy et al. 2009; Durante et al. 2012). In 3 dozen societies, greater societal income inequality predicts more ambivalently stereotyped societal groups, consistent with an unequal society’s need to justify group advantage or disadvantage (allegedly, “older people are poor but nice”; “investment bankers are rich but cold”). Ambivalent stereotypes may sustain systemic inequality.

Drilling Down to the Dynamics of Particular Categories

Referring, where relevant, to the stereotype dimensions warmth/interdependence x competence/status, we next identify several specific categories that social psychologists have implicated in social inequality. We start with the two that have garnered the most focus (race and gender) and then less-studied ones (age, disability, sexuality, social class, and weight). Afterward, we return to broader perspectives on individual determinants of category usage.

Race

Primarily, psychological social psychology has focused on Black and White categories of inequality. In fact, some of the first studies in social psychology measured self-reported stereotypes of and attitudes toward different racial and ethnic groups (e.g., Bogardus 1933; Katz and Braly 1933; Thurstone 1928). This is similar to sociological social psychology, which has focused on race essentially since its inception (Winant 2000).

Later psychological work became more nuanced, in distinguishing between subtle forms of racism and its more blatant manifestations. Typically, old-fashioned forms of race prejudice are overt; by contrast, the Dovidio–Gaertner idea of *aversive racism* (Dovidio et al. 1986; Gaertner and Dovidio 1986) speaks to a more common, subtle form of prejudice that may go unnoticed even by its perpetrators. Aversive racism combines negative feelings and beliefs toward the outgroup along with paternalistic sympathy and denial of one's underlying negative attitudes (see also Katz et al. 1986). Even in the absence of blatant racism, more aversive forms create deleterious consequences, such as inhibiting voluntary interracial contact (Dovidio et al. 2002) and fostering pro-White-biased hiring decisions (Dovidio and Gaertner 2000). Covert-overt prejudice distinctions have emerged in studies of other types of ethnic prejudice, too, and across multiple countries (Pettigew and Meertens 1995).

Sociologists have similarly unearthed the powerful impact of subtle racial prejudices. One recent, landmark field experiment sent pairs of equally qualified job applicants (White versus Black or Latino) to seek low-wage jobs; not only were Black candidates half as likely to receive a callback or job offer, but minority applicants were equally likely as Whites with prison records (Pager et al. 2009). Such experimental field research is a likely future direction for sociologists and psychologists alike, as both share an interest in real-world consequences of racial discrimination—which typically manifests in ways more covert than overt (Pager 2007).

From the perspective of stereotype content, low-wage African Americans appear in the low-low part of the warmth x competence space, but so do poor Whites (Cuddy et al. 2007; Fiske et al. 2002). Likewise, Black professionals appear between generic competent-but-cold (presumably White) professionals and warm, competent genre middle class (also presumably White). Increasingly, the intersection of class and race will trump the simple category of race, and research will increasingly recognize the importance of subtypes (e.g., African Americans' own subtypes for Blacks, see Fiske et al. 2009). Nevertheless, recent work offers hope for combating race-based identity threat in various domains (e.g., Cohen et al. 2012; Sherman et al. 2013).

Gender

Long after the race studies came investigations of sexism, which continues to be the second most frequent form of prejudice studied in psychology (APA 2012). Classic

social psychological studies of gender prejudice uprooted long-held beliefs about innate gender inequalities. Until the late 1960s, the most prevalent explanations treated masculinity and femininity as polar opposites and assumed that biological gender differences solely accounted for gender inequalities. Then came others proposing a more nuanced approach, treating the two gender concepts as socially defined and complementary, rather than innate and opposing (Deaux 1984; Deaux and Major 1987).

These influential, novel perspectives resulted in one of the earliest sexism measures, the Attitudes toward Women scale (ATW; Spence et al. 1973). Along with acting as a systematic, psychometric evaluation of gender stereotypes, the ATW also identified factors involved in how people come to endorse traditional sex roles and related inequalities. For instance, traditional male-female power hierarchies tend to be endorsed by particularly masculine men and feminine women, rather than more androgynous individuals (Spence et al. 1975).

Later work on gendered roles and resulting inequalities emerged from Eagly's (e.g., 1987) *social role theory*. Similar to sociologists' classic emphasis on social roles, and expectations states theory in particular, Eagly's approach stated that perceptions of social groups derive from the societal parts that they each disproportionately play. From this standpoint, perceptions fostered by traditional gender roles can appear to legitimize gender imbalances. For instance, because traditional gender division of labor more often places women inside the home, they are consequently perceived as low in agency. Such perceptions are surprisingly powerful in dictating gender-based behavioral expectations, even impacting the perceived effectiveness of leaders (depending on the extent to which job descriptions are framed in masculine terms; Eagly et al. 1995).

Gender prejudice investigations were also integral in revising Allport's original definition from pure antipathy to incorporate mixed reactions that include allegedly benign intent—as reflected in *ambivalent sexism*, which comprises both subjectively benevolent and openly hostile forms (Glick and Fiske 1996). Ambivalent sexism results from the tension between male societal dominance and male-female intimate interdependence. As such, some forms of sexism derive from subjectively *benevolent* intent—for instance, chivalrous behaviors (e.g., a contextually inappropriate compliment on attractiveness, subtly undermining competence) that nonetheless paternalize women as inferior. On the other hand, a negative, *hostile* side emerges if women are perceived as violating their prescriptive gender roles (Rudman and Glick 2001). Indeed, the endorsement of low-competence female stereotypes, traditional gender roles, and differential gender-based treatment reflects a modern neo-sexism similar to its race-based counterpart (Swim et al. 1995; Tougas et al. 1995). The domain of feminist sociology has touched on many of the same themes (e.g., Ingraham 1994).

What underlies the ambivalence are “should”-based, *prescriptive* gender stereotypes, which attempt to dictate how women ought to behave, fulfilling traditional gender roles (Burgess and Borgida 1999; Prentice and Carranza 2002; Rudman 1998). When women behave according to role-based expectations, they face default, benevolent sexism; when women do not comply, they put themselves at risk

for hostile backlash. For instance, when women act in threateningly agentic ways (countering expectations for being nice), they risk being passed over for jobs (Carli and Eagly 1999; Eagly and Karau 2002; Rudman and Glick 2001).

Prescriptions tend to arise when groups are deeply interdependent (as men and women are); when groups need each other and interact regularly, and when the subjugation of one group directly benefits the other, the potential beneficiary has a vested interest to employ controlling stereotypes (Burgess and Borgida 1999; Pratto et al. 1997; Snizek and Neil 1992). The predominant contrasts in female stereotypes—traditional and subordinate versus nontraditional and competitive—also fit the stereotype content data showing these types as respectively nice but incompetent versus competent but cold (Eckes 2002; Fiske et al. 2002). Again, the recognition of intersections and subtypes will likely move research closer to lived experience.

Less-Studied Categories

More rarely, psychological investigations center on age, disability, sexuality, social class, and weight.

Age Though Robert Butler originally coined the term “ageism” in 1969, empirical and theoretical investigations are surprisingly sparse. Moreover, the majority of theoretical perspectives on the subject are general theories to explain a wide variety of other biases (North and Fiske 2012). One of the most common such approaches to ageism is *terror management theory* (Becker 1973), which focuses on people’s reactions to death anxiety and consequent motivation to maintain physical and psychological distance from older people (Greenberg et al. 2002). Another prominent social psychological theory used to explain ageism, *social identity theory* (Tajfel and Turner 1979), characterizes age prejudice as a means of maintaining self-esteem (i.e., identifying more strongly with young, ingroup members and pushing away older, outgroup members).

Other general perspectives adapted for ageism focus on physical characteristics in driving age-based stigma. One example of such stigmatizing trait inferences is *negative halo* effect, in which older people’s perceived unattractiveness taints other trait judgments; another involves *overgeneralization*, in which certain traits are mistakenly inferred from mannerisms, such as loneliness from stooped posture. Yet another physical behavior-driven stigma derives from social *affordances*; in this sense, elders’ slow gait might signal low-interaction potential (Palmore 2003).

Other general theories apply more broadly at the group level. An intragroup relations-based, *sociofunctional* perspective posits older people as nonreciprocating, which may foster anger and resentment among other group members (Cottrell and Neuberg 2005). *Sociohistorical* accounts cite historical causes that have rendered older people as a relatively useless social group (e.g., the advent of the printing press, the industrial revolution, improved education, and better medical care; Cuddy and Fiske 2002; Nelson 2005). Similarly, the already-noted social-role perspective (Eagly 1987) would link older people’s predominant societal roles (e.g., retired) with stereotypes (e.g., low agency; Kite and Wagner 2002).

Also taking into account the role of social structure in fostering elder perceptions is the *stereotype content model* (SCM; Fiske et al. 2007; Fiske et al. 2002). As a group, older people are a social group spurring *pity*: perceived as high in warm intentions (friendly, trustworthy) but low in competence (unable to enact those intentions). These perceptions stem from older people's default social standing as low-status and noncompetitive (Cuddy et al. 2005).

The default pity response presupposes the predominant structure of age groups, which fosters expectations for age-group turn-taking. Typically, younger and older people take a low-status backseat to middle-agers, whose relative prosperity is both recognized and legitimized across age groups (ESS 2008; Garstka et al. 2004, 2005). We implicate this progression in driving prescriptive expectations among the young for older people to step aside and make way for younger generations (North and Fiske 2012). Thus, like the SCM, this kind of multilevel psychological perspective takes into account how structural relationships between groups predict psychological downstream reactions, and how interdependence and status are major drivers of stereotypes, emotional prejudices, and discriminatory behavior (e.g., Fiske et al. 2007).

Recent developments in ageism propose a more "should"-based, prescriptive form, which subtly nudges older people aside to make way for younger generations (North and Fiske 2012, 2013a). These tensions comprise at least three distinct domains: active *Succession* of enviable resources (wealth, employment), passive *Consumption* of shared resources (government funding, public space), and avoidance of symbolic *Identity* resources (activities or roles traditionally reserved for younger people). When older people do not conform to expectations concerning these practical and figurative resources, they risk facing resentment from aspiring younger people eager to maintain or enhance their own social standing.

Like many groups in the stereotype content space, age-based prejudice is commonly ambivalent, deriving from the perception that older people are high in warmth but low in competence (Cuddy et al. 2005), typically relegating them to a low-status societal position. Similar to ambivalent sexism, this default, subjectively benevolent perception has the potential to transform into something more hostile if elders are perceived as violating prescriptive age stereotypes (such as delaying retirement and blocking younger people from entering the workforce) or something more benevolent, if elders cooperate with stereotypic injunctions to step aside (North and Fiske 2012, 2013a).

Disability Research on disability prejudice has often been closely linked with stigma. In one classic study, participants were assigned to interact with another person—a confederate—who either ostensibly was missing a leg (thanks to a specially constructed wheelchair) or was not. People were far more likely to choose to cut short the interaction with the ostensibly handicapped person, and indicated a greater level of discomfort (Kleck 1966).

One explanation for people's uneasiness with the physically disabled is the novelty associated with the disability (Langer 1976). However, an important mediating factor in this perception is whether or not the disability is perceived as controllable (Weiner et al. 1988); similar to physical illness-based stigma, ailments that

are viewed as controllable are most likely to yield social rejection (Crandall and Moriarty 1995). In the stereotype content space, people with physical disabilities land in the pity quadrant, as do people with developmental delays or dementia, consistent with a bad outcome that is not their fault (Weiner et al. 1988), but drug addicts (arguably a mental disability) land in the disgust quadrant, consistent with blaming them for their condition (Cuddy et al. 2007; Fiske et al. 2002).

Sexuality Sexuality often drives inequalities, as anyone following the current political climate can attest. Until recently, the majority of American adults have believed that homosexuality is wrong and unnatural (Herek and Capitanio 1996; Herek and McLemore 2013). In fact, a common explanation for such prejudice is perpetrators' underlying discomfort with their own sexual impulses or gender (non)conformity (particularly among men; Herek 2000). Holding prejudice toward homosexuals may also serve a self-esteem purpose of reinforcing a positive sense of oneself as a "good Christian" (Herek 1987).

Nevertheless, various indicators suggest that sexuality-based prejudices are on the decline. The political zeitgeist of the early 2000s has resulted in a massive increase in states allowing gay marriage. Heterosexuals who believe in the immutability of sexual orientation tend to be less prejudiced toward homosexuals, feeling that they cannot change the way they are (Hegarty 2002). In the stereotype content space, generic gay men are rated neutrally on both dimensions, but a closer examination suggests this to be an averaging across common subtypes (Clausell and Fiske 2005). Lesbians are generally rated as cold but competent, along with other women who challenge traditional gender roles (Eckes 2002). Whereas sexuality studies have predominantly emerged in psychology, a call for increasing sociological approaches has emerged as well, given the field's closely related focus on gender (Stein and Plummer 1994).

Social Class Despite boasts of the United States' classless society (characterized by American Dream ideals that anyone can be successful by working hard), social class categories undoubtedly maintain social inequalities. For instance, recent psychological research has found that first generation college students demonstrate greater interdependent motives for attending college (e.g., "bring honor to my family") than do continuing generation college students. On the other hand, the latter seek to fulfill more independent motives (e.g., "explore potential in many domains"). Nevertheless, colleges tend to focus disproportionately on independence, presenting a *cultural mismatch* that fosters subtle inequalities (Stephens et al. *in-press*).

Even though Americans do not overwhelmingly identify as middle class (contrary to popular belief, people split equally between working and middle class), Americans do broadly endorse work-ethic values to explain social-status disparities (Fiske 2011). Applied to perceptions of poor people, these shared values mitigate the default prejudices against poor people, who are normally viewed as having uncooperative, exploitative intent, as well being generally incompetent (Fiske et al. 2002; Russell and Fiske 2008). Homeless people in particular are especially viewed with disgust (Harris and Fiske 2006). However, when a low-income person is specifically described as hard-working, that person is given more credit than a

hard-working rich person (Russell and Fiske, under review). Social class too has its subtypes.

A neglected topic is images of the rich, who universally land in the competent-but-cold quadrant of stereotype content; they elicit envy, which leads to Schadenfreude, malicious glee at their misfortunes (Cikara and Fiske 2012). Although psychologists are just beginning to investigate social class as an important phenomenon driving social inequalities, sociology has an established tradition of doing so. In particular, sociologists have spent considerable focus on the rise in concentrated disadvantage in the inner cities, which has resulted in a loss of upward mobility for many in the lower class (Wilson 1987).

Weight Also under psychology's radar is the role of people's body mass in fostering antifat prejudice (Crandall 1994). Weight bias permeates various sectors—even healthcare circles specializing in obesity (Schwartz et al. 2003)—and spans at least five continents (Crandall et al. 2001). Common correlates of antifat beliefs are blame, conservative political attitudes, and belief in a just world, suggesting that people legitimize weight-based inequalities as righteous punishment of social deviants (Crandall and Biernat 1990). Although never to our knowledge studied in the stereotype-content space, obese people elicit disgust reactions consistent with the default being to blame them for their condition (Krendl et al. 2006).

Who Uses Categories and When?

Thus far, this chapter has noted general sociological and psychological approaches to category-based status differentiation, as well as describing general societal dimensions of specific outgroup stereotypes that differ on status/competence and warmth/interdependence, both within the stereotype content model and within the respective category literatures. We now turn to moderator variable: individual differences and circumstances that encourage or discourage category use.

Individuals Differ in Endorsing Structural, Group-based Hierarchy

Certainly the SCM is not the only example of psychology successfully examining the social structure of hierarchy. Another example is *social dominance theory*, which we here limit to social dominance orientation (SDO; Sidanius and Pratto 1999), identifying how people's beliefs about group hierarchies legitimate systemic inequalities. Going beyond mere ingroup-outgroup factors, the theory explains how certain people are more predisposed than others to endorse the mere idea that some groups are better and more deserving than others (encapsulated by measurement items such as "Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups" and "If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems"; Pratto et al.

1994). Thus, the theory takes into account both the sociostructural elements (how groups are organized), and their impact on individual worldviews. SDO moderates beliefs that status and competence are virtually equivalent (Oldmeadow and Fiske 2007).

Individuals Differ in Justifying the System

In a similar vein, *system justification theory* (Jost and Banaji 1994; Jost et al. 2004) posits that people prefer sociostructural, organizational (“system”) stability, rather than equality between social groups, and thus explain societal rank accordingly. System justification endorsement differs across individuals. System justification may relate to one part of SDO, opposition to equality beliefs (the other part, general “group-based dominance,” is closely tied to one’s social identity beliefs that spur ingroup favoritism; Kugler et al. 2010). System justification theory predicts that, although ingroup favoritism is typical, low-status groups may actually favor high-status ones, to perpetuate system stability.

When Do People Categorize? Perspectives from Social Cognition

Social cognition research specializes in gauging how social actors perceive the social world. Getting inside the heads of social perceivers, as they are making sense of the social world, suggests when people use categories: when they are often automatic, sometimes ambiguous, and ultimately complex.

Automaticity of Social Categories

As noted earlier under general psychological theories, dual-process frameworks conceptualize people’s tendency to prefer automatic impressions of others. Indeed, when we first encounter another person, we immediately infer race, gender, and age (e.g., Fiske 1998; Kite et al. 1991; Kunda 1999), the first step in status divides. Although this categorical ability helps people make quick sense of their social world, it also has the unfortunate consequence of triggering status-maintaining stereotypes and prejudices. Nevertheless, depending on their individually and contextually primed goals and motives, people can overcome these automatic categories under certain circumstances.

General Automaticity Target people belong to several social categories, and automatic processes determine when perceivers use which ones. Particular categories may seem more or less relevant in the mind of the social perceiver; ones that are frequently primed are *chronically accessible* (Bargh et al. 1986; Higgins et al.

1977). Individual differences factor heavily in which categories become chronically accessible; for instance, different people value different traits (e.g., intelligence) in evaluating others and thus more likely remember and describe other people in those terms (Higgins and King 1981). Chronically accessible social categories matter too (Zárate and Smith 1990); for example, given limited information, some people rely on existing, chronic gender schemas when judging advertisements for female political candidates (Chang and Hitchon 2004).

More recent work uses event-related brain potentials (ERPs) to underscore how quickly people differentiate among social categories. For instance, people spontaneously attune particularly to other people, reacting more rapidly than to nonhuman counterparts (Ito and Cacioppo 2000; Ito et al. 1998). Related work shows that people make similarly rapid Black-versus-White and male-versus-female distinctions from the first moments of perception (Ito and Urland 2003). The automatic categorizations evidently occur regardless of individual motives because of shared cultural context.

Automatic categorization is one process; spontaneous bias is another. Perhaps the most powerful demonstration of how accumulated cultural experience makes people associate other groups with certain (often negative) evaluation is the *implicit association test* (IAT; Greenwald et al. 1998, 2002; Nosek et al. 2007). For an array of social categories, this prominent method has shown how people more readily associate certain social groups with positive words (e.g., Whites and nice) and others with negative words (e.g., Blacks and hostile)—though this effect is stronger for White participants than Black ones (Nosek et al. 2002). Although some have criticized the IAT as simply assessing widely-known cultural beliefs, and others have questioned whether it truly measures attitudes (as opposed to mere cognitive associations), arguably no other individual paradigm has spurred as much work on the unconscious processes linked to social category information. And the IAT predicts interpersonal feelings, decisions, and behavior, so it behaves as attitudes do.

Race-Specific Automaticity Part of social psychology's "dual-process" movement, Devine's *dissociation model* (1989) distinguishes between automatic and controlled processes in stereotyping. On the automatic side, *stereotype activation* does not require conscious attention—and seems inevitable whenever a White perceiver encounters a Black person or a symbolic representation of one, due to shared cultural knowledge of racial stereotypes. However, the other half of the model acknowledges that individual *personal beliefs* that can overcome stereotype activation if the individual were sufficiently motivated and able to do so.

Recent studies of implicit racial bias corroborate Devine's model. For example, demonstrating the automaticity of culturally held, racial stereotypes, people more rapidly identify guns and more readily misidentify tools as guns when primed with Black faces than White ones (Payne 2001). However, demonstrating the more controlled side of the model, over time people can learn to override implicit biases. For example, in a simulated decision-to-shoot task involving Black and White targets, highly trained police officers are less trigger-happy than ordinary civilians in identifying the correct targets to shoot, despite being similarly prone to automatic racial bias (Correll et al. 2007). Such work shows that motives and goals do matter.

Face-Specific Automaticity Underlying most social categories, the human face is one source of interpersonal categorization. Even with exceptionally short exposures to emotionally neutral faces (as little as 38 ms; Bar et al. 2006), people automatically evaluate faces on multiple trait dimensions, composing two overall dimensions: *trustworthiness* and *dominance* (Oosterhof and Todorov 2008). Spontaneous face judgments portend a variety of social ramifications, including criminal sentencing decisions, where faces with more stereotypically Black features are more likely to receive a death sentence (Eberhardt et al. 2006). Facial judgments of (male) competence predict political election outcomes with almost 70% accuracy (Ballew and Todorov 2007; Todorov et al. 2005), though such judgments can also be skewed depending on skin tone (Maddox and Gray 2002). Despite little evidence that facial judgments reliably predict abilities (apparent face-based competence does not predict actual competence), these often arbitrary judgments foster real social inequalities.

Even within the face, eye gaze direction influences automatic interpersonal categorical judgments. People more rapidly gender categorize targets with direct eye gaze (Macrae et al. 2005). That is, people most rapidly discern the gender of those most likely to be relevant to immediate interaction, namely, someone looking at them.

The face is a source of spontaneous categorization for race processing as well. Resembling IAT work, people primed with concepts typically associated with certain racial groups (e.g., basketball) more readily identify faces belonging to the associated categories (i.e., Black males; Eberhardt et al. 2004). Altogether spontaneous categorizations anchor most interactions, though motives and goals do moderate their effects.

Ambiguity in Categories

Categorization has ambiguous effects. For example, ingroup-outgroup distinctions magnify the effects of categories. That is, people's views of ingroup members are more detailed than those of outgroup members; this yields the consequence of more extreme, polarized views of outgroup members (Linville and Jones 1980). For instance, Black prospective law school applicants garner more favorable views than comparable White applicants when armed with strong credentials, but harsher views when possessing weak credentials. Thus, the role of race is ambiguous; Blacks are not always more negative, but more extreme under some conditions.

Still, also ambiguous is that the general tendency to favor the ingroup does not necessitate outgroup derogation (Brewer 1999). Favoring the ingroup has the zero-sum consequence of disadvantaging people not "like us." But preferring one's own kind is a more ambiguous prejudice than unabashed rejection of the outgroup. Status perpetuates through ingroup favoritism.

Uncovering the social construction of categories has further muddied the ambiguity of social categories, once thought to be definitively biological. For instance, acknowledging the symbolic, cultural meanings of race and gender avoids

oversimplified, unindividuating perspectives; this allows better understanding of how inequalities are socially constructed and not predetermined by biology (Glenn 1999). Given the repeated absence of conclusive biological, genetic markers (e.g., Nisbett 2009), social determinants of race in particular mark its undeniable social inequalities (Smedley and Smedley 2005). Overall, with globalization, intermarriage, intersectional identities, and social change, social categories are becoming more volatile (dynamic), uncertain (incomplete), complex (indeterminate), and ambiguous (unclear) (Bodenhausen and Peery 2009). Perhaps categories are also diluting, ambiguitating, subtyping, and contextualizing as a result.

Complexity of Categories

Though originally stereotypes seemed rigid and resistant to change, later work showed that categories can get complicated, yielding multiple *subtypes*. For instance, though as noted the default perception of older people typically combines warmth and incompetence, people recognize the kindly “grandmother,” the distinguished “elder statesman,” the lonely “senior citizen,” the “John Wayne conservative,” and the wise “sage” (Brewer et al. 1981; Schmidt and Boland 1986). Moreover, people distinguish the relatively healthy and active “young-old” and the “old-old,” despite the common tendency to group “senior citizens” as one group (Neugarten 1974; North and Fiske 2013b). Similar subdistinctions for gender include the “athletic woman” and the “blue-collar working man” (Deaux et al. 1985; Eckes 2002).

How does subtyping fit into changing categories? One description of the psychology of stereotype change suggests three different, possible models: (1) a *book-keeping* process, in which extant stereotype content modifies gradually over time, (2) a more rapid, *conversion* whereby stereotype changes suddenly in the presence of a dramatic instance, and (3) a *subtyping* mechanism that adds subcategories to the existing stereotype content to apply it to more instances (Weber and Crocker 1983).

Future Opportunities

Clearly much remains for social psychologists interested in hierarchy. Psychologists may need to regain their “sociological imagination,” reincorporating the structural perspectives that at one point developed hand-in-hand with individual-level psychological inquiry (Oishi et al. 2009). On both sides, bridging the two sides has become something of a lost art, with each increasingly specializing with their own, both in theme (distal societal influences versus proximal individual behavior) and in primary methodology (quantitative versus mixed approaches). But it does not have to be that way.

Until now, however, intergroup biases have been by some indicators the social psychology field's top topic (Fiske 2002). Social psychologists have much to offer, serving as a citation hub, a discipline that translates more biological approaches (health outcomes, social neuroscience, social evolution) to more macro sociological approaches (Fiske and Molm 2010).

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