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Excerpt

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PART

I

**FROM THERE TO HERE: THEORETICAL
BACKGROUND**

1 From Viciousness to Viciousness

Theories of Intergroup Relations

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

18-year old Bosnian woman, 1993¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Psychological Theories

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

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

The Frustration–Aggression Hypothesis

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

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

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

Authoritarian Personality Theory (APT)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Psychological Uncertainty and Anxiety Models

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

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

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

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

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

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

Value and Value Conflict Theories

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

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

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

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

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

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

Social-Cognitive Approach to Stereotyping

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

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