READING 18
Social Dominance Theory: A New Synthesis

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A number of classical and contemporary theories of social attitudes and intergroup relations have given us some important insights into the nature and dynamics of intergroup conflict, stereotyping, and group oppression. However, there has yet to be a serious effort to integrate these insights into one coherent and comprehensive theoretical model. While social dominance theory has been influenced by models within personality psychology, social psychology, and political sociology, it is neither strictly a psychological nor sociological theory, but rather an attempt to connect the worlds of individual personality and attitudes with the domains of institutional behavior and social structure. Thus, social dominance theory is an attempt to integrate several levels of analysis into one coherent theoretical framework.

Some Basic Observations

Social dominance theory (SDT) begins with the basic observation that all human societies tend to be structured as systems of *group-based social hierarchies*. At the very minimum, this hierarchical social structure consists of one or a small number of dominant and hegemonic groups at the top and one or a number of subordinate groups at the bottom of the hierarchical structure. Among other things, the dominant group is characterized by its possession of a disproportionately large share of *positive social value,* or all those material and symbolic things for which people strive. Examples of positive social value are things such as: political authority and power, good and plentiful food, splendid homes, the best available health care, wealth, and high social status. While dominant groups possess a disproportionately large share of positive social value, subordinate groups possess a disproportionately large share of *negative social value,* including such things as low power and social status, high-risk and low-status occupations, relatively poor health, poor food, modest or miserable homes, and severe negative sanctions (e.g., prison and death sentences).

After making the observation that human social systems are structured as group-based social hierarchies, social dominance theory then attempts to identify the various mechanisms that produce and maintain this group-based social hierarchy and how these various mechanisms interact with one another.

Group-Based Versus Individual-Based Social Hierarchies

By the term "group-based social hierarchy" we mean something quite distinct from an individual-based social hierarchy. In an individual-based social hierarchy, individuals might enjoy great power, prestige, or wealth by virtue of their own highly valued *individual* characteristics, such as great athletic or leadership ability, high intelligence, artistic, or political or scientific talent or achievement. Group-based social hierarchy, on the other hand, refers to that social power, prestige, and privilege that an individual possesses by virtue of their ascribed membership in a particular socially constructed group such as a "race," religion, clan, tribe, lineage, linguistic/ethnic group, or social class. This is not to imply that the power, prestige, and privilege of individuals in group-based social hierarchies are completely independent of the individual's personal characteristics and qualities. We only imply that the achievements and status of individuals are not completely independent of the status and power of the groups to which they belong. With ascribed or group-based hierarchies, on the other hand, one's social status, influence, and power are also a function of one's group membership and not simply of one's individual abilities or characteristics. Of course, in complex human social systems, individual- and group-based social hierarchies will not be completely independent. Access to the means of individual achievement (e.g., education, specialized skills) is differentially available to ascribed social groups. For example, two children may both have the same level of native talent, individual drive, and personal ambition. However, if one child is upper class, has ambitious, well-connected parents, and attends the "right" schools, the chances are that this child will do quite well in life. On the other hand, for the other child growing up in an impoverished, dangerous, and sociogenic neighborhood, and afflicted with inferior schools, chances are that child will not do quite as well in life, even if both children have equivalent talents and energies from birth. This, of course, is simply to state the obvious. Even in modern, "democratic," and multigroup societies, the "achieved" component of social status is, to a very significant degree, dependent upon one's the social status and power of one's ascribed group membership.

The Trimorphic Structure of Group-based Social Hierarchy

Pierre van den Berghe (1978) was among the first to observe that human group-based social hierarchies consist of distinctly different stratification systems. While he distinguished among four different stratification systems,[1] for our purposes, these can be collapsed into three: (a) an *age-system,* in which adults and middle-age people have disproportionate social power over children and younger adults,[2] (b) a *gender-system,* or *patriarchy* in which males have disproportionate social and political power compared to females, and (c) what we shall label an *arbitrary-set* system. The "arbitrary-set" system is filled with socially constructed, and highly salient groups based on characteristics such as clan, ethnicity, "estate," nation, "race," caste, social class, religious sect, regional grouping, or any other socially relevant group distinction which the human imagination is capable of constructing.

In such systems, one group is materially and/or politically dominant over the other. As we shall see below, while there are a number of similarities in the structural and

functional characteristics of these different stratification systems, each of these three systems is unique, and each plays a different role in the overall construction and maintenance of group-based social hierarchy. For example, if a person lives long enough, he or she can occupy every level of the age-system, from the role of low-status small child, to the role of high-status "elder." This continually changing social role position is quite distinct from one's position in either the arbitrary-set or especially the gender-systems, in which one's position in the social hierarchy tends to be relatively fixed throughout life. This "fixedness" of status position is particularly dramatic with respect to the gender-system.

While the age and gender systems certainly have at least some degree of malleability in terms of who is defined as "young" or "old," "male" or "female," the arbitrary-set system is characterized by an unusually high degree of arbitrariness, plasticity, flexibility, and situational and contextual sensitivity in determining which group distinctions are socially salient and the manner in which ingroups and outgroups are defined. For example, the salient arbitrary-set ingroup/outgroup boundaries may be defined in terms of membership in street gangs (e.g., "Bloods" vs. "Crips"), nationality (e.g., American vs. Iraqi), "race" ("White" vs. "Black"), or a social class (e.g., "working-class" vs. "upper-class"). Furthermore, even using a particular arbitrary-set dimension (e.g., "race"), the criteria for membership in one cat-egory or another is highly dependent upon the cultural and situational context. For example, a given person would be classified as "Black" in early 19th century America (i.e., having at least 1/8 African heritage), classified as "mulatto" during the same period in the Caribbean or in South Africa, and "White" in late 20th century Sweden.

The arbitrary-set system is also, by far, associated with the greatest degree of violence, brutality, and oppression. While the age and gender systems are certainly no strangers to very brutal forms of social control, the brutality associated with arbitrary-set systems very often far exceeds that of the other two systems in terms of intensity and scope. For example, besides the infamous Holocaust, the 20th century alone has witnessed at least seven other major episodes of genocidal, arbitrary-set violence, including: (a) the episodic massacres of the Kurds by Turkey in 1924, Iran in 1979, and Iraq in 1988, (b) Stalin's wholesale slaughter of the Kulaks in 1929, (c) the widespread massacre of the inhabitants of East Timor in the late 1990s, (d) the Khmer Rouge terror in the late 1970s, (e) ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Bosnia and other regions of the former Yugoslavia in the late 1990s, (f) the widespread killings of Kasaians in Zaire, and (g) the most recent massacres of Tutsis and Hutus in Rwanda and Burundi in the late 1990s, just to name a few. Furthermore, Gurr and Harff catalogued some 63 ethnic and armed conflicts around the world in 1993 alone (Gurr & Harff, 1994). These conflicts were not restricted to any particular part of the world and could be found in Europe, the Middle East, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, Central, South and East Asia, the Pacific Islands, and the Americas. This level of barbarism and blood-lust is rarely, if ever, observed within the age and gender systems of social stratification.

Another difference between the arbitrary-set system and the age and gender stratification systems is that, with the exceptions of the social roles of headman and shaman, arbitrary-set stratification systems are generally not found among small hunter-gatherer societies (van den Berghe, 1978; Lenski, 1984). It is widely assumed that one major reason for the lack of arbitrary-set, group-based social hierarchy among hunter-

gatherer societies is because such societies lack sufficient economic surplus. The technologies of food production and storage within hunter-gatherer societies do not permit long-term storage of food (Lenski, 1984). Similarly, because hunter-gatherer societies tend to be nomadic, people within such societies are not able to accumulate large amounts of other, nonedible forms of economic surplus such as animal skins, weapons, armaments, etc. This lack of economic surplus does not allow for the development of highly specialized social roles, such as professional armies, police, and other bureaucracies facilitating the formation of expropriative political authority. Because of the absence of military and "coercive specialists," all adult males within hunter-gatherer societies are essentially the military equals of all other adult males. Therefore, the extent to which political authority among adult males exists, this authority tends to be based upon mutual agreement, persuasion, and consultation rather than coercion. Although hunter-gatherer societies are generally not *completely* egalitarian, when social and political hierarchy does exist among adult males, it tends to be based on the general skills and leadership capacities of particular *individuals*. As a result, this hierarchy tends not to be transgenerational or hereditary in nature.

In contrast, societies producing substantial and stable economic surplus (i.e., horticultural, agrarian, industrial, and post-industrial societies) are also those which have arbitrary-set systems of social hierarchy (Lenski, 1984). Because of economic surplus, not all adults need to devote most of their time to food procurement and survival. Certain males are then freed to specialize in the arts of coercion (e.g., war-lordism, policing) or spiritual and intellectual sophistry. These role specialists are used by political elites to establish and enforce expropriative economic and social relationships with other members of the society. Once these role specializations and expropriative relationships are in place, arbitrary-set, group-based hierarchies then emerge. Examples of societies containing systems of stable, arbitrary-set group-based hierarchies abound and can be found in both the ancient and modern worlds and on every continent, including nations and societies such as: Mexico, Japan, Sumeria, Nigeria, Germany, Israel, France, Canada, the United States, Taiwan, Zaire, Korea, the Zulu empire, the USSR, South Africa, the ancient societies of Rome, ancient and modern Egypt, Greece, China, Scandinavia, Benin, Persia, and the pre-Colombian societies of the Inca, Aztec, and Maya. Restricting our attention to nonsubsistence societies, one is truly hard pressed to find a society any where in the world which does *not* have an arbitrary-set stratification system.

Furthermore, every attempt to abolish arbitrary-set, group-based hierarchy within societies of economic surplus have, without exception, failed. These failures have ranged from attempts at massive, revolutionary transformation (e.g., the French, Russian, Mexican, Chinese, and American civil rights revolutions) to transformatory experiments within small and isolated utopian communities (e.g., New Harmony, Indiana; New Lanark, Scotland; the Oneida Community, New York). This apparently perfect correlation between the production of sustainable economic surplus and the emergence of arbitrary-set social hierarchy appears to imply that systems of arbitrary-set hierarchy will emerge *whenever the proper economic conditions allow*.

While arbitrary-set hierarchy tends to be restricted to those societies producing economic surplus, age and gender systems of social stratification appear to be completely universal. Adults generally have more power and privilege than children and younger people.

In both hunter-gatherer and early agricultural societies, while women contributed substantially to the subsistence of the group by frequently controlling and collecting the essentials for survival, there is no known society in which women, as a group, have had control over the political life of the community, the community's interaction with outgroups, or control over the technology and practice of warfare, arguably the ultimate arbiter of political power. While some scholars have argued that matriarchy is the foundation of human society (see e.g., Bachofen, Gimbutas), most anthropologists and social historians dispute this claim. Although there are several known examples of matrilineal societies (i.e., descent traced through the family of the mother), matrilocal or uxorilocal societies (i.e., newly married couples residing with the wife's kin), and societies in which women have near economic parity with men (Murdock, 1949), there are no known examples of matriarchal societies (i.e., where women, as a group, control the political and military authority within the society; see Busch, 1990; Collier & Yanagisako, 1987; Keegan, 1993).

We have evidence of women being excluded from significant political and military power as far back as 5,000 years. For example, by 3,000 BC, women in Sumer were excluded from almost all important political and military decisions. Similarly, approximately 3,700 years ago, the legal code of ancient Babylon (i.e., the Code of Hammurabi) built upon the patriarchal tendencies of Sumer and prescribed rather draconian punishments for women who challenged male dominance (Johns, 1947; Seagle, 1971). Even though some societies were occasionally ruled by very powerful individual queens, in the aggregate, the ultimate military power has always been in the hands of men. Furthermore, patriarchy in the ancient world was not restricted to Islamic societies and areas in and adjacent to the Near East, but also has been documented among the ancient and traditional cultures in Middle and South America, Africa, among the ancient Germanic tribes, and the ancient cultures in India, China and Japan (Abel & Nelson, 1990; Beck & Keddie, 1978).

In his discussion of the role of women in hunter-gatherer societies, Gerherd Lenski remarks:

> Women invariably occupy a position inferior to men, though in some societies, the differential is not great. Women are almost always excluded from the role of headman and usually are ineligible to become shamans or participate in council meetings. (Lenski, 1984, p. 111).

While not as stable as age and gender hierarchies, the evidence suggests that arbitrary-set stratification systems also display a remarkable degree of stability. One example of this stability is the Indian caste-system, which has remained relatively intact for at least 3,000 years. While caste is no longer part of the legal order of Indian society and "untouchability" was outlawed after Indian independence in 1947, caste remains an extremely important aspect of Indian social and political life. For example, most marriages are still made within castes, politicians rely on the "caste vote," castes continue to act as economic and political pressure groups, castes are still ranked in terms of "purity" and pollution, and intercaste violence continues to the present day.

While the United States is a more socially dynamic nation than India and is, of course, not nearly as old, the American version of the caste system shows every sign of being

highly stable as well. Despite intense efforts to eliminate racism from American life, the relative dominance of Euro-Americans over African-Americans has remained unchanged since the European occupation of the New World more than 400 years ago. Although not nearly as impressive as the Indian example above, some empirical evidence of the stability of the American ethnic hierarchy can be found in recent public opinion polling assembled by Tom Smith (1991). Using national probability samples, Smith tabulated the perceived social standing of a long array of American ethnic groups, once in 1964 and again a quarter of a century later in 1989. What makes this particular period of American history so interesting is that it embraces the era when the modern civil rights movement was at its height and America embarked on its most intense and ambitious efforts to eliminate racism and actualize the promise of American "democracy." Close inspection of these data discloses a very high degree of hierarchical stability. While the social status ranking of a number of ethnic groups increased during this period (e.g., Negroes: 2.75 in 1964 to 4.17 in 1989), the *relative* ethnic group rankings and thereby the hierarchical structure within this arbitrary-set system remained essentially unchanged.

Basic Assumptions of Social Dominance Theory

After observing the ubiquitousness and stability of group-based social hierarchy, and having identified the trimorphic nature of this social hierarchy, we can now introduce the three primary assumptions upon which social dominance theory is based:

1. *While age and gender based hierarchies will tend to exist within all social systems, arbitrary-set systems of social hierarchy will invariably emerge within social systems producing sustainable economic surplus.*

    This first assumption follows from our review of the anthropological literature on human social structure.

2. *Most forms of group conflict and oppression (e.g., racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, nationalism, classism, regionalism) can be regarded as different manifestations of the same basic human predisposition to form group-based social hierarchy.*

    The second assumption touches upon a subtle yet extremely important distinction between social dominance theory and one of its intellectual parents, namely, social identity theory. While social identity theory clearly recognizes and in part, accommodates itself to the reality of social hierarchy and power differences between social groups, social dominance theory is centrally focused upon and built around the notion of group-based social hierarchy. In contrast to social identity theory, originally developed to explain ingroup favoritism within the context of essentially equal and arbitrarily defined social groups, social dominance theory was originally conceived as a model of social hierarchy. Because of this, SDT focuses on the way social discourse (e.g., ideology, attitudes and stereotypes) and individual and institutional behavior both contribute to and are affected by the nature and severity of group-based social hierarchy. In situations in which hierarchical group relations cannot be identified, social dominance theory would, in principle, have little to explain, and one might be content to understand the nature of prejudice and discrimination in terms of some

combination of earlier models such as authoritarian personality theory, realistic group conflict theory, and social identity theory. The social dominance synthesis not only states that group-based social hierarchy will tend to be ubiquitous, especially within social systems producing economic surplus, but more importantly, most if not all forms of group prejudices, stereotypes, ideologies of group superiority and inferiority, and forms of individual institutional discrimination both help produce and are reflections of this group-based social hierarchy. In other words phenomena such as prejudice, racism, stereotypes, and discrimination can simply not be understood outside of the conceptual framework of group-based social hierarchy, especially within social systems of economic surplus.

3. *Human social systems are subject to the counterbalancing influences of "hierarchy-enhancing" (HE) forces, producing and maintaining ever higher levels of group-based social inequality, and "hierarchy-attenuating" (HA) forces, producing greater levels of group-based social equality.*

A perusal of recorded history across all known non-hunter-gatherer societies testifies to clear and, sometimes, extreme levels of group-based social inequality. The relatively recent system of chattel slavery in the United States is perhaps one of the most brutal examples in human history. Group-based social inequality is often directly produced by the unequal distribution of social value (both positive and negative) to various groups within the social system. This unequal distribution of social value is, in turn, justified and defended by use of various social ideologies, beliefs, myths, and religious doctrines. At the same time, a fair reading of the historical record also reveals consistent attempts to create more egalitarian and inclusive social systems. Evidence of these hierarchy-attenuating forces can be seen in everything from early Christian discourse, to the widespread socio-political discourse emanating from social democratic, socialist, and Marxist movements of the 19th century, to the civil- and human-rights activists of the mid- and late 20th centuries. However, for the most part, these counterdominance or hierarchy-attenuating tendencies within post hunter-gatherer societies appear to function to moderate the degree of *inequality*.

Schematic Overview of Social Dominance Theory

Given these three basic assumptions of SDT, the body of social dominance theory concerns identifying and understanding the specific intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, and institutional mechanisms that produce and maintain group-based social hierarchy, and how, in turn, this hierarchy affects these contributing mechanisms. In very broad terms, SDT argues that the general processes producing and maintaining group-based social hierarchy are those sketched out in Figure 18.1.

As shown in the extreme right-hand side of Figure 18.1, SDT argues that group-based social hierarchy is driven by three proximal processes: (a) *aggregated individual discrimination,* (b) *aggregated institutional discrimination,* and (c) *behavioral asymmetry.* These proximal processes are regulated, in part, by legitimizing myths. The extent to which an individual endorses legitimizing myths depends upon whether he or she generally endorses, desires, and supports a sy stem of group-based social hierarchy or

not. We call the generalized orientation towards group-based social hierarchy *social dominance orientation (SDO)*.
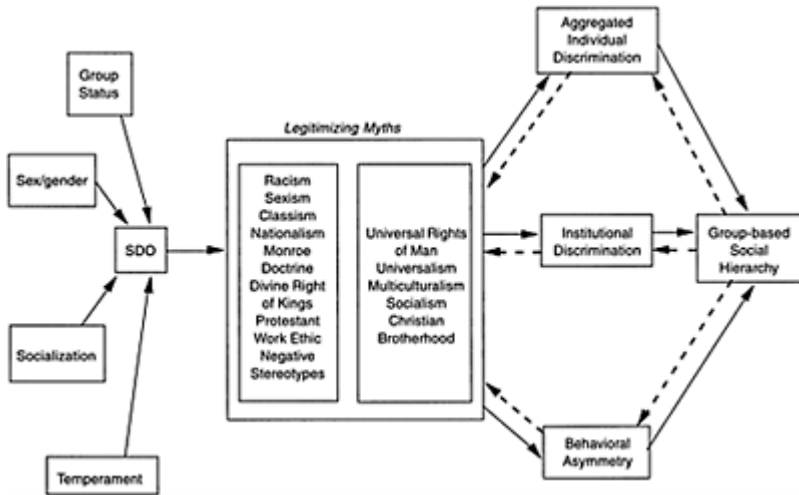

FIGURE 18.1 ■ Schematic overview of social dominance theory.

Aggregated Individual Discrimination

By the term *aggregated individual discrimination,* we are referring to the simple, daily, and sometimes quite inconspicuous individual acts of discrimination by one individual against another. Examples of such discrimination can be found in the decision of an employer not to hire or promote a person from a given minority group, or the decision of a voter not to vote for a given candidate because of race, ethnicity, or gender. When thousands of such individual acts of discrimination are aggregated over days, weeks, years, decades, and centuries, these individual actions contribute to the clear and salient differences in the power between social groups.

Aggregated Institutional Discrimination

Group-based social hierarchy is not only produced by individual and private acts of discrimination, but also by the rules, procedures, and actions of social institutions. These institutions may be public or private, including courts, lending institutions, hospitals, retail outlets, and schools. Sometimes this institutional discrimination is conscious, deliberate, and overt, and sometimes it is unconscious, unintended, and covert. Whatever form it takes, it can be identified by whether institutional decisions result in the disproportionate allocation of positive and negative social value across the social status hierarchy, all other factors being equal.

Systematic Terror

Besides the unequal distribution of social value, institutions also help maintain the integrity of the social hierarchy by the use of *systematic terror*. By sy stematic terror we refer to the use of violence or threats of violence disproportionately directed against subordinates. Systematic terror functions to maintain expropriative relationships between dominants (i.e., members of dominant groups) and subordinates (i.e., members of subordinate groups) and enforce the continued deference of subordinates toward dominants. Systematic terror is likely to be most ferocious when subordinates directly challenge and confront the hegemonic control of dominants. There are three basic forms of systematic terror: (a) *official terror,* (b) *semiofficial terror,* and (c) *unofficial terror.*

Official terror is the public and legally sanctioned violence and threat of violence perpetrated by organs of the state and disproportionately directed toward members of subordinate groups. The most contemporary examples of official terror are the disproportionate use of the death penalty against subordinates in nations such as apartheid South Africa and the United States, and the acts of collective punishment used against the Palestinians of Gaza and the West Bank by Israel. Rather than being a relatively uncommon occurrence in the modern world, the evidence suggests that official terror is quite widespread. For example, in a 1997 study of 151 countries, Amnesty International reported general, comprehensive, and widespread state violence against ethnic and racial minorities in the form of mass arrests, trials without due process of law, extended detention without trial, beatings, and the torture of children in front of their parents, etc.

Semiofficial terror is the violence or intimidation directed against subordinates, carried out by officials of the state (e.g., internal security forces, police, secret police, paramilitary organizations) but not publicly, overtly, officially, or legally sanctioned by the state. Examples of semiofficial terror can be seen in the death squad activities that have played such a prominent role in the politics of Asia, Central and South America, and Africa. Some of the most recent evidence of semiofficial terror can be found in the systematic and routine beatings, bombings, rapes, and murders perpetrated against opponents of the apartheid regime by members of the Vlakplass, or South African secret service (Koch, 1996). *Unofficial terror* is that violence or threat of violence perpetrated by *private individuals* from dominant groups against members of subordinate groups. While this terror does not enjoy the active approval or sanction of official government agencies, it usually does enjoy the tacit approval if not active participation of members of the security forces (e.g., lynchings by the Ku Klux Klan). This type of terror can be quite widespread in scope and comprehensive in its effects. For example, unofficial terror resulted in the deaths of at least 3,400 African Americans in the United States between 1882 and 1927 (Pomper, 1970).

One finding from the study of institutional discrimination and associated forms of terror is that the legal and criminal justice systems are among the major instruments used in establishing and maintaining the hierarchical structure of intergroup relations. Admittedly, the internal security and criminal justice systems are designed to maintain "law and order." However, from a social dominance perspective, in the aggregate, "law" is often written and enforced so as to favor the interests of dominants and "order" is often defined as those social conditions that disproportionately protect and maintain the interests of dominants. Therefore, contrary to the commonly held assumption that discrimination against subordinates within the criminal justice system is relatively rare,

nonsystematic, and completely overshadowed by the everyday realities of basic fairness and equity, social dominance theory suggests that discrimination within the criminal justice system is quite systematic and comprehensive in its effects.

Social dominance theory expects that discrimination against subordinates is to be found in all societies with economic surplus, including societies with "democratic" and egalitarian pretensions. However, in general, the level of brutality and discrimination against subordinates within "democratic" societies will tend to be somewhat constrained, indirect, and covert due to the cultural ideals espousing equality before the law. As a consequence, although the criminal justice system will still behave in a discriminatory manner, the elites within these systems will be under some pains to justify the presence and extent of this discrimination. In other words, it is crucial that such "democratic" social systems maintain *plausible deniability,* or the ability to practice discrimination, while at the same time denying that any discrimination is actually taking place.

Behavioral Asymmetry

Group-based social hierarchy is also produced and maintained by a mechanism known as *behavioral asymmetry*. On average, there will be differences in the behavioral repertoires of individuals belonging to groups at different levels of the social power continuum. More importantly, however, these behavioral differences will both contribute to and be reinforced by the group-based hierarchical relationships within the social system. This behavioral asymmetry will also be affected by socialization patterns, stereotypes, legitimizing ideologies, temperamental predispositions, and the operation of systematic terror.

The construct of behavioral asymmetry highlights one of the major ways in which social dominance theory differs from other closely related structural models of group oppression such as classical Marxism, neo-classical elitism theory, or group positions theory. These latter models emphasize the manner in which people within elite, dominant, and ruling classes actively oppress, manipulate, and control people within subordinate groups. While social dominance theory does not dispute, and indeed incorporates many of these ideas, SDT places greater emphasis on the manner in which subordinates *actively* participate in and contribute to their own subordination. Within SD theory, we do not merely regard subordinates as *objects* of oppression, but also as people who usually retain some *agency* and actively participate in the oppressive exercise. In other words, within SD theory, *group oppression is very much a cooperative game*.

On the other hand, we do not mean to imply that subordinates do not resist their own oppression, for they most certainly do. At times, this resistance can be quite intense, leading to active rebellion and even social revolution. Nonetheless, successful social revolution is a rare event indeed, and most group-based sy stems of social hierarchy remain relatively stable over long swaths of time. Therefore, while we recognize that there always will be some element of resistance and resentment within subordinate groups (Scott, 1990), contrary to the arguments of more traditional elitism theorists, we suggest that within relatively stable groupbased hierarchies, most of the activities of subordinates can be characterized as cooperative rather than subversive to the system of group-based domination. Furthermore, we suggest that it is subordinates' high level of both passive and active cooperation with their own oppression that provides sy stems of

group-based social hierarchy with their remarkable degrees of resiliency, robustness, and stability. Therefore, seen from this perspective, social hierarchy is not primarily maintained by the oppressive behavior of dominants, but by the deferential and obsequious behavior of subordinates.

Thus far, we have been able to identify at least four varieties of behavioral asymmetry: (a) *asymmetrical in-group bias,* (b) *out-group favoritism* or *deference,* (c) *self-debilitation,* and (d) *ideological asymmetry*.

Asymmetrical ingroup bias. As Sumner (1906) remarked generations ago, and has been found to hold across most cultures, people generally tend to be *ethnocentric* and to favor their own ingroups over outgroups (e.g., Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989). However, within any given social system, not all groups will show ingroup bias to the same degree. Dominant groups will tend to display higher levels of ingroup favoritism or bias than will subordinate groups.

Deference or *out-group favoritism* can be regarded as a special case of asymmetrical ingroup bias, and can be said to occur when the degree of asymmetrical ingroup favoritism is so strong that subordinates actually favor dominants over their own ingroups. A well known example of such out-group favoritism can be found in the "Uncle Toming" behavior of certain Afro-Americans towards Euro-Americans (e.g., Deane, 1968).

Self-debilitation occurs when subordinates show higher levels of self-destructive behaviors than dominants. These self-debilitating and self-destructive behaviors are often consistent with, but not exclusive to the negative stereotypes associated with subordinate groups. These lower expectations and stereotypes are consensually shared across the social status hierarchy and exist within the minds of both dominants and subordinates alike. From a social dominance perspective, the negative stereotypes of subordinates are important, not only because of the discriminatory behavior they induce among dominants, but perhaps even more importantly, because they also serve as behavioral scripts or schemas for subordinates. This is to say that the negative stereotypes subordinates carry in their heads about themselves induce them to behave in ways that reinforce these stereotypes. Stereotypes thus become *self-fulfilling prophecies* (Merton, 1972).

Not only should we expect to find asymmetry in the type and degree of ingroup-bias across the social status hierarchy, but the social dominance model also posits the existence of a much more subtle form of asymmetry, labeled *ideological asymmetry*. As we see in Figure 18.1, our theory assumes that a host of hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing ideologies, such as racism, sexism, classism, meritocracy, etc., are driven by one's acceptance of and desire for group-based social hierarchy. Not only is one's desire for group-based social dominance related to one's social ideologies, but both of these latter factors help drive group relevant social policies. Those holding hierarchyenhancing social ideologies are also those who are most likely to support social policies perceived to increase the degree of group-based social inequality (e.g., punitive social welfare legislation). In addition, these are also the same individuals who are most likely to oppose those social policies perceived to decrease the degree of group-based social inequality (e.g., affirmative action). However, the ideological asymmetry hypothesis suggests that the degree to which hierarchy-enhancing and hierarchy-attenuating social ideologies and social policies are related to and driven by group dominance values will systematically

vary as a function of one's position within the group-based, hierarchical social structure. Everything else being equal, the social attitudes and policy preferences of dominants are more strongly driven by social dominance values than is the case among subordinates.

Altogether, within SD theory these various forms of behavioral asymmetry are thought to be important because they illustrate the *cooperative* nature of intergroup oppression and group-based social hierarchies. Systems of group-based social hierarchy are not simply maintained by the oppressive activities of dominants, nor the *passive* compliance of subordinates, but rather the coordinated and collaborative activities of both dominants and subordinates.

Legitimizing Myths

Group-based social hierarchy is also affected by what we term *legitimizing myths*. Legitimizing myths (LMs) consist of attitudes, values, beliefs, stereotypes, or ideologies that provide moral and intellectual justification for the social practices that distribute social value within the social system. Our theory of legitimizing myths owes much to Marxist notions of "ideology," Mosca's concept of the "political formula," Pareto's notion of "derivations," Gramsci's idea of "ideological hegemony," Moscovici's notion of "social representations," and Durkheim's notion of "collective representations" (Gramsci, 1971; Durkheim, 1933; Marx & Engels, 1846; Mosca, 1896; Moscovici, 1981, 1988). Within social dominance theory, legitimizing myths (LMs) can be distinguished by two independent characteristics: *functional type and potency*.

Functional type refers to whether a particular LM justifies either group-based social *inequality* or its exact opposite, social *equality*. LMs that justify and support group-based social inequality are referred to as *hierarchy-enhancing (HE)* LMs, while LMs that support and justify greater levels of group-based social equality are referred to as *hierarchy-attenuating (HA)* LMs.

There are many different examples of HE-LMs, including ideas and philosophies such as sexism, classical racism, the notion of the "White Man's burden," notions of "fate," the doctrine of meritorious karma, Confucianism, negative stereotypes of subordinate groups, traditional forms of classism, the thesis of Papal infallibility, nationalism, the Monroe Doctrine and the notion of manifest destiny, the thesis of the divine rights of kings, and "speciesism" (the idea that humans have the "right" to rule the planet and all living creatures on it).

While these are all fairly obvious examples of HE-LMs, there are also more subtle, yet no less powerful examples of HE-LMs. In contemporary American and Western cultures, among the most important of HE-LMs are the notions of "individual responsibility," the Protestant work ethic, internal attributions for the misfortunes of the poor, and the set of ideas and assumptions collectively referred to as "political conservatism." What all these ideas and doctrines have in common is the notion that each individual occupies that position along the social status continuum that she has earned and therefore deserves. From these perspectives then, the particular configuration of the hierarchical social system is fair, legitimate, natural and perhaps even inevitable.

While HE-LMs are often associated with what is regarded as "conservative" political beliefs, this need not always be the case. For example, there are also "left-wing" versions of HE-LMs. One such ideology is Lenin's theory of the leading and central role of the

communist party. This theory asserted that since members of the communist party were the only individuals who truly understood the "real interests" of the working class, it was only right and just that they also exercise near complete monopolistic control of the state. This was the theoretical justification for the existence of the "Nomenklatura."

The set of beliefs, values, ideologies, and attitudes known as hierarchy-attenuating LMs have social functions directly contradicting HE-LMs. While HE-LMs serve to exacerbate and maintain group-based social inequality, HA-LMs serve to promote greater levels of group-based social egalitarianism. Examples of HA-LMs are as readily available as HE-LMs. They are political doctrines such as socialism, communism, feminism, the universal rights of man, and major themes in the American Declaration of Independence, and even portions of the New Testament.

The potency of an LM refers to the degree to which that LM will help promote, maintain, or overthrow a given group-based hierarchy. The degree to which an LM is potent is a function of at least four factors: (a) *consensuality,* (b) *embeddedness,* (c) *certainty,* and what we shall call (d) *mediational strength*.

Similar to arguments proposed by Gramsci, Durkheim, and Moscovici, by the term *consensuality* we are referring to the degree to which "social representations" and social ideologies are broadly shared within the social system. However, within SD-theory the notion of *consensuality* is given a much more precise and focused definition than has been generally provided in the past. Among other things, we argue that the notion of "consensuality" is particularly directed at the degree to which HE- and HA-LMs are shared across the continuum of social power and within both dominant and subordinate groups alike. For example, for most of American history, classical racism, or the belief that Blacks were inherently inferior to Whites, was not simply a belief held by most Whites, but arguably a belief shared by a substantial number of Blacks as well. Among other things, this implies that Blacks have endorsed anti-Black racism almost as intensively and thoroughly as Whites. This suggests that, from the point of view of system stability, the largest and most important component of anti-Black racism was not simply the beliefs held by Whites, but rather that anti-Black racism was shared by Blacks.

Everything else being equal, we postulate that the greater the degree to which dominants can induce subordinates to endorse self-demeaning ideologies such as anti-Black racism, the less physi-cal force or threat of force (i.e., terror) will be necessary in order to keep the hierarchical group relationships in place. Similarly, within the contemporary United States and Western Europe, one of the reasons the Protestant work ethic is such a potent HE-LM is because it is widely embraced across broad swaths of the social power continuum, by rich and poor, Black and White, men and women (e.g., Kluegel & Smith, 1986).

By *embeddedness* we mean that the LM is strongly associated with and well-anchored to other parts of the ideological, religious, or aesthetic components of a culture. For example, classical racism against Blacks can be seen as rather well embedded within Western and American culture. While the color "black" is most often associated with implications of evil, filth, depravity, and fear, the color "white" is most often associated with notions of purity, truth, innocence, goodness, and righteousness. These two contrasting color symbols permeate a great deal of Western culture and can be discerned in everything from classical fairy tales, to popular film and literature.

By *certainty,* we are referring to whether a given LM appears to have a very high degree of moral, religious, or scientific certainty or "truth." For example, belief in inherent white superiority was a very robust LM in 19th century Western Europe in general, and the antebellum South in particular. One of the reasons this classical racism appeared to be so "obviously true" is that it was consistent with the emerging "scientific" literature of the time, including the new evolutionary thinking and its social Darwinist offshoots (e.g., Gobineau, see Biddiss, 1970). Furthermore, rather than having died out, this type of social Darwinist and "scientific racism" continues to be produced by American and Western European intellectuals such as Shockley, Rushton, Murray and Herrnstein, and Rasmussen (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Rushton, 1996; Shockley, 1972). Collectively, these intellectuals continue to exert significant influence on the direction and tenor of social discourse in the United States and Western Europe.

Finally, by *mediational strength* we refer to the degree with which a given LM serves as a link between the desire to establish and maintain groupbased social hierarchy on the one hand, and endorsement of hierarchy-enhancing or hierarchyattenuating social policies on the other hand. For example, those who strongly support the Protestant work ethic are also those most opposed to help for the poor and the less fortunate. According to SD theory, part of the reason people endorse the Protestant work ethic is because this ideology is an accessible and socially acceptable means of justifying group-based social inequality. The stronger an LM mediates the relationship between the desire for group-based hierarchy and a given social policy, the more potent the LM is said to be.

While the ideas of Marx, Gramsci, Pareto, Mosca, and Moscovici all suggest that ideology justifies group dominance, these ideas provide us with no empirical standard for testing whether any given ideology actually does so in any given situation. In contrast, the notion of mediation provides us with a relatively crisp empirical standard by which to judge whether a given ideology or belief is functioning as an LM. Namely, a given belief, attitude, opinion, or attribution can be classified as an LM if and only if it is found to have a mediational relationship between the desire for groupbased social dominance, on the one hand, and support for hierarchy-enhancing or hierarchy-attenuating social policy on the other hand.

The Nature of Social Dominance Orientation

Perhaps the most "psychological" component of social dominance theory concerns the construct of *social dominance orientation* (SDO). SDO is defined as the degree to which individuals desire and support group-based hierarchy and the domination of "inferior" groups by "superior" groups. As a general orientation, SDO pertains to whatever group distinctions are salient within a given social context. These group distinctions may involve: sexes, genders, "races," social classes, nationalities, regions, religions, estates, linguistic groups, sports teams, or any of an essentially infinite number of potential distinctions between groups of human beings.

SDO is thought to have a widespread influence over the nature and intensity of group-based social hierarchy, not only because it influences a wide range of social ideologies and LMs, but also and perhaps most importantly because it influences the output of hierarchy-enhancing and hierarchy-attenuating public policies. The empirical and conceptual scope of SDO is expected to be extremely broad because it is related to

attitudes toward *any* social ideology, attitude, belief, career path, or social policy with strong implications for the distribution of social value between social groups. This social value comes in a variety of forms, including wealth, power, status, jobs, health, and prestige.

SDO is significantly affected by at least four factors. First, SDO will be driven by one's membership in and identification with arbitrary, highly salient, and hierarchically organized arbitrary-set groups. In general and everything else being equal, one should expect that dominants and/or those who identify with dominants, will have higher levels of social dominance orientation than subordinates and/or those who identify with subordinates. Second, one's level of SDO is affected also by a series of background and socialization factors such as one's level of education, one's religious faith, traumatic life experiences, and a whole set of other socialization experiences (e.g., war, depression, natural disasters). Third, there is reason to believe that people are born with different "temperamental predispositions" and personalities (Bouchard, 1994; Loehlin, 1993). One such temperamental predisposition is empathy. There is reason to believe that the greater one's empathy, the lower one's level of SDO.

Fourth, one's level of SDO depends upon one's gender. Everything else being equal, males will have significantly higher average levels of social dominance orientation than females. This thesis is known as the *invariance hypothesis*. This greater level of SDO among males is not simply due to the fact that males occupy dominant social roles, but also due to factors that are largely independent of these social roles. For this and other reasons, the gender system of social hierarchy is related to yet quite distinct from the arbitrary-set system.

The Intersecting Psychologies of Gender and Arbitrary-Set Conflict

Since there is overwhelming evidence that intergroup aggression is primarily a male enterprise, there is also reason to expect that arbitrary-set aggression is primarily directed at outgroup males rather than outgroup females. If we regard normal forms of intergroup discrimination as mild forms of intergroup aggression, there is then also reason to suspect that it will be primarily males rather than females who are the targets of this arbitrary-set discrimination. We label this thesis as the *subordinate-male target hypothesis*.

Note that the subordinate-male target hypothesis does *not* imply the absence of discrimination against women, for such discrimination clearly occurs and is part of the gender system of group-based social hierarchy (i.e., *patriarchy*). Rather, what we are suggesting is that, everything else being equal, subordinate males rather than subordinate females are the primary objects of *arbitrary-set discrimination*. In Figure 18.2, we ignore the absolute level of discrimination directed at any group and show the expected difference in discrimination directed against members of dominant and subordinate groups within each gender. Thus, for example, Figure 18.2 shows slightly more discrimination directed against dominant and subordinate women. However, the subordinate-male target hypothesis expects the difference in discrimination experienced by subordinate males as opposed to dominants males to be much greater. The subordinate-male target hypothesis is both counter-intuitive, and also stands in direct contradiction to the generally accepted "double-jeopardy" hypothesis. This hypothesis

suggests that since both subordinate ethnic groups and women are discriminated against, women from subordinate ethnic groups are then at a double disadvantage (e.g., Beale, 1970; Almquist, 1975).

The subordinate-male-target thesis highlights another major difference between previous theories of intergroup relations and SD theory. Namely, SDT incorporates the political psychology of gender into the larger story of arbitrary-set conflict. Rather than regarding the psychology of intergroup conflict and the psychology of gender as being independent domains, we regard the psychology of the one as an important and fundamental component of the psychology of the other. Seen from the perspective of social dominance theory, the psychology of intergroup conflict is intimately connected to and bound up with the male predisposition for group boundary maintenance, territorial defense/acquisition, and the exercise of dominion. This implies that an understanding of the psychology of sex/gender is incomplete without an incorporation of the dynamics of intergroup relations, and an understanding of intergroup relations is incomplete without incorporating impor-
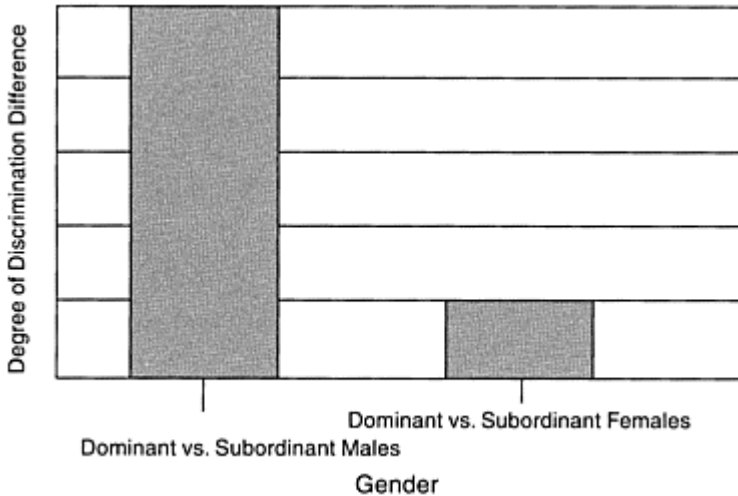

FIGURE 18.2 ■ Difference in level of discrimination between dominant and subordinate males versus dominant and subordinate females.

tant lessons of the psychology of male/female differences.

Hierarchical Equilibrium and Hierarchy Constraints

Given the historical record of both human and hominoid social structure, it seems most reasonable to assume that hominoid social systems are predisposed to organize themselves within some range of group-based inequality. Furthermore, the historical

record also seems to suggest that, under "normal circumstances" and everything else being equal, the degree of this group-based social hierarchy will tend to stabilize around a given level that we can refer to as the *"point of hierarchical equilibrium."* In broad terms, we suggest that this point is established at the fulcrum between: (a) *hierarchy-enhancing forces* and (b) *hierarchy-attenuating forces*.

Hierarchy-enhancing forces are the complete set of social ideologies, beliefs, attitudes, traditions, social institutions and social roles that promote and maintain group-based hierarchy within social systems. Besides the HE-LMs already mentioned above, these HE-forces also consist of important social institutions and social roles such as the internal security forces (e.g., local and secret police), major elements of the legal and criminal justice system (e.g., prosecutors) and major elements within the business community (e.g., banks, insurance companies). *Hierarchy-attenuating forces* are those social institutions, traditions, and ideologies that tend to promote greater degrees of group-based social equality. Besides HA-LMs, other examples of HA-forces would be social roles and social institutions such as civil rights and social welfare organizations, charities, the public defender's office, and religious denominations such as the Society of Friends.

In sum, the counterbalancing and mutually constraining effects of hierarchy-enhancing and hierarchy-attenuating forces are thought to be among the factors helping to maintain hierarchical equilibrium in any society over time. Furthermore, we posit that within relatively stable social systems, hierarchical equilibrium is found at the point that simultaneously: (a) organizes the social system in a hierarchical and trimorphic fashion, and yet (b) does not allow the degree of group-based social hierarchy to become either "morally" offensive or structurally destabilizing.

Other Structural Implications of Social Dominance Theory

The mechanisms described above not only tend to make group-based social hierarchies ubiquitous and stable, but also provide these social hierarchies with a number of other common characteristics. Among the most important of these characteristics are features such as: *increasing disproportionality*, *consensuality,* and *resiliency*.

Increasing Disproportionality

One defining feature of group-based social hierarchies is what Robert Putnam (1976) has labeled the *law of increasing disproportion*. This law suggests that the more political authority exercised by a given political position, the greater the probability that this position will be occupied by a member of the dominant group (Putnam, 1976). In addition, the law of increasing disproportion operates within all three forms of group-based stratification (i.e., age-system, gender system, and arbitrary-set system).

For example, Putnam shows that the higher the post held by any given individual in the British government (e.g., Prime Minister vs. Member of Parliament), the greater the likelihood that this individual attended one of the two elite British universities (Oxford or Cambridge). Putnam presents evidence showing that this increasing disproportionality is not restricted to particular nations or cultures, but is found cross-culturally, and has been

found to hold in countries such as the United States, the former Soviet Union, Israel, Italy, and Tunisia (Putnam, 1976).

Hierarchical Consensuality

Group-based social hierarchies are also characterized by a high degree of *hierarchical consensuality*. By this term we mean that there is a high degree of consensus within the social system as to which groups are "dominant" and which groups are "subordinate." This consensuality not only characterizes the beliefs of dominants, but more importantly, the beliefs of subordinates. This high degree of cross-group consensuality is critical for the orderly and relatively peaceful coordination of dominant and submissive behaviors and the maintenance of an ongoing system of group-based social inequality.

One example of this high degree of hierarchical consensuality can be found in our analysis of a sample of 723 UCLA undergraduates in 1989. We asked these students to rate the social status of five ethnic groups on a scale from "1-Very low status" to "7-Very high status." Results showed that the ethnic groups were perceived to have highly significant differences in social status. The average social status ratings were ordered: (1) Whites (M =6.42), (2) Asians (M=4.80), (3) Arabs (M= 3.59), (4) Blacks (M=3.31) and (5) Latinos (M= 3.00). There was a very high level of consensus in the ethnic status ratings of these five groups across all respondents (intraclass r=.999). In addition, the degree of consensus among raters within each of the four ethnic groups was high: (Euro-Americans: intraclass r=.998; Asian-Americans: intraclass r=.997; Latino-Americans: intraclass r =.995; Afro-Americans intraclass r=.988. Most importantly, however, the consensuality in perceived social status of American ethnic groups was largely impervious of the ethnic group to which one belongs. Inspection of the mean status ratings of each of these five ethnic groups within each of four ethnic groups in Figure 18.3 shows a very high degree of cross-ethnic consistency in how American ethnic groups are perceived. The same basic results were found using a second sample of UCLA students and four ethnic groups four years later.

Resiliency

While group-based social hierarchies tend to be highly stable over time, this cross-temporal stability is not absolute. Not only does the *degree* of social hierarchy within any given social system vary across time, but at least within the arbitrary-set system, there are also rare yet dramatic occasions when a given group-based social hierarchy will be completely overthrown. While these "regime smashing" social revolutions are exceedingly rare, there have been at least seven such events within the last 300 years. These revolutionary events include: (a) the French revolution of 1789, (b) the Mexican revolution of 1910, (c) the Russian revolution of 1917, (d) The Chinese revolution of 1949, (e) the Vietnamese revolution (1954–1975), (f) the Cuban revolution of 1959, and (g) the Sandinista revolution of 1979. However, despite all these attempts at egalitarian social transformation, one is struck by the fact that there is not a single case in which an egalitarian transformation has actually succeeded. Even in the few cases in which the *ancien régime* was overthrown (e.g., the French, Russian, Mexican, and Chinese revolutions), like the myth of the phoenix, some new arbitrary-set order soon rose up to

take its place. In other words, even though a given arbitrary-set stratification system might collapse or be overthrown, the phenomenon of arbitrary-set stratification itself appears to be extremely resilient.
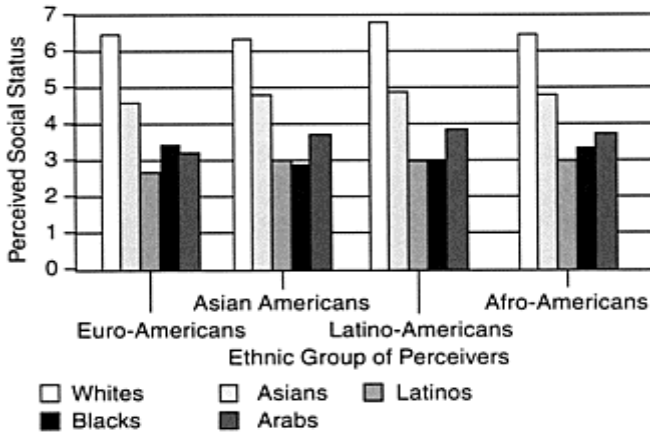

FIGURE 18.3 ■ Perceived social status of U.S. ethnic groups as a function of ethnic group membership.

Consistencies in Social Organization Across Primate Species

The evolutionary perspective suggests that not only will humans tend to live in group-based and hierarchically organized social systems, but that this form of social organization should also tend to be found among other species closely related to humans. Studies of other primate species tend to support this expectation (e.g., Bercovitch, 1991; Mazur, 1985; Sapolsky, 1993, 1995). Not only do all primates within the *hominoid clade* (i.e., chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas, and baboons) have systems of social dominance, but there is a group-based nature to these systems. Several group-based primate systems outside of the hominoid clade also have a trimorphic structure not unlike that found among humans indicating that social status is a function of: (a) age—with older animals dominating younger animals (e.g., Kawanaka, 1989), (b) sex—with males dominating females (Kawanaka, 1982; Nadler, 1987; Strier, 1994; with the exception of bonobos), and (c) position in kinship and friendship groups, which might be considered rudimentary arbitrary-set systems (Rowell, 1974).

   Among most primates, these kinship groups are most closely associated with mother-offspring lineage bonds. Besides age, sex, size, and intelligence, in certain primate species such as yellow baboons, the social rank of the offspring is influenced by the social rank of the mother (e.g., Lee & Oliver, 1979). Studies among olive baboons have shown that the death of the mother or the loss of social status of the mother affects the social status of her offspring (Johnson, 1987). Similarly, research has shown that when the social rank of rhesus monkey mothers was experimentally manipulated by the

introduction or removal of higher ranking animals, the offspring showed changes in their level of aggressive behavior congruent with their changed social rank (Marsden, 1968). Another manifestation of the arbitrary-set system can be seen in the formation of political coalitions and alliances among high-status primate males. It is not uncommon for certain *alpha males* (i.e., dominant males) to achieve their dominant positions by forming and maintaining "ruling coalitions" with other high-status males (Leigh & Shea, 1995; Harcourt, 1988).

Considering only closely related primates in the hominoid clade, there are a number of other common and relevant features of social organization, including: (a) the existence of closed social networks or what might be called *ingroups,* (b) communal territoriality, (c) male domination of intergroup relations, (d) the male domination of hostile and antagonistic relations between groups, and (e) the male domination of stalking, attacking, and of killing outgroup males (Ghiglier, 1989; Wrangham, 1987). This list suggests that the hominoid clade appears to be predisposed towards an *ethnocentric* orientation in which boundary maintenance towards outgroups is largely enforced by males.

Summary

Social dominance theory begins with the observation that surplus-producing human social systems are structured as trimorphic, group-based social hierarchies. The three forms of group-based systems are: (a) an age system, (b) a gender system (i.e., patriarchy), and (c) an arbitrary-set system. The arbitrary-set system consists of socially constructed group distinctions that happen to be relevant within specific situational and historical contexts. Not only does this trimorphic structure appear to characterize human social systems that produce economic surplus, there are also rudimentary signs of this trimorphic structure within other groups of primates as well.

After noting the ubiquitousness of group-based social hierarchy, social dominance theory goes on to make three primary assumptions: (a) While age and gender based hierarchies tend to exist within all social systems, arbitrary-set systems of social hierarchy invariably emerge within social systems producing sustainable economic surplus; (b) Most forms of group conflict and oppression (e.g., racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, nationalism, classism, regionalism) are different manifestations of the same basic human predisposition toward group-based social hierarchy; (c) Human social systems are subject to the influences of "hierarchy-enhancing" (HE) forces, promoting group-based social inequality, and that are partially counterbalanced by opposing "hierarchy-attenuating" (HA) forces, group-based social equality.

Based on these assumptions, social dominance theory then goes on to explore the manner in which psychological, intergroup, and institutional processes interact with one another in the production and maintenance of group-based, hierarchical social structure.

Unlike most previous models of intergroup discrimination and prejudice, social dominance theory operates at several levels of analysis. While being influenced by many perspectives within evolutionary psychology and sociobiology, it does not make the assumption that the dynamics of intergroup conflict and oppression can be reduced to individual strategies of reproductive success or inclusive fitness maximization. Unlike classical "psychological" and individual differences theories such as authoritarian

personality theory, social dominance theory does not restrict its explanation of discrimination and prejudice to the intrapsychic conflicts and mechanics of individual actors, but rather examines how psychological orientation and individuals act and are acted upon by group-based hierarchy. Unlike situational and cognitively oriented theories in social psychology, social dominance does not restrict itself to the nature and dynamics of the individual's self and social categorizations, but situates these processes in the context of motivational differences between individuals and the broader social context within which individuals find themselves. Finally, unlike classical "sociological" theories, SD-theory utilizes—but does not restrict itself to—the structural relations between groups or the operations of social institutions.

Therefore, as a general and synthetic perspective, social dominance theory attempts to take elements from the individual, group, institutional, and structural levels of analysis and to integrate these elements into a new, more comprehensive and more powerful theoretical framework. From evolutionary psychology come the notions that the ubiquitousness of social hierarchy and ethnocentrism are most parsimoniously understood in terms of survival strategies adopted by hominoids, including homo sapiens. From authoritarian personality theory and Rokeach's two-value theory of political ideology comes the notion that the importance that people place on the value of "equality," dominance, and submission is of fundamental importance to our understanding of a whole range of sociopolitical beliefs and behaviors. From realistic group conflict and group position theories comes the notion that the political choices and attitudes of individuals must often be seen within the context of group conflict over both real and symbolic resource allocation. From social identity theory come the important notions that the conflict between groups is not necessarily or even primarily designed to maximize the absolute material return to the ingroup but rather to maximize the *relative* return to the ingroup, sometimes even at the cost of substantial material loss to both the self and the ingroup. Finally, from classical and neoclassical elitism theories come the notion of the functional value of ideology in the dynamics of hierarchical social control.

To these basic ideas, we have constructed some new theoretical elements such as: (a) the notion of social dominance orientation as a ubiquitous motive driving most group-relevant social attitudes and allocative decisions, (b) the notion of behavioral asymmetry, or the different yet coordinated behavioral repertoires of dominants and subordinates that help maintain the stability of group-based hierarchy, (c) the notion that the dynamics of the political psychology of gender is an essential and universal element in the dynamics of hierarchical relationships among social groups in general, and (d) the notion that hierarchical stability is affected by the equilibrium-producing functions of hierarchy-enhancing and hierarchy-attenuating social forces. Among other things, we argue that this theoretical catholicism will allow us to get a firmer grip on the general dynamics of intergroup relations and to more clearly appreciate the underlying similarities in a wide array of social phe-nomena within one comprehensive theoretical framework. The phenomena of concern can range from simple acts of mobbing in the playground, to mild forms of prejudice and street-gang violence, to instances of genocide.

NOTES

1. Based on sex, age, descent, and marriage.

2. However, it should be noted that this age system is not completely linear. *Very* old people (i.e., aged 80 years or older) do not always dominate over somewhat younger people (e.g., 60 year olds).

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